

Luke's Episode Notes

Note: This PDF contains the notes which I prepared for this episode. It contains **photographs** and **screenshots**, so please consider that before you **print it** 🖨️ There is a printer-friendly transcript also available via the episode page on my website teacherluke.co.uk/episodes



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Sir David Attenborough 🌍 [1005]

Today on the podcast I would like to celebrate the life of a living legend - Sir David Attenborough.

This episode will be a rambling tribute to this British gentleman who so many of us know and love. Most of us don't know him personally of course, but we kind of feel like we do, because we listened 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, anecdotes and rambling memories from me, which I will attempt to put clearly into words and sentences in English of course.

I am 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

Perhaps I should mention my ex-girlfriend at the start of this episode, 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, in which I re-told the story of Jurassic Park from the point of view of one of the characters.

That was not a true story by the way everyone, despite what some listeners seemed to think judging by the comments!

No, I have 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 mosquitos 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 Attenboroughs are household names in the UK. So there is the connection to last week's episode.



David (left), Richard (right)

So, 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 am sure you are 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 is 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.

There are so 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, belated happy 100th birthday to David, Sir David.

I wanted to do an episode dedicated to him in May, but didn't get myself organised in time. 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?

The first part of that question is easier to explain than the second. Who is he?

Who is David Attenborough?

I suppose for many people, David Attenborough (yes, that's how his name is pronounced) is the voice that we have 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 have seen his work on Netflix, or clips on YouTube.

His voice is very distinctive. Let me try to do an impression of him talking, now. 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.

Improvised impression happens here

I will come back to talk about his voice, because that is perhaps how most of us know him.

Before that, let me tell you some basic facts about D.A.



David Attenborough Facts - Life & Career

Here's some information paraphrased from Wikipedia.

David Attenborough is an English broadcaster, naturalist, and writer born on 8 May 1926. He is best known for pioneering TV nature documentaries such as Planet Earth, The Blue Planet, The Trials of Life, and Life on Earth.

He did pioneer these documentaries, with the help of various producers and film crews, and he started in the 1950s, when the BBC was making so many brand new programmes.

He is from Leicester in the East Midlands. 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 campus, 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 was not 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 2, but he did do national service. He joined the Navy for 2 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 was developing its television output. TV was brand new and so the BBC was expanding its repertoire of shows for this medium. David did not 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 TV programmes.

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, allowed viewers at home to see a lot of animals for the very first time, in their natural environments. They travelled around the world to film these animals.



Anteater (left) Komodo dragon (right)

Most British people had never ever seen things like an *anteater*, or a *komodo dragon*. David brought these things and so many other animals to people's attention.

He started as a producer on Zoo Quest, but when the presenter became ill suddenly, David had to step in front of the camera and start presenting. It seems he was a natural at this.

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 with compelling storytelling, and transforming public understanding of the natural world.

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

7

His career has spanned more than seven decades. He is the only person to win BAFTA awards (British Academy of Film and Television Arts awards) for black-and-white, colour, HD, 3D, and 4K productions.

As well as making natural history documentaries, he also served as the Controller of BBC Two in the late 60s, and then he was promoted to Director of Programmes for BBC Television.

During that time he commissioned various TV shows that later became groundbreaking and significant in their own right, including Monty Python's Flying Circus. Thanks 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.

In more recent years, Attenborough has become a leading voice for conservation, climate action, biodiversity protection, and sustainable living, and he remains one of the most respected figures in global environmental communication. I will come back to that point at the end of the episode, when I'll read out a speech that he gave at the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow several years ago. It is an important and powerful piece of climate advocacy, and very well written, as you might expect.

So, as you can see, he has 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.

A National Treasure, and *The Greatest Living British Person*?

In Britain he is widely considered to be a national treasure, and for many people "the greatest living British person".

That seems like hyperbole - or exaggeration - "The Greatest Living British Person". It does sound like hyperbole, but it isn't really. People genuinely hold him in very high esteem, he is beloved, and deservedly so.

Personally I would agree with that title. I struggle to think of anyone else who could claim it. Maybe there are people who have been more beneficial to our lives, but who are less visible. But, right now, I can't think of anyone more suitable for that title of Greatest Living Briton.

You might think, "Well Luke what about The King? King Charles III. Isn't he, by definition, the greatest living Briton?"

Well, he's alright I suppose, but sorry but he can't really compare, in my opinion at least, to Attenborough - in terms of what he has done, and what he represents.

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, The King is actually a big admirer of Attenborough too, as we saw when he joined the celebrations of Attenborough's 100th birthday. He wrote him a nice letter and everything.

Back to the question of "Who is the greatest living Briton?" 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 country's greatest person.

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 Briton/icon.

But Luke, why? You might think to yourself.

Paraphrased from Britishcouncil.org: While various media outlets, polling organizations (like YouGov), and cultural institutions routinely run these surveys, Attenborough almost always claims the number-one spot for a few distinct reasons:

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.

A Lifetime of Public Service: Having started his career at the BBC in the 1950s, his broadcasting career spans nearly eight decades. He has fundamentally shaped how generations of people view the planet.

And the fact it was on the BBC is significant, because this is quite a unique institution. The BBC is not a state-run television company. It is funded by viewers (but not through a tax), and it has its own charter and 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 any more.

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, 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 is a gentleman, he has a sense of humour, he's modest, he's extremely knowledgeable, he is incredibly worldly but also down-to-earth, he has good judgement, and he is 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.

A person's legacy means the lasting impact, and influence they leave on the world and the people around them after they die.

Now, that's all well and good, but I don't want to just sit here and attempt to persuade you that David Attenborough is a just 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.

Anecdotes & Personal Memories

My cousin Oli met him once, and has a couple of things to share.

Oliver's message

Oli used to work for the BBC, as a producer, in the department that was responsible for natural history documentaries (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 still works as a TV producer, and he recorded this voice message for us yesterday, while he was on his way to work.

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.

Bonus points if you can get these things:

- Where was Oli when he recorded this message?
- How did he meet Sir David?
- What did he think of David when he met him?
- What did David tell him?
- What did David give to Oliver, which was quite special?

I will give answers to those questions afterwards, just to be sure you got it all.

Oli's voice message (script)

Hello, Cousin Luke, it's Oli here. Just driving along Sunset Boulevard in my driverless car, something I could not have conceived of ten 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 celebration of, I think, 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, East Fife, something like that, somewhere in Scotland.

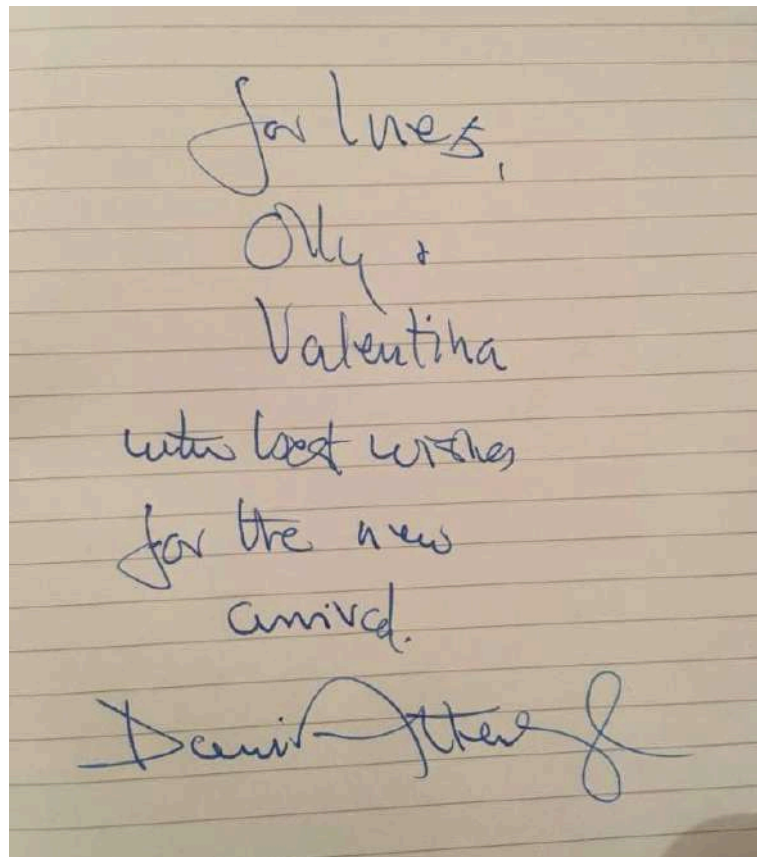
And my wife, Ines, was pregnant at the time with our second child, Penelope. And he wrote us a lovely message saying, *Dear Oli, Ines, and Valentina, Congratulations on your imminent arrival, with lots of love from Sir David Attenborough*, something like that.

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 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 the first colour television channel, before changing and then going back to being a 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 is loved around the world and is hugely successful.



Other anecdotes from The Guardian here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2026/may/08/david-attenborough-at-100-memories-encounters>

My childhood memories of watching natural history documentaries

Sunday evening television.

Nature documentaries were usually shown on Sunday evenings.

As well as just being nice cosy moments in front of the TV, these were moments of wonder, sitting in the living room on a Sunday.

You have that slightly sad and anxious feeling in your stomach because you know you have to go to school the next day, but here's one more treat before

the weekend is over. There's an Attenborough doc 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, sometimes his voice would be recorded later in a studio in London probably.

Animals just trying to survive. Quite a range of emotions. Often just a small, tiny 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 homes and our relatively stable human lives, as they exist always in the moment, 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.

And it was all perfectly accompanied by this voice, which managed to describe and present it all so clearly and effectively.

Some memorable from those documentaries



Migrations and the changing of seasons across the the Serengeti Plains in Tanzania or Kenya. Scenes of the most profound struggles for survival. Packs of lions hunting wildebeest. Such awesome predators. Watching in slow motion as these big cats stalked, chased and tackled various beasts - sometimes an antelope or buffalo would actually escape and survive.



Also cheetahs hunting antelope. Incredible chases.

We saw zebras being ambushed by crocodiles while drinking. These crocodiles who have been in more or less the same exact form for millions of years - perfectly evolved predators for their environment. Eating machines.

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 preying mantis, with their courtship displays and fatal post-coital eating habits. Female praying mantis sometimes eats her mates during or after copulation to gain essential nutrients for egg production.



The “Kung Fu” mantis - 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) but it looks so cool when the mantis stands up and waves its arms. The jumping spider is intimidated and leaves, but then the mantis turns around and is immediately eaten by another much bigger mantis, disguised as a orchid flower.



Enormous Elephant seals fighting for mating rights on beaches. Huge masses of blubber, fur and sharp teeth crashing against each other.



Polar bear families searching and searching for food and stalking seals in the arctic, getting impossibly thin, before finally catching one and feeding, their faces red with blood.

It's not all as brutal as I'm describing. Apparently this is the stuff that has stuck in my mind. 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.



Never-before seen footage of Orca - killer whales working together in their pods to find clever ways of outsmarting their prey, like knocking seals off large pieces of ice, or deliberately beaching themselves to grab seals off the sand, and then taking one of those seals out into the ocean and playing with it - flipping it high into the air with their tails.



Young male dolphins catching puffer fish and playing games with them, while getting high off their poison. They deliberately chew the puffer fish, which then releases a nerve toxin. The toxin gets the dolphins high, and they pass it around. But it's so risky - if they take too much, it can kill them.



The unbelievable sequence in which we see a huge shoal of sardines slowly get hunted and eaten by a combination of different underwater predators - huge yellowfin tuna fish that sweep in at high speed, seals twisting and turning after stray sardines, gannets dive bombing from above and swimming under the water to grab fish in their beaks, sharks arriving and feeding, then dolphins coming in, and finally the rest of the sardine bait-ball is simply swallowed up whole by a huge whale which sweeps up from underneath.



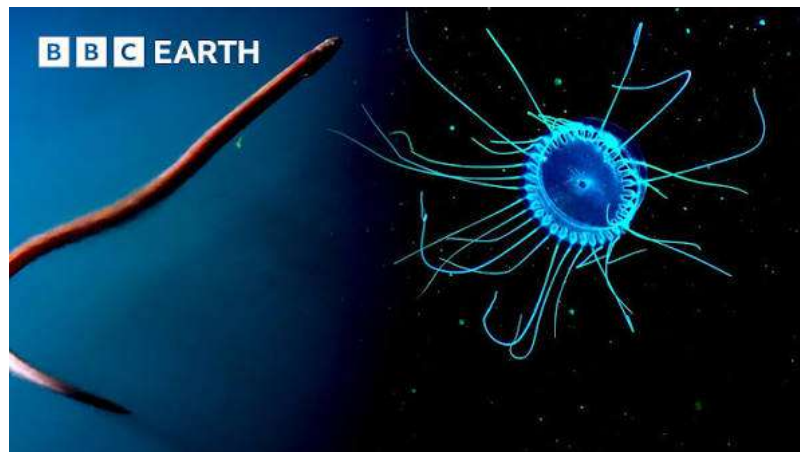
Great white sharks breaching off the coast of South Africa. Huge bodies and sharp teeth emerging at speed from the choppy waters of the South Atlantic.



A killer whale pod which relentlessly hunts a grey whale and its pup. 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 team work of the orca, who finally succeed, wear out the whales and take the pup, then only eat a small choice part of its body - leaving the rest of the whale's carcass

(mostly whole) to float in the water and then sink, and we follow as it slowly descends all the way down to the very bottom of the ocean, and then the documentary continues and we see exactly what happens to this whale carcass on the sea floor, and all the different creatures that come to feed on it. The bizarre-looking sharks, crabs, snails and worms which devour every last bit of meat, leaving a perfectly clean skeleton sitting on the sand.

Some of the most wondrous, beautiful and frightening things are right there in our world with us, especially at the bottom of the ocean.



Some of the weirdest creatures on earth, that live in the deep of the ocean.

Bioluminescent life forms of so many bizarre shapes and colours, so deep in the ocean that the sunlight never gets there, and they live in total darkness. But they produce their own light, and they glow and shimmer and dance down there.

And there are the cute or funny moments like monkeys playing in treetops or diving into rivers, or meerkats just being adorable standing on their hind 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 voice-over commentaries were always perfectly executed - eloquently worded and masterfully pitched - helping to educate, inform and entertain us.

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.

He has a very distinctive tone of voice and speaking style. It sounds warm, yet authoritative. It is 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 LEP Premium I have been talking about prosody - 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 communicate 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 large part of the appeal.

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 had a commitment to public service broadcasting (and still does) 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 I think 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.

David Attenborough's work there represents some of the 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 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.

David and The Gorillas



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.

Here's the transcript of it. I'm going to read it to you. 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.

At one point one of the young ones actually crawls over and lies down on top of him, and plays with him, while its mother looks on, seemingly quite amused. The huge male silverback gorilla is also there, observing. I don't know if you have ever seen a silverback gorilla in real life, in a zoo probably. They are extremely impressive and highly intimidating creatures. Huge, very very powerful and extremely imposing. The idea of lying in the grass with one and its family would be terrifying to me. But Attenborough took it in his stride. In fact, the gorillas seemed to like him. Of course they did!

But the footage shows not only his easy charm, but also his great professionalism. He is 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 it around so that she can look 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, 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, while it has its hand on your head, and one of its children is crawling all over you.

Transcript

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. There's a look out sitting on that tree and he's already seen me.

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 around 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 is 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 finger prints just as we have. The gorilla family spends its day gently grazing and there's plenty of time for play. Half-grown, blackback 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.

I could go on, 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 D.A's voice overs, or his pieces to camera. I'll share loads of videos there and watching them would definitely be time well spent.

Some fun facts

Here are some more fun facts about him.



1969 - Monty Python's Flying Circus

I've already mentioned this. We can (partly) thank Attenborough for allowing the Pythons to exist.

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, check out the episodes I've done about the pythons (as they are known) in the past.

Monty Python's Flying Circus was a global phenomenon at the time, and has become a comedy institution since, inspiring generations of comedians around the world.

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. You know tennis, right? Of course you do. What colour are the balls in tennis? Fluorescent yellow. They look nice don't they - and easy to see on TV. That was thanks to David Attenborough.

In the late 1960s, David Attenborough was the Controller of 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.

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. His push for a visible alternative eventually led to the creation and adoption of fluorescent yellow balls.



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. To prove the vibrant capabilities of colour TV to the public, Attenborough specifically searched for a sport that used a wide spectrum of colors.

Realising snooker featured red, yellow, green, brown, blue, 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 & 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.

Apparently the commentator nodded in agreement and understanding, and then while commentating, 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”.

These days snooker remains a hugely popular sport in the UK (especially as a spectator sport).

Is snooker also popular in your country? I know it is big in China.

I could go on.

Some stand-up

As far as I know, David has never done stand-up comedy, although he is funny.

But, I once wrote a routine that involved a David Attenborough impersonation, which I thought you might enjoy. Let me read it out to you now. It’s just a bit of a laugh.

Luke’s old Stand-Up Material

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.

We all love to be watched, 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. I was struggling with the bags, trying to find a seat.

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. Just struggling.

While I was doing this, I noticed that at least three people on the train were just watching me. Just watching me. Just 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 social invisibility cloaks, aren't they? They're social invisibility cloaks. If you're on your phone or you have headphones on, you're not really there.

But it was just weird. It was like they were just watching me struggling, for their own entertainment and interest, like it was some nature documentary or something about a dung beetle or an ant. Perhaps voiced by David Attenborough, possibly.

And here on the 1847 train from Shepherds Bush 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.

Yeah, That is what life is like. We are all living in a David Attenborough nature documentary, to some extent.

I have never actually done that on stage. I could never remember it all.

Climate advocacy

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 eco-system that we live all in and depend on - both for humans and animals.

I'd like to end by reading out a speech that he made at the Cop 26 climate summit in Glasgow November 1, 2021

Take note of not only the message he is communicating, but the way he communicates it.

<https://www.rev.com/transcripts/david-attenborough-cop26-climate-summit-glasgow-speech-transcript>

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.

Happy (belated) Birthday David Attenborough and thank you for everything.

How can you enjoy his work?

If you are in the UK

- October 17: Following a successful run at London's Natural History Museum, the spectacular immersive production, Our Story with David Attenborough, makes its highly anticipated debut at Chester Zoo (not far from Liverpool and Manchester). Narrated by Attenborough himself, this 50-minute, 360-degree cinematic experience charts the four-billion-year history of Earth and is open to the public starting mid-October.
- October 30: This marks the final day of The Beauty of the Earth centenary exhibition hosted by The Royal Society in London (a fellowship of many of the world's most eminent scientists and the oldest scientific academy in continuous existence in the world). The free exhibition 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.

Online

TV series on Netflix (just search for Attenborough)

YouTube clips from his documentaries - I will share as many as I can on the website page.