

## Sir David Attenborough Britain's #1 National Treasure [1005] Episode Transcript

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Hello listeners, welcome back to Luke's English Podcast. How are you doing today? I hope you're doing fine.

Welcome to this brand new episode. And today on the podcast, I would like to celebrate the life of a living legend, and that is Sir David Attenborough. Have you ever heard of David Attenborough? Do you know who he is? If you look at the PDF for this, I've added a photograph at the top, and you'll see David sitting in a chair.

And then another picture behind him, which is him in 1979, lying down on some grass in the jungle with a gorilla sitting on top of him, a young gorilla. And this is a picture from one of the most amazing moments in television that I remember seeing on TV a few times. And it was just an absolutely incredible moment when David and a BBC camera crew went to Rwanda, went to the jungle in Rwanda and filmed very closely a family of gorillas.

And it was an incredible moment because obviously you think these creatures might be dangerous and also quite shy. And yet David and his crew managed to get really close to them and film them. And not only that, they ended up interacting with him.

One of the young ones decided to climb all over him and play with him. And the mother gorilla who was sitting just next to them at one point grabbed David's head and turned his head with her big hand and stared right into his eyes. And that was just one of the most brilliant moments of television that David was involved in or has been involved in in his life.

And I'll talk more about that gorilla encounter in this episode, as well as lots of other incredible moments with animals that I saw and so many people have seen in his documentaries over the years. So Sir David Attenborough is the name of the episode and also the subject of this episode. So this will be a rambling tribute to this British gentleman who so many of us know and love, or most of us don't know him personally, of course, but we kind of feel like we do because we listen to him as children when he spoke to us every week in our living rooms on television.

In terms of language learning opportunities with this episode, because this is a podcast for learners of English, of course, look out for English for describing someone's character, achievements and career, descriptions of animals, including their behaviour and habitat, the language of conservationism, environmental awareness and various personal reflections and anecdotes and rambling memories from me, which I will attempt to put clearly into words and sentences in English, of course. I'm sure the episode will be rich with vocabulary and perhaps some complex grammar here and there as I attempt to do justice to this man through my words. So, plenty for you to feed on in terms of nutrient-rich language input for the development of your English.

Sir David Attenborough, yes. And now perhaps I should mention my ex-girlfriend at the start of this episode, just to get your attention. Right? Shall I talk about my ex-girlfriend just to get your attention? It seemed to work with last week's episode.

Actually, there is a connection with last week's episode of this podcast which I retold the story of Jurassic Park from the point of view of one of the characters. Have you heard that? That was not a true story, by the way, everyone, despite what some listeners seem to think, judging by the comments. No, I've never actually worked as a palaeontologist.

I never had a paleobotanist girlfriend who left me and broke my heart. And no, dinosaurs have never actually been brought back from extinction through cloning, thanks to extracted dinosaur DNA from mosquitoes preserved in prehistoric amber, as far as I know. Anyway, in the film of Jurassic Park, the character of the billionaire park owner John Hammond was played by the great British actor and director Sir Richard Attenborough.

And he is the brother of David Attenborough, the subject of today's episode. Both of the Attenborough brothers are household names in the UK. If something is a household name, it's basically like a name, a person, or maybe a brand or something that is known in most households, most households around the country.

A household is basically a home with a family living in it. So both the Attenboroughs, Richard Attenborough from Jurassic Park and David Attenborough, who I'm talking about today, they're both household names in the UK. So there is a connection.

There is the connection to last week's episode then. Anyway, so David Attenborough, do you know this person? I wonder how well known he is all around the world. You might be aware of him already.

And if you are, then I'm sure that you're also a fan because he is that sort of person. If you know about him, you tend to be a fan of his. Maybe you don't know his name, but you might know his voice or maybe you know absolutely nothing about this person at all, in which case you're in luck because he's great.

And so is his work, much of which you can enjoy online now. And I'm going to tell you a lot of what you need to know about him today. So there are many reasons to talk about David Attenborough and to celebrate him on this podcast.

One of those reasons is that he turned 100 years old earlier this year in May, to be exact. So happy belated 100th birthday to David, Sir David. I wanted to do an episode dedicated to him in May.

In fact, I've been wanting to do an episode about David Attenborough and his work for years, but I just have never managed to get myself organised to do it. And I didn't get myself organised in time for his birthday in May, but still better late than never. So who is David Attenborough then? And why should I devote an entire episode to talking about him and his life? So the first part of that question is a little easier to explain than the second.

So who is he? I suppose for many people, David Attenborough, Attenborough, yes, that is how his name is pronounced, Attenborough, not Attenborough or anything else, Attenborough. David Attenborough is the voice that we heard on so many nature documentaries on television and now the internet, probably produced by the BBC over the last, well, 70 years, in fact. Perhaps some of those documentaries were shown on television in your country or you've seen his work on Netflix or clips on YouTube.

But if you ever watch those documentaries in English, then you will have heard David Attenborough's voice. I imagine many of those documentaries were dubbed into your language if you watch them on television in your home country. Anyway, in English, David's voice is very distinctive.

In fact, let me try to do an impression of him now. I'll try and do an impression of him talking. This might help you recognise him.

Or if you don't know him, perhaps this will give you even a slight sense of what he sounds like in his documentaries. So I now have to try and improvise David Attenborough talking about something, doing a voiceover of one of his

documentaries. Let's say you can imagine a shot of an animal in the water or something like that, like a little furry animal in the water.

And then David would say something like, and here on the lakes of Lake Papakuku in Northern Ontario, Canada, is a very curious creature. It's a beaver and he's trying to find some food. Thanks to his flat, flipper-like tail, a beaver is able to paddle through the water at incredible speed, reaching up to speeds of 3,000 miles an hour.

The beaver propels himself through the water, his large front teeth pushed forwards in an act of aggression, attempting to kill a crocodile. I mean, that's not factually accurate about beavers, of course, but they don't fly through the water at 3,000 miles an hour and kill crocodiles. But anyway, this is the sound of David Attenborough's voice.

It's very distinctive and it sort of sounds like this. Okay, so anyway, I'll come back to his voice later because that is perhaps how most of us know him. But before that, let me tell you some basic facts about David Attenborough just so I can feel that I have done the job of telling you who he is.

So here are some David Attenborough facts about his life and career. This is some information that I paraphrased from Wikipedia. So David Attenborough is an English broadcaster, naturalist and writer born on the 8th of May 1926.

He's best known for pioneering TV nature documentaries such as Blue Planet, Planet Earth, The Trials of Life and Life on Earth. He did pioneer these documentaries with the help of various producers and film crews when he started in the 1950s when the BBC was making so many brand new programmes. He's from Leicester in the East Midlands of England.

He was educated at a local state-funded grammar school there, and he was the son of the principal of University College Leicester, and his family lived on the university campus, in fact, where he spent a lot of his time as a child. So he grew up surrounded by education and the world of academia, but he wasn't privately educated or part of the upper-class elite. From an early age, David was fascinated by animals and nature and spent a lot of time exploring the local area where he lived, collecting fossils, stones and other natural specimens.

Living in Leicester in the Midlands meant that David had easy access to the countryside and also the region is rich in fossils, and he spent a lot of time

collecting them, learning about the local wildlife and visiting the local museum. He later won a scholarship to Cambridge University in 1945 to study geology and zoology and obtained a degree in natural sciences. He would have been too young to fight in World War II, but he did do national service, which is where you have to join the army, you know, you spend a certain amount of time in the army as a compulsory thing.

National service. He joined the navy for two years, stationed in Wales, and after that he started his career. First there was a brief period producing children's science books for a publishing company, but then he eventually joined the BBC.

At the time, the corporation, the BBC, was developing its television output. This is the 1950s, right? TV was brand new and so the BBC was expanding its repertoire of shows for this new medium. When he got the job, when he got his first job at the BBC as a producer, David didn't even own a TV himself and had only ever seen one programme, but he was recruited by the BBC on the strength of his CV to help them make television programmes.

It must have been a really sort of exciting and interesting time. The BBC were like, right, so we've got this thing called television and we're pretty sure that like radio, everyone, every home's going to have one, so we better start making some programmes. What do we want to make programmes about? And, you know, the very early days of television, they just had a completely blank slate.

They could just choose whatever they wanted to make television programmes about. They had a kind of objective or a remit at the BBC, which was to entertain, educate and inform, not in that order. Inform, educate and entertain.

Educate, inform and entertain. Those three things. I can't remember exactly what the order was, but it's basically, the BBC was and still is a public service and they had a duty to public service, not just to entertain, but also to educate and to inform with their programmes.

And so David was brought on, along with many other people, no doubt at the time, in order to make television programmes. Obviously, he had his special interest, which was natural history. David was involved as a producer in the making of all sorts of different shows in the early days, but he was particularly interested in making programmes about nature and animals.

And the first series he worked on, called Zoo Quest, which was filmed in black and white, allowed viewers at home to see a lot of animals for the very first time. I mean, moving images of them anyway, in their natural environments. They travelled around the world to film these animals.

And this was incredible, really, because most British people had never seen things like an anteater in its natural environment, or a Komodo dragon, right? And David brought these things and so many other animals to people's attention, right from the beginning, but then more and more profoundly, I think, as his career has progressed. He started as a producer on Zoo Quest, this old show which is a bit dated now. But when the presenter of that programme became ill, suddenly, David had to step in front of the camera and start presenting.

And it seems that he was a natural at this from the very beginning. Since then, as well as taking on several very senior roles at the BBC over the years, he has become primarily known as one of the world's most influential and groundbreaking natural history television presenters, famous for combining scientific insight and compelling storytelling and transforming public understanding of the natural world. And his voice and the way he used his voice, if we're talking about English, the way he used his voice was definitely a big part of that.

And I'll come on to that in a moment. But essentially, the pausing, the rise and fall of intonation, generally, the way he used his voice was extremely compelling. And yeah, as I said, a huge part of his success, his appeal and his ability to sort of bring the natural world to life on the screen and to accompany those incredible images with very clear, insightful storytelling.

So his career has spanned more than seven decades. He's the only person to win BAFTA awards. That's British Academy of Film and Television Arts Awards.

That's sort of like the British version of the Oscars. Anyway, he's the only person to have won BAFTA awards for black and white, colour, HD, 3D and 4K productions, which just shows you how his career has spanned so many different technological developments over the years, as well as making natural history documentaries. He also served as the controller of BBC Two in the late 1960s.

So initially, there was just one BBC channel that then expanded to two BBC channels. And David was given the job of basically kind of being in charge of BBC Two for a few years at the end of the 1960s. And then he was promoted to director of programmes for the BBC, for BBC Television.

Sorry, director of programmes for BBC Television, which is like a huge job and very high in the corporation. During that time, he commissioned various TV shows, meaning allowed them to be made and agreed for them to be made, including various groundbreaking and significant shows like, for example, Monty Python's Flying Circus. So he's responsible for the existence of Monty Python.

Thanks a lot for that, David. David Attenborough has been the recipient of numerous honours, including two knighthoods, one in 1985 for his foundational contributions to television broadcasting, and another one in 2022, again, for his services to television broadcasting, but also for environmental work, campaigning to protect the natural world, and multiple international science and conservation awards. So he's had two knighthoods in his life.

Most people don't get even one, but he's got two. So Sir David Attenborough, maybe that should be Sir Sir David Attenborough, considering he's got two knighthoods. Anyway, in more recent years, Attenborough has become a leading voice for conservation, climate action, and sustainable living, and he remains one of the most respected figures in global environmental communication.

I'll come back to that point at the end of the episode, when I will read out a speech that he gave at the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow several years ago. It's an important and powerful piece of climate advocacy, and very, very well written, as you might expect. So I'll come back to that, and I'll read it out for you.

So as you can see, he's had an incredible and very important career. But I think those facts still might not quite communicate to you just how beloved this man is by people, certainly in the UK. In Britain, he's widely considered to be a national treasure, and for many people, the greatest living British person.

Yes, now that seems like hyperbole or exaggeration, the greatest living British person. It does sound like hyperbole, which is like basically something exaggerated to create a certain effect. But it isn't really an exaggeration.

People genuinely hold him in very high regard and high esteem. He's beloved and deservedly so. Personally, I would agree with that title of the greatest British living person.

I struggle to think of anyone else who could claim it, to be honest. Maybe there are people who've been more beneficial to our lives in some ways, but who are less

visible. But right now, I can't think of anyone more suitable for that title of greatest living Britain.

Now, you might think, well, Luke, what about the king? What about King Charles III? Isn't he, by definition, the greatest living Britain? And that's Britain, B-R-I-T-O-N, meaning British person. Well, he's all right, the king, I suppose. But sorry, I think he can't really compare, in my opinion, at least, to David Attenborough in terms of what he's done and what he represents.

And that's fine for me to say, by the way. As a British person, I have no obligation, either legal or just cultural, to think or say that the king is the best guy in the country. Actually, as a huge environmental advocate himself, King Charles, the king, is actually a big admirer of Attenborough too.

And he's a fan of David Attenborough as well, as we saw when he joined the celebrations of Attenborough's 100th birthday. He wrote him a nice letter and Anyway, back to the question of who is the greatest living Britain. It's sort of a redundant and unnecessary question, to be honest.

But it is the thing that sometimes gets spoken about in the media. And maybe the BBC or another organisation might run a survey to find out who the nation thinks is the greatest person in the country. This from BritishCouncil.org. Sir David Attenborough frequently tops public opinion polls, surveys and major studies regarding national sentiment, often being crowned the UK's ultimate national treasure or greatest living Britain slash greatest living icon.

But Luke, why you might think to yourself, which is a strange thing to think to yourself, why are you talking to me in your own brain? I don't know. But this again is paraphrased from the British Council's website. While various media outlets, polling organisations like YouGov and cultural institutions routinely run these surveys, Attenborough almost always claims the number one spot for a few distinct reasons.

So his universal appeal, he bridges generational divides. Grandparents, parents and children alike have grown up listening to his voice, guide them through the natural world, making him a rare figure who is universally beloved across political, social and age demographics. He's had a lifetime of public service, which people appreciate.

Having started his career at the BBC in the 50s, his broadcasting career spans nearly eight decades. He's fundamentally shaped how generations of people view

the planet, in fact. And the fact that it was on the BBC is significant because this is quite a unique institution, right? We talk about British culture, British life and culture, and some of my episodes are devoted to this subject because, you know, as a British English podcast, that's just going to be one of the things that I talk about.

And I find that my listeners are genuine, generally and genuinely interested in British stuff. So if you want to know about British culture, you've got to know about David Attenborough and the BBC. The BBC is quite a unique institution.

It's not a state-run television company, OK? It is funded by viewers, but not through a tax. So it has its own unique funding where the people who watch the BBC pay for it through a licence fee, but it's not a tax that is then collected by the government and then the government doesn't. It's not a government TV, right? Not exactly.

Anyway, it has its own charter and it has its own commitment to public service. And I honestly believe that many of its programmes are among the best television that we've had. The best BBC TV programmes are not just trivial entertainment designed only to distract viewers or act as a vehicle for advertising or to appeal to the lowest common denominator, but they are genuinely enriching and original shows that educate as well as entertain.

Good quality, original broadcasting. I'm not sure it's the same anymore, but certainly when I was growing up, I think maybe I lived through the golden age of the BBC in terms of the programmes that we were able to watch on television. And in the UK, the TV is a big thing.

I mean, obviously, TV arguably is all it's finished now, maybe. That's that the era of television is arguably finished now that we have streaming and platforms and our phones and this, that and the other. It's much more splintered and our viewing habits are much more sort of divided and complex these days.

But there was a golden age of television and TV in the UK was a really important thing, actually. And maybe this is something to do with the weather or something like that. I don't know, long winters, but it must be the same in other countries.

But I don't know. I've lived in various countries and haven't really had the same sensation that the TV is an institution in the same way that it is or has been in the UK. And I think the BBC is a large part of that.

Now, obviously, going back to heroes, my heroes and greatest living British people, obviously, I have my personal heroes like Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr and some comedians and stuff. But objectively, it's hard to argue with the contribution made by David Attenborough. He represents so many positive values for me and most people, education, a love of nature, the protection of biodiversity on planet Earth.

Also, excellent communication skills, professionalism and just a touch of class and quality in everything he does and has done. So many virtues and positive values. Apparently, he's a gentleman.

He has a sense of humour. He's modest. He's extremely knowledgeable.

He's incredibly worldly, but also down to earth. He has good judgement and he's a great storyteller. He's like the ideal person to find yourself sitting next to at a dinner party or something.

Millions of interesting things to say and experiences to share and funny stories up his sleeve. He's a class act and the legacy he will leave behind is huge. By the way, a person's legacy means the lasting impact and influence they leave on the world and the people around them after they die.

So we often talk about people's legacy and basically the contribution that they make with their life and how that lasts after their death. Now, all of that stuff, that's all well and good, but I don't want to just sit here and attempt to persuade you that David Attenborough, who potentially you've never heard of, is just a really great guy and you should think he's wonderful and thanks for listening, etc. Instead, I will now continue by sharing some personal memories and anecdotes.

Now, my cousin Oliver met him once and had dinner with him even because Oliver works in television and has a couple of things to share, which I was hoping to get. I was hoping to get a voice note from him about that. Essentially, he said that he was funny.

He was impressed by how down-to-earth and funny he was. Hello, this is Luke from the future. And yes, I got the message from Oliver.

He sent it to me yesterday, in fact, so we can listen to it. And just before we do that, let me give you some details just to help you prepare yourself to understand this. So Oli used to work for the BBC as a producer in the department that was responsible for natural history documentaries.

That's the NHU, the Natural History Unit. And once he met Sir David Attenborough and he has a short anecdote to share about that experience. These days, Oli lives in sunny Los Angeles, California, and he still works as a TV producer.

And he recorded this voice message for us yesterday while he was on his way to work. So let's listen to what he has to say about the time he met Sir David. In fact, here is a little listening exercise for you for this message, a listening exercise within a listening exercise.

So bonus points if you can get answers to these questions. So the first one is, where was Oli when he recorded this message? Where was he specifically when he recorded this message? How did he meet Sir David then? What were the circumstances of that meeting? What did he think of David when he met him? What did David tell him? What did he talk about? And what did David give to Oliver, which was quite special? So I will give answers to those questions afterwards, just to be sure you got it all. But now let's listen to Oli's voice message.

And here we go.

*Hello, Cousin Luke. It's Oli here.*

*Just driving along Sunset Boulevard in my driverless car, something I could not have conceived of 10 years ago when I met Sir David Attenborough. So my job before this one was working at the BBC in the Natural History Unit as their head of production. And just before I left, there was an event in Edinburgh where my boss, who was the head of the NHU, the Natural History Unit, was interviewing Sir David Attenborough as part of a 60 years of the Natural History Unit, which is the world's longest standing specialist wildlife filming team.*

*They make Planet Earth and Blue Planet, Frozen Planet and all these fabulous series. Anyway, there was an interview with Sir David on stage about his career and the impact of the Natural History Unit. And afterwards, I had the good luck of having lunch with Sir David, who was, I think, 90 at the time, 89 or 90.*

*And it was a fabulous experience. He was still as sharp as anyone you could meet with as much energy as anyone you could meet. And he told us some funny stories about his time when he did National Service and was working on a ship in, I think, something like that, somewhere in Scotland.*

*And my wife, Ines, was pregnant at the time with our second child, Penelope. And he wrote us a lovely message saying, Dear Oli, Ines and Valentina, congratulations on your imminent arrival, with lots of love from Sir David Attenborough, something like that. I'll show you the photo and you can see.*

*But it was a really great experience. And he is a real hero of the BBC team in Bristol who work on all these series, many of whom have been travelling the world with him for, you know, 30 or 40 years. And he's kind of outlasted all of them.*

*But he's a real god in the broadcasting world. Not only was he a presenter on television and travelling the world doing series like Zoo Quest originally, he then became a manager at the BBC and introduced computers to the BBC and first colour television channel before changing and then going back to being a sort of programme maker and being on screen and travelling the world and he is now what would be described as a national treasure, which I'm sure you're going to talk all about. Anyway, I hope all is going well in Paris and congratulations on such a wonderful podcast that I know is loved around the world and is hugely successful.*

Okay, there you go. Thank you very much to Oli for taking the time to do that. So what about those questions then? So where was Oli when he recorded this message? Well, he was driving down Sunset Boulevard, which is in Los Angeles.

And whenever Oli and I meet and talk to each other, we always, you know, stunned that he lives in Los Angeles and, you know, every day goes to work down Sunset Boulevard, which is like something out of a film or even a computer game or something. It seems unreal. But not only was he driving down Sunset Boulevard, but also he was in a driverless car because, yes, that's how he gets to work every day, in a driverless car.

He sits in the car and it drives him to work. It's like Knight Rider or something like that. And again, Oliver and I obviously have known each other since we were little babies and spent a lot of time growing up and stuff.

And the idea, when we were even teenagers, just the idea that he would one day be going to work down Sunset Boulevard in a driverless car is just incredible. So that was the answer to that question. How did he meet Sir David? So there was some sort of celebration, that's it, a celebration of, I think it was 60 years of the Natural History Unit, this kind of department responsible for making natural history documentaries on the BBC.

And as part of the celebrations, David Attenborough was being interviewed by Oli's boss at the time at the BBC. And after the interview on stage, Oli was lucky enough to sit down and actually have lunch in the company of David Attenborough. And he sat next to him and David told him various stories about the time when he was in national service, right? That's when he was in the army in his much younger days.

And he told them some funny stories about the time he was stationed in Scotland and some of the things that happened to him there. What did he think of David when he met him? He thought he was sharp, right? That means kind of mentally bright, lucid, clear in his thoughts and in his words, and just very quick witted, sharp. And despite being 89 or 90 years old, he was still very mentally clear and sharp, okay? And also full of energy, as much energy as anyone.

So despite being 90 years of age, he was still very sharp mentally and also physically full of energy. And what did David tell him? Well, I've already answered that. He told him about the time he was in national service and told him some stories.

And what did David give to Oliver, which was quite special? So he gave him a handwritten note, because at the time Oli's wife Ines was pregnant, expecting their second child. And David wrote a lovely note saying, Dear Ines, Oli and Valentina, so Valentina's their first child. Congratulations on the arrival of your second child.

What was it? Actually, I've got the note. I've got the note right here and we can have a look at it. So let's do that.

You can see this note on the PDF, by the way, if you want to. So let's actually have a look at the note itself. So for Ines, Oli and Valentina, with best wishes for the new arrival, David Attenborough.

And there it is, his signature and everything. So that's great, isn't it? So what a great experience. And, you know, a great career for Oliver as well.

I mean, we're all so proud of him. Anyway, let's carry on with the episode. Hold on.

Before we do that, I feel like I should explain and talk about the phrase national treasure, because it's a phrase that's been used a couple of times in this episode already. Oliver said that David Attenborough is a national treasure. I said it earlier in the episode.

And so this is definitely a phrase to clarify for you just in case you haven't worked it out already. So a national treasure, this phrase could be used to describe an object or a building or an artwork or something, or it could be used to describe a person. OK, so a national treasure is basically something that a whole country thinks is really important and that the whole country is very proud of and that the whole country values very highly.

OK, and it's often used to talk about people. So if I talk about objects and things first, so for Britain, British national treasures would include things like the Stonehenge, which is obviously this ancient monument which is very, very precious to us, but also buildings, iconic buildings like the Houses of Parliament and Elizabeth Tower, it's called, or Big Ben as it's commonly known. These things are national treasures.

OK, but also in terms of people, Sir David Attenborough is probably number one in the list of people that we consider to be national treasures. But other national treasures would be, I guess, someone like Stephen Fry or maybe Sir Trevor MacDonald, who was a news television presenter for a long time, Dame Judi Dench, the actress, Ian McKellen, Sir Ian McKellen, Sir Michael Caine, Sir Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, Elton John, sorry, Sir Elton John, Dame Mary Berry, people like this. Those are people who are often described as being national treasures, British national treasures.

What about in your countries, which people are considered to be national treasures, universally, more or less, accepted to be great, that everyone loves and that the whole country is proud of? Right, back to the episode. I've got some other anecdotes that I can share from a Guardian article, which I found. This is from the Guardian newspaper.

I'll put a link for this in the description. A true pinch-me moment, memories of David Attenborough as he turns 100. A pinch-me moment, basically, is like when you have an incredible experience and you think that you might be dreaming.

Like, is this real? Is this really happening? Am I dreaming? Pinch me. And if you say pinch me as a way of saying, I want to check to see if I'm actually dreaming or not. And if you pinch yourself or if someone pinches you, meaning they take like a bit of your skin between their thumb and finger and squeeze, ow, pinch.

If someone pinches you and you feel the pain, it means you're not dreaming. So it's just a way of saying, I think I might be dreaming. Pinch me.

So a pinch-me moment, basically, here are some stories of moments when people just by chance ended up meeting David Attenborough. And these just share, this is to illustrate how people feel about him, right? So here's one from someone called Bonnie, right? In 2002, I'd just finished the first year of my zoology degree at the University of Bristol. Desperate to get some field experience, I joined a six-week project in Borneo.

Towards the end of the trip, as a reward for all our hard work, we visited Tanjung Puting National Park in the south. We were travelling by boat one day to see some old rehabilitated orangutans, when our captain suddenly told us we had to stop. There was something blocking the river ahead.

We were then told that there was a man in a kayak paddling across the river. That blockage turned out to be David Attenborough filming a piece to camera for his show, The Life of Mammals. As a group of enthusiastic zoologists, we could hardly believe what we were seeing.

Was that really David Attenborough paddling a tiny wooden kayak just up ahead? His film crew, realising they had a fan club on their hands, let us stay and watch. The scene involved him delivering the same piece to camera about 10 times, all while controlling the kayak. He was a true professional throughout.

Later that afternoon, we were lucky enough to sit with him and the crew while they filmed rehabilitated orangutans at a feeding platform. I know I should have been watching the orangutans, but I think I spent most of the time staring at David Attenborough, wondering whether I was in a dream. It was an incredible encounter that I will never forget.

Meeting one of the world's greatest naturalists in situ was a true pinch me moment. In situ meaning sort of in situ. It's a Latin phrase.

It means in its correct, proper and natural environment. In this case, being able to see David Attenborough actually working. OK.

Amazing. Another one from someone in Poland. In the late 70s and early 80s, I was in primary school in communist Poland.

Behind the Iron Curtain, we would watch one of the very few programmes in English available back then, Life on Earth. It was broadcast every Sunday, but at a different time. So you always had to check the schedules in the newspaper.

At the time, we were not allowed to travel outside Poland. So as well as sparking a love of nature, these programmes took me all around the world. They were voiced over in Polish, meaning dubbed in Polish and being determined to learn English.

I would listen out for Sir David's voice, not understanding much back then, but completely mesmerised by his discoveries. I followed Sir David's trails of adventures as a teenager and through my adult years and kept watching his nature programmes religiously. Watching him in his element has always been a moving, yet very calming experience for me.

That's Dorota in her early 50s, an English teacher from Torun in Poland. I don't know. I'm probably not saying that correctly.

I mean, there are more really interesting encounters that people had with David that give you a sense of how beloved this man is. Let me go back to my notes. So let me share some of my personal childhood memories of watching natural history documentaries presented and voiceovered by David Attenborough.

So Sunday evening television basically is what we're talking about here. Nature documentaries, these David Attenborough documentaries were usually shown on Sunday evenings. And so as well as just being nice, cosy moments in front of the TV, these were moments of wonder for my brother and me and our parents sitting in the living room on a Sunday.

And Sunday evenings, is it still the same? Kind of. You have that slightly sad and anxious feeling in your stomach because you know that you have to go to school the next day. Do you ever feel like that? But then here's one more treat before the weekend is over.

There's an Attenborough documentary on the TV and I would sit and watch with my mum, dad and brother. It was usually a combination of incredible footage, which was probably extremely difficult for the camera crew to capture, and then commentaries by David. Sometimes he'd be there on camera and sometimes his voice would be recorded later in a studio in London, probably.

So just animals trying to survive. Quite a range of emotions as you watch. Often just a small, tiny little animal living a life of constant struggle from the very moment of their birth, when they arrive in the world, very vulnerable, but impossibly beautiful, all the way through to when they find a mate, bring new life into the world, struggle to protect it, and finally die somehow, probably killed by a predator, or perhaps by the collapse of their environment, maybe due to changing seasons, or perhaps due to some human-related cause, which was more and more the case in these documentaries.

For these animals, death is always just moments away, their chances of survival painfully low. And we watch in the comfort of our own homes and our relatively stable human lives, as they exist always in the moment, moving from one trial to another. We could witness so intimately these lives filled with struggle, wonderful colour and grace, comedy, tragedy and action.

It was always quite a profound experience and we were hooked from start to finish each Sunday evening. And it was all perfectly accompanied by this voice, which managed to describe and present it all so clearly and effectively. Here are some moments from those documentaries, some sort of memorable moments.

There were the episodes that covered migrations and the changing of seasons across the Serengeti plains in Tanzania or Kenya. And we saw scenes of the most profound struggles for survival, packs of lions hunting wildebeests, such awesome predators, these big cats. And we would watch in slow motion as these big cats stalked, chased and tackled various beasts.

I mean, we wouldn't watch in slow motion. I mean, we weren't in slow motion. I mean, often the moments of lions attacking wildebeest, chasing them, were often presented in slow motion.

And they were incredible, seeing the power of these cats and the agility and the way that they would track these animals until the right moment when they would pounce or leap or chase after them. Sometimes an antelope or buffalo would actually escape and survive, which was always a great moment and you kind of cheer. Also cheetahs, other big cats hunting antelope, incredible chases, cheetahs, of course, the fastest land animals.

We saw zebras being ambushed by crocodiles while drinking water from the riverside. And they've no idea that there's an enormous crocodile hiding right under

the surface of the water, right underneath their noses. And the crocodile waits and waits and waits.

And then with explosive power comes bursting out of the water. Just a huge mouth with all these sharp teeth just would probably snap closed as these antelope or other animals like zebras or something would also, with split second timing, manage to jump out of the way and jump high into the air out of the jaws of these crocodiles. But often, you know, the crocodile would manage to grab hold of an antelope's leg or something like that and then with its immense strength, pull it into the water and drown it and then probably rip bits of flesh from its body by grabbing it with its powerful jaws and twisting.

Insanely powerful creatures. And, you know, these crocodiles have been in more or less the same exact form for millions of years. Perfectly evolved predators for their environment, just eating machines.

And this was all on our TV screens. Elephants giving birth to babies and also mourning the deaths of members of their herd. Ants working together in huge numbers on the floor of the rainforest.

Such industrious creatures able to carry far more than their own body weight, cleaning up anything that was unfortunate enough to fall onto the forest floor. The bizarre mating rituals of praying mantis or is that mantises? Mantises is the plural. We can also call them mantids apparently as well.

Meaning just any member of the mantis sort of family could be like mum, dad, son, daughter. No, I mean, any type of mantis could be called a mantid. So mantids can be the plural form or one mantis, two mantises or one mantid, two mantids.

Anyway, they're bizarre mating rituals of praying mantis, right? With their courtship displays and fatal post-coital eating habits. Sometimes after they mated, the female praying mantis sometimes eats her mate during or after copulation to gain essential nutrients for egg production. So fancy that.

So they get together, male and female mantis, and they mate, they copulate. And after the male mantis has done his job, she just bites his head off. Mmm, nice tasty snack.

This will certainly help to provide the nutrients I need to develop these eggs. Thanks a lot. I mean, it's extraordinary.

Also, there's a fascinating scene in one of the documentaries about the Kung Fu Mantis. I don't think that's the technical term for this species, but it's a little red mantid that manages to scare away a jumping spider that is following it. By raising itself onto its hind legs and waving its arms like a Kung Fu fighter.

Actually, I think Kung Fu fighters were inspired by watching mantises in action and then kind of came up with the mantis style Kung Fu. Which is very influenced by the unique way that mantises move their limbs, especially their arms. They're incredibly strong arms.

This Kung Fu mantis manages to scare away a jumping spider that is following it. So the mantis is crawling around, going from leaf to leaf, and it's being hunted by a spider which keeps jumping and following it. And eventually the mantis raises itself onto its hind legs and waves its arms around like this Kung Fu fighter.

And it just looks so cool when it does that. And the jumping spider is intimidated and it leaves. And you think, yes, well done, you did it.

But then the mantis turns around and is immediately eaten by something else. I mean, it's just instantly eaten by another much bigger mantis, which is disguised as a white orchid flower. I mean, just like the brutality of nature, you know, the way that an animal can go through the most dramatic escape, like a long protracted trial of survival and succeed and then just instantly gets eaten straight away by something else afterwards.

Elephant seals, these enormous seals with these big sort of big trunk like noses. Elephant seals fighting for mating rights on beaches, huge masses of blubber, fur and sharp teeth crashing against each other. Looks like just such a hard life.

You know, all these animals have got these incredibly difficult lives and yet they're so kind of dignified and beautiful at the same time. Like polar bear families searching and searching for food and stalking seals in the Arctic on the ice and getting impossibly thin because they just can't catch anything before finally catching one seal and feeding on it. And you see their faces all red with blood on the snow.

Now, it's not all as brutal as I'm describing. Apparently, this is just the stuff that stuck in my mind, all the most violent moments. But there were plenty of more peaceful and graceful moments.

But it's the hunting and survival that clearly caught my imagination while sitting on a comfortable sofa in a living room somewhere, probably in West London. For example, never before seen footage of orca, that's killer whales, working together in their pods to find clever ways of outsmarting their prey. Like, for example, knocking seals off large pieces of ice.

The killer whales are trying to catch and eat these seals and the seals hide on top of lumps of ice floating on the water, trying to avoid the killer whales. And the killer whales pop their heads up out of the water and have a look. They literally have a look at the seal and talk to each other like, it's over there.

OK, here's what we're going to do. And they make their plan and then they rush at the ice and flip and cause a huge wave which breaks up the ice and pushes the seal into the water where naturally then they they catch it and eat it. Or incredible footage of killer whales, orca, deliberately beaching themselves on the beach when a whale beaches itself, or an orca in this case.

It means that they leave the water and slide onto the land. And that can be incredibly dangerous, right? We've all seen footage or pictures of whales that have ended up on the land and they die because they can't get back in the water. But these orca do it intentionally so that they can grab seals off the beach and then sort of like flip back into the water and then eat them.

And then incredible scenes where the orca take seals out into the water and then play games with the seals. They flip them way up into the air. They swim underneath the seal which is on the surface and with their tail smack it up and you see the seal go flying up into the air and they're just doing that for fun.

And other animals doing similar things like young dolphins, young male dolphins. There's footage of these young male dolphins catching puffer fish, which are those fish that puff up, that fill themselves up with what, air? No, can't be air. But they make their bodies all big and round like a ball with all these spikes on it.

So these are puffer fish and there's footage of young male dolphins catching these fish and then playing games with them, passing them around and sort of pushing them about. And this causes the puffer fish to release their poison, which is actually incredibly dangerous poison. It's a sort of nerve toxin that can kill you and could kill a dolphin.

But the dolphins are so sort of clever that they're able to squeeze these puffer fish so they release a bit of their poison and it actually, a little bit of it, makes the dolphins high. And they kind of get high off these puffer fish and pass them around between each other. But it's so risky if they take too much, it can kill them.

I mean, it's mind boggling stuff. And then, I don't know if you've seen this, it's a famous sequence from one of the documentaries when we see a huge shoal of sardines, like a massive, massive shoal of sardine fish getting hunted by a combination of different underwater predators. And as a defence mechanism, this shoal of fish turns into what's called a bait ball.

So the fish start to swim really close together in a very tight little ball. And you see all these different predators all coming in to attack this bait ball. There are huge yellowfin tuna fish that sweep in at high speeds.

You see seals coming in, twisting and turning, chasing after stray sardines. Gannets, these birds that dive-bomb from above, plunge into the water and then swim really far down into the water to grab fish in their beaks. Are they gannets or are they cormorants? Anyway, some sort of diving bird.

And then dolphins arrive, trying to catch the fish, and sharks come in and start feeding. And finally, the rest of this sardine bait ball, this sort of small ball of sardines that's left, is then swallowed up whole by an enormous whale. Is it a blue whale or a grey whale? I can't quite remember.

It's actually a humpback whale. But a huge whale suddenly comes up from underneath and sweeps up and, hum, in one massive mouthful, essentially eats the rest of the bait ball. I mean, it's just the most extraordinary sequence of events.

And there's the footage of great white sharks breaching off the south coast of South Africa, off the coast of South Africa. So these great white sharks, right? So the camera crew managed to film sharks jumping out of the water in order to catch seals. So great white sharks, not the biggest sharks, but one of the biggest, most impressive predators, the great white shark, like in the film Jaws.

What they do is they, apparently, if they find a seal that's swimming fairly close to the surface, the shark swims down quite deep and then swims up and, with great speed and power, grabs the seal and kind of emerges out of the surface of the water, often flying into the air with the seal in its mouth. And the BBC managed to capture loads of incredible slow motion footage of these sharks coming, flying out

of the water with seals in their mouths. And then there's the footage of a killer whale pod, which relentlessly hunts a grey whale and its pup.

So there's this mother grey whale with a whale pup by its side, and these orca hunt the pup. They're trying to get the pup and they chase them and chase them. It's actually quite upsetting to see the desperation of the whale attempting to escape and protect its child and getting more and more exhausted and desperate.

And the sheer intelligence, power, stamina and teamwork of the orca, who finally succeed, wear out the whales and take the pup and then only eat a small choice part of its body. They don't even eat the whole whale pup, they just eat a part of it, leaving the rest of this whale's carcass, which is mostly whole, to just float in the water where it's kind of eaten by various other animals in the sea. And we see this whale carcass.

Sharks come along and take bites out of it and stuff. And eventually the whole carcass starts to sink. And we follow this carcass sinking.

The camera crew managed to follow this carcass sinking down, down, down, all the way to the very bottom of the ocean. And then the documentary continues and we see exactly what happens to this whale carcass on the seafloor. And all the creatures, all the bizarre different creatures that come to feed on this whale carcass, the bizarre looking sharks that live at the bottom of the sea, crabs and snails and worms, which devour every last bit of meat, leaving a perfectly clean whale skeleton sitting on the sand at the end.

Just some of the most wondrous, beautiful and frightening things are right there in our world with us, especially at the bottom of the ocean. And I remember footage of some of the weirdest creatures on earth that live in the deep of the ocean. And I'm talking about things like bioluminescent life forms, animals that produce their own bright fluorescent light.

And they come in all these different bizarre shapes and colours and sizes. And they live so deep in the ocean that the sunlight never gets down there, but they live in total darkness. I think it's called the midnight zone.

But they produce their own light and they glow and shimmer and dance down there. And then there are the cute or funny moments like monkeys playing in treetops or diving into rivers or meerkats just being adorable, standing on their legs and staring

into the distance and various baby animals rolling around, play fighting, all furry and adorable. We used to watch these things completely engrossed and compelled.

And David's voiceover commentaries were always perfectly executed, eloquently worded and masterfully pitched, helping to educate, inform and entertain us about the natural world. Now, it is worth talking about his voice because that's how most of us know him, through listening to his commentaries, which accompany footage of animals in their natural habitats doing these quite extraordinary things. So he has a very distinctive tone of voice and speaking style.

It sounds warm, yet authoritative. It's kind of whispery, but also comforting and full of dynamic range as it goes up and down while describing the onscreen footage. In recent episodes of Luke's English Podcast Premium, I've been talking about prosody, which is the way the voice is used to communicate information through pausing, emphasis and intonation.

And Attenborough is a master of this. The way he uses his voice to tell stories, to accompany video footage of the natural world is wonderful. His ability to do this is one of the things that makes him special.

His control of language, his eloquence, his efficiency and his accessibility without ever being over the top, patronising or sentimental. That is all a huge part of the appeal. Now, I was I was built by the BBC.

Of course, my family, my education and my experiences were the main things. But the BBC and the programmes we watched on it when we were kids were terribly important in our lives. The Beeb, as it sometimes known, had a commitment and still has a commitment and still does to public service broadcasting and a level of quality in its programming that I think should be recognised.

Of course, like any big institution, it isn't and hasn't always been perfect. But in terms of British life and culture, the BBC represents an immense presence, which has largely been positive, in fact, hugely beneficial in terms of how it educated, informed and entertained us. And David Attenborough's work there represents some of the very best of that programming.

His voice and his writing are seared into my brain. And the same is true of so many others of my generation and my parents' generation. Another moment which I mentioned at the beginning of the episode that I must share is when he visited a

family of gorillas in their natural habitat on the side of a mountain in the jungle in Rwanda.

So let me tell you about David and the gorillas. Now, this is one of those all time greatest moments of television on the BBC, I think. He basically just hung out with some gorillas in the jungle for the TV series Life on Earth in 1979.

And it was all quite spontaneous and therefore magical. It is one of the most incredible and also lovely moments of TV I've ever seen still to this day. I never get tired of watching it, not just because of the footage of these incredible animals and David's proximity to them and interaction with them, but the way he talked about them right there on camera, unscripted.

It's incredibly impressive, just like his professionalism as a broadcaster and just as a speaker. Being able to be there with these gorillas, I mean, that would have been quite a stressful moment, I imagine, and difficult to get there and then to be there with them. You'd be nervous, I would be.

But he turns to the camera and delivers this monologue, which is, I mean, it doesn't seem to be scripted. He's not reading it from an autocue or anything. He just sort of does it.

I've seen some videos about the making of that moment, and apparently the producer just said, right, David, we've got, we don't have a lot of film in the cameras left. You've got to do your, your piece to camera now. And David was just right there next to the gorillas and David was, oh, right now.

Okay. And he turned around and, and said so many like really insightful things. He never stumbled over his words.

He never ummed or ah'd. He just delivered exactly the right thing. He just said exactly the right words.

And I'm just incredibly impressed and amazed by it and inspired by it. Here's the transcript of that moment, actually. I'm going to read it to you.

Now, bear in mind that he said most of this when lying in the undergrowth of the jungle, surrounded by this group of huge, beautiful gorillas. I don't know if you've ever seen, for example, a male silverback gorilla in the zoo or something. They are huge and so powerful and quite intimidating.

Seriously intimidating. Huge jaws and massive arms and they sit there and they're enormous. I remember, I think I mentioned it on the podcast once.

I went to the zoo. I don't know how I feel about zoos. I'm not a huge fan of the zoo, but at the same time, I do like to see animals.

Anyway, we went to the zoo and they had gorillas and there was this male gorilla that was sitting under a wooden, it was like in a little wooden house kind of thing. And you could see it lying down under the wood. And at one point it crawled out and got out and stood, well, and sat on the grass in front of everyone watching.

And there was the gorilla and then there's a kind of a big moat of water around it so it can't just get out. But you're basically a few metres away from a gorilla sitting there and the thing's huge. It's like a Volkswagen.

It's like a Volkswagen Golf sitting on the grass. It's like this massive, enormous thing. And so anyway, David was there in the jungle lying on the undergrowth, surrounded by these gorillas and they're touching him.

At one point, one of the young gorillas actually comes over and crawls on top of him and lies down on top of him and plays with him while its mother looks on, seemingly quite amused from the expression on her face. And the huge male silverback gorilla is also just there watching all of this. Now, I don't know, I've said this already, but I don't know if you've ever seen a silverback gorilla in real life, in a zoo probably, but they are extremely impressive and highly intimidating creatures, huge, very powerful and extremely imposing.

The idea of lying in the grass with one and its family while one of the children crawls all over you would be terrifying to me. But David Attenborough took it in his stride. In fact, the gorillas seem to like him.

Of course they did. But the footage shows not only his easy charm, but also his great professionalism. He's able to continue presenting and talking to the camera very articulately without tripping over his words while the gorillas are all around him and even touching him.

At one point, an adult female puts her huge hand on his head and sort of twists his head around so she can look directly into his eyes. It could easily have broken his

neck just like that. But of course, these creatures are not aggressive as long as they don't feel threatened.

But still, imagine sharing a moment of eye contact with a full grown gorilla, not in a zoo, but right there in their own home in the jungle with nothing separating you and them, while it has its hand on your head and one of its children is crawling all over you. So here's this tape script of the transcript of what David Attenborough said in that moment. The first, I think, the first paragraph is spoken not in front of the gorillas, but then after the second or third paragraph, these are the things he actually said when he was lying down with the gorillas.

So I'm not going to do the impression, I'm going to do my own version, kind of. There's one ape, however, that spends nearly all its time on the ground. It lives here, 10,000 feet up on the flanks of the volcanoes of Central Africa, on the borders of Rwanda and Zaire.

It's the biggest of all the apes, the shyest, one of the rarest, and until recently, one of the least known, the gorilla. The group of gorillas that lives here has been studied by scientists for several years and has become sufficiently accustomed to human beings to allow you to approach quite close, but you have to behave properly and you mustn't conceal yourself too well. If you suddenly appeared close to them and took them by surprise, then they would almost certainly charge.

To charge, that's when they run towards you really quickly and aggressively. There's a lookout sitting on that tree and he's already seen me. He's pointing to a gorilla that's sitting on a branch that is obviously there to observe, to look out for people coming or, you know, any predators or anything.

There is more meaning and mutual understanding in exchanging a glance of the gorilla than any other animal I know. We're so similar, their sight, their hearing, their sense of smell. They're so similar to ours that we see the world in the same way as they do.

They live in the same sort of social groups, permanent family relationships. They walk on the ground as we do, though they're immensely more powerful than we are. And so, if ever there was a possibility of escaping the human condition and living imaginatively in another creature's world, it must be with the gorilla.

And yet, as I sit here, surrounded by this trusting gorilla family, they're gentle, placid creatures. The boss of the group is that silverbacked male. The rest are adult females with their young sons and daughters.

And this is how they spend most of their time, lounging on the ground, grooming one another. The male is an enormously powerful creature, but he only uses his strength when he's actually protecting his own family from a marauding male from another group. And it's very, very rare that there is any violence within the group.

So it seems really very unfair that man should have chosen the gorilla to symbolise all that is aggressive and violent, when that's the one thing that the gorilla is not, and that we are. That grasping, manipulative hand has now become something more, an instrument with which to explore and investigate. The fingers can delicately revolve a small object and investigate it from every angle.

They can feel not only its shape, but its texture. For the fingers, since they're no longer required to be put flat on the ground in support of the body, have sensitive pads at the end, covered with tiny ridges of skin to enhance the sense of touch. Every gorilla, in fact, has its own unique fingerprints, just as we have.

The gorilla family spends its day gently grazing, and there's plenty of time for play. Half-grown, black-backed males regularly have wrestling matches. Sometimes they even allow others to join in, though they may play games.

You don't forget that these are the rulers of the forest, and the great silverback is king of the whole group. He is so enormously strong that he need fear nothing except a man armed with a spear or a gun. No enemies and an unlimited supply of food that can be gathered by simply stretching out an arm, the gorilla has no need to remain particularly agile in either body or mind.

Now, I could go on here describing more moments, but I think the best thing is if you actually take the time to see these bits of footage for yourself. So check the page for this episode on my website, and you can watch various clips from these natural history documentaries with David Attenborough's voiceovers or his pieces to camera. They are really, really worth watching.

I'll share loads of videos there, and watching them would definitely be some time well spent. Let me give you some fun facts about David Attenborough as we just sort of approach the end of the episode here. Here are some more fun facts about him.

I mentioned Monty Python's Flying Circus in 1969, and I've mentioned this, but we can partly thank David Attenborough for allowing the pythons to exist. That's Monty Python. At the end of the 1960s, when he was BBC Director of Programmes, he commissioned the TV series Monty Python's Flying Circus, the cult sketch show which made stars out of John Cleese, Michael Palin, Terry Jones, Eric Idle, Graham Chapman, and Terry Gilliam.

If you don't know about Monty Python, you must check out the episodes I've done about the pythons as they're known. In the past, I've done episodes about the Monty Python TV show, the movies, and so just check my episode archive for Monty Python's Flying Circus. The show was a, the TV show was a global phenomenon at the time and has become a comedy institution since, inspiring generations of comedians around the world.

Monty Python's Flying Circus is a British institution and a comedy show. In Britain, Python became part of the nation's cultural DNA, encapsulating a recognisably British eccentricity and spawning popular catchphrases and figures of speech. Again, one of the British things I can feel genuinely proud of.

Thanks, David. Also, tennis. Now, you know tennis, right? Of course you do.

What colour are the balls in tennis? They're kind of fluorescent yellow, right? They look nice, don't they? And they're easy to see on TV. Well, that was thanks to David Attenborough. I know that's weird, isn't it? But it's true.

In the late 1960s, David Attenborough was the BBC Two, the network tasked with rolling out colour television in the UK. His connection to tennis balls comes down to how colour television interacted with sports. So he pointed out that traditional white tennis balls were nearly impossible for viewers at home to see against the grass courts and white lines on the new colour screens.

Okay. His push for a visible alternative eventually led to the creation and adoption of fluorescent yellow balls. So there was David Attenborough going, right, we're going to show tennis on television, but in colour, the white ball, because tennis balls used to be white.

But David Attenborough thought, right, we're going to put tennis on television. The problem is, though, you can't see the ball very clearly against the because of the

white lines, the ball is less easy to see. And so he encouraged the programme to find a solution.

And that was the reason why those fluorescent yellow balls were brought in to make them easier to see on the television. That's thanks to David Attenborough. I mean, I don't know if it's just a funny fact, really.

Also, the sport of snooker can thank David Attenborough for its huge rise in popularity in the modern era. Again, when colour television first became available at the end of the 1960s, Attenborough was the BBC director of programmes. And to prove the vibrant capabilities of colour TV to the public, Attenborough specifically searched for a sport that used a wide spectrum of colours, realising that snooker featured red, yellow, green, blue, brown, pink, black and white balls all on a green table.

He commissioned a hit TV series called Pot Black in 1969 to showcase colour TV technology. And this single handedly launched the sport's massive popularity. At the time, of course, most TVs in the country were still black and white.

So apparently David made a point of telling the snooker commentators to remember this and to help viewers still watching in black and white understand which colour was which. Right, so are you getting this, listeners, that as controller of the BBC, he was looking for programmes that would be great on colour televisions. And snooker was perfect because it was very colourful with all these different coloured balls in the green table.

And also the game's quite long. So putting snooker on television meant that you got, you know, hours of television programming just from broadcasting the sport. And it was a great way to showcase colour TV.

But he also knew that certainly in the beginning, most people would still be watching in black and white. So he told the commentators, don't forget, most of the viewers will be watching in black and white. OK.

And apparently the commentator nodded in agreement and understanding. And then while commenting on a game, he said, and now he's going for the pink ball. And for viewers watching in black and white, the pink is the one just next to the blue.

Now, these days, snooker remains a hugely popular sport in the UK, especially as a spectator sport. And it's a big part of British life and culture. And that's largely thanks to the fact that David Attenborough commissioned snooker to be shown on television.

Anyway, is snooker also popular in your country? I wonder if it is. Obviously, pool is a popular game in pubs and bars and stuff all over the world. But snooker is a totally different sport.

It's similar, but it's on a much bigger table and has different rules and stuff. I don't know if snooker is popular where you are. I know it's popular in China.

Anyway, I could go on. Now, some stand up comedy. Now, as far as I know, David has never actually done stand up comedy, although he is funny.

He's got a sense of humour. But I once wrote a routine, a stand up comedy routine that involved a David Attenborough impersonation, which I thought might enjoy. So let me read it out to you now.

It's just a bit of a laugh. It's I've got it in a notepad here. I'm just going to grab that and then I'll read the stand up routine to you, which will involve my David Attenborough impression.

OK. So I finally found this old bit of stand up in an old notepad. I tracked it down and I've typed it up now and I've added it to my notes for this episode.

So I'm going to read it out to you now. So this is a piece of material which I wrote ages ago originally to do on stage as part of a stand up comedy routine. But I never actually performed it on stage because I could never remember it.

Because when you're doing stand up, you need to be able to just remember it and do it off the top of your head. You can't read it out from a piece of paper. But it was sort of so long and so specific that I could never quite remember it.

But I'm glad to read it to you now because it'll actually be heard by an audience for the first time. So here's some old stand up material which has a kind of David Attenborough connection. All right.

Do you ever feel self-conscious? Do you ever feel self-conscious in public? You know, the feeling that other people can see you and you feel a bit embarrassed or

just aware of yourself. I do because sometimes I know I'm being watched. It's not paranoia.

It's true because we all love to people watch, don't we? We love people watching. We do it subtly without other people noticing, but everyone does it. Living in a big city surrounded by other people, we can't help it.

But have you ever realised that you're the victim of people watching? Yes, that moment when you realise that other people are silently watching you for their own amusement. I realised that was happening the other day. I was on the train struggling with shopping bags, plastic bags from Sainsbury's full of my shopping for the week.

I'd been to the supermarket and I was struggling with the bags, trying to find a seat on the crowded train. It was a bit of a trial for me, really difficult. And I was trying to deal with the bags without them breaking open and spilling all my food everywhere and trying not to bump into other people.

I was just struggling basically. And while I was doing this, I noticed that at least three people on the train were just watching me, just watching me for their own amusement, just standing there. Two of them had their headphones on, so as far as they were concerned, they were invisible.

The other one was speaking on her mobile while watching me, and obviously I couldn't see her either because basically phones and mobiles and headphones, they're just social invisibility cloaks, aren't they? They are. They're social invisibility cloaks. If you're on your phone or you have headphones on, you're not really there, so you can just watch people as much as you want.

But it was just weird. It was like they were watching me struggling for their own entertainment and interest, like it was some nature documentary or something about a dung beetle or an ant or me in this case, perhaps voiced by David Attenborough, possibly. And here, on the 1847 train from Shepherdsbush to Clapham Junction, we find an interesting creature simply struggling for survival.

It's a commuter called Luke, and he's trying to get home. Luke has been on a foraging mission to Sainsbury's, and now, with the fruit of his labour stuffed into some flimsy plastic bags, he's trying to find a seat. Seating on an overland train such as this at this time of year can be scarce, but luckily Luke is a tenacious traveller and is able to use all his skills to find a suitable resting spot.

The bags of shopping, though, prove harder to manage. Luckily, Luke is armed with opposable thumbs, which have been gifted to him through millions of years of evolution. He uses those thumbs to simultaneously hold the bags in place whilst texting his mating partner.

The mating partner, known as a girlfriend, is back at the apartment, busily preparing the kitchen and getting things ready for dinner. Luke knows, without the appropriate number of ingredients in the shopping bags and the right carefully timed comments that evening, he will fail to complete his mating rituals for the week. So yeah, that is what life is like.

We're all living in a David Attenborough nature documentary to some extent. Now, on a more serious note, over the last couple of decades, for obvious reasons, David Attenborough has focused on climate advocacy, using his voice to highlight the growing climate crisis and the vitally important effort to control the impact we are having on the ecosystem that we all live in and depend on, both for humans and animals. I'd like to end this episode by reading out a speech that he made at the COP26 Climate Summit in Glasgow on the 1st of November 2021.

So, as I read this, take note of not only the message he's communicating, but the way he communicates it. I mean the efficiency of language, the way he organises his ideas and the way he keeps it short and simple, which is a lesson that we can all learn from. So let me just read his script then from that moment.

So imagine he's there in front of many different people, leaders, business leaders and so on. Here is the speech that he gave. Your excellencies, delegates, ladies and gentlemen, as you spend the next two weeks debating, negotiating, persuading and compromising, as you surely must, it's easy to forget that ultimately the climate emergency comes down to a single number, the concentration of carbon in our atmosphere.

The measure that greatly determines global temperature and the changes in that one number is the clearest way to chart our own story, for it defines our relationship with our world. For much of humanity's ancient history, that number bounced wildly between 180 and 300, and so too did global temperatures. It was a brutal and unpredictable world.

At times, our ancestors existed only in tiny numbers, but just over 10,000 years ago, that number suddenly stabilised, and with it, Earth's climate. We found ourselves in

an unusually benign period with predictable seasons and reliable weather. For the first time, civilisation was possible, and we wasted no time in taking advantage of that.

Everything we've achieved in the last 10,000 years was enabled by the stability during this time. The global temperature has not wavered over this period by more than plus or minus one degree Celsius, until now. Our burning of fossil fuels, our destruction of nature, our approach to industry, construction and learning are releasing carbon into the atmosphere at an unprecedented pace and scale.

We are already in trouble. The stability we all depend on is breaking. This story is one of inequality as well as instability.

Today, those who've done the least to cause this problem are being the hardest hit. Ultimately, all of us will feel the impacts, some of which are now unavoidable. Is this how our story is due to end? A tale of the smartest species doomed by that all-too-human characteristic of failing to see the bigger picture in pursuit of short-term goals? Perhaps the fact that the people most affected by climate change are no longer some imagined future generation, but young people alive today? Perhaps that will give us the impetus we need to rewrite our story, to turn this tragedy into a triumph.

We are, after all, the greatest problem solvers to have ever existed on Earth. We now understand this problem. We know how to stop the number rising and put it in reverse.

We must recapture billions of tonnes of carbon from the air. We must fix our sights on keeping one and a half degrees within reach. A new industrial revolution, powered by millions of sustainable innovations, is essential and is indeed already beginning.

We will all share in the benefits. Affordable, clean energy, healthy air and enough food to sustain us all. Nature is a key ally.

Whenever we restore the wild, it will recapture carbon and help us bring back balance to our planet. And as we work to build a better world, we must acknowledge no nation has completed its development because no advanced nation is yet sustainable. All have a journey still to complete, so that all nations have a good standard of living and a modest footprint.

We're going to have to learn together how to achieve this, ensuring none are left behind. We must use this opportunity to create a more equal world, and our motivation should not be fear, but hope. It comes down to this.

The people alive now, the generation to come, will look at this conference and consider one thing. Did that number stop rising and start to drop as a result of commitments made here? There's every reason to believe that the answer can be yes. If, working apart, we are a force powerful enough to destabilise our planet, surely, working together, we are powerful enough to save it.

In my lifetime, I've witnessed a terrible decline. In yours, you could and should witness a wonderful recovery. That desperate hope, ladies and gentlemen, delegates, excellencies, is why the world is looking to you and why you are here.

Thank you. Well, it's hard to add anything to that really, except obviously to mention that he was addressing an audience in a fairly formal way. That was quite a formal speech and he referred to delegates and excellencies.

That would be a term used to describe, in the greatest level of respect, you know, heads of state and maybe members of royalty. But the message is pretty strong and clearly stated there. Now, David is 100 years old and his voice sounds more frail, but impressively, he still continues to work and to devote his time to the cause of the planet that we all live on, together, along with millions of animal species.

So, happy belated birthday, David Attenborough, and thank you for everything. And, of course, you must explore some of his work and enjoy it. I haven't played you actual recordings of his voice in this episode, but as I said before, you can check out all the links and all the embedded videos and things that I will put onto the episode page for this episode.

You'll just find a link in the description there for that. So follow the link to my website and you'll find loads of videos and things that you can enjoy. If you're in the UK this October, this autumn, you could actually go and see the production, which is called Our Story with David Attenborough.

It is available to visit at Chester Zoo, which is not far from Liverpool and Manchester. Chester Zoo, check out Our Story. It's narrated by Attenborough himself.

It's a 50-minute, 360-degree cinematic experience which charts the four-billion-year history of Earth. It's open to the public starting mid-October. And from the 30th of October, in fact, no, the 30th of October marks the final day of the Beauty of the Earth Centenary Exhibition hosted by the Royal Society in London.

So I guess this is an exhibition you can see up until the 30th of October at the Royal Society in London. It's a free exhibition and it serves as a tribute to David's 100th year, displaying archival documents, scientific wonders and histories of the ecosystems he dedicated his life to protecting. And online, well, on Netflix, if you have Netflix, there are various Attenborough documentaries there.

Some of the newest ones, the most recent ones are available on Netflix. Just search for Attenborough and you'll find them. And also loads of YouTube clips from his documentaries.

As I said, I'll share as many of those as I can on the website page for this episode and various other links. But thank you for listening to the episode. I hope you found this interesting.

As I said, I've been wanting to talk about David Attenborough for a long time. I think he's a very important and very significant British public figure that has brought for me personally, brought so many rich and interesting and insightful and enjoyable moments to my life. And I feel has been a key figure in the lives of, you know, many people in my generation, my parents' generation, too.

And so how could I not do an episode about David Attenborough as a celebration of him and also as a way to highlight the causes that he advocates for today? Thanks for listening. Thanks for watching. Leave your comments below.

Did you know about David Attenborough already? Have you ever had any sort of experiences watching his documentaries? What do you think of them? Or is this person completely new to you? In which case, do check out his work. It's really, really interesting and fascinating. Do you have a similar person in your country who has done a similar thing as David Attenborough? I wonder.

I'd love to know. Anyway, thank you for watching. Thanks for listening.

I'll speak to you next time. But for now, it's just time to say good bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.

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