



Humble Bee Films



Knight of the natural realm



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Legendary broadcaster Sir David Attenborough talks about his recent trip to the Great Barrier Reef and reflects on some of his most memorable marine encounters.

At the grand age of 88, the godfather of the natural world, Sir David Attenborough, is showing no signs of slowing down. Busier than ever, the living icon has spent the last year working on a slew of projects, including the BBC's landmark series, *Life Story*. He will soon be seen hosting a new series called *Natural Curiosities* for UKTV and has recently fronted *Conquests of the Skies* for Sky, documenting the triumphs and challenges of winged creatures around the globe. With such a hectic workload, though, perhaps it's time he took a bit of a break?

"Nonsense," he scoffs, dapper in a blue suit jacket, with his white hair swept to one side. "I'm moving much slower than I used to, I'm definitely feeling my age, but I'm still upright so one can't complain too much about that."

Retirement, it seems, is a dirty word to the great naturalist, who has spent most of his life travelling the globe educating the world about the wonders of nature.

RETURN TO THE REEF

Among his many projects over the last year, the respected documentary maker returned to the Great Barrier Reef to film a three-part series based around the coast of Australia. Using satellite scanning and macro lenses, the series promises to bring us an up-close and personal view of the reef's most elusive creatures. Having last filmed there in 1957, Sir David was delighted to return.

"I've seen lots of things that I never thought I would be seeing," he said, "but, if I'm honest, one

By Liz Parry



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of the big revelations for me in my career was diving the Great Barrier Reef for the first time. It is an awe-inspiring place, and every time I've gone back, it has offered something bigger and better than the previous occasion.

"Apart from its fantastic appearance, the Great Barrier Reef is able to move in three dimensions, which is unlike any other similar species. The sheer variety, the sheer beauty and abundance of the reef, was a massive personal revelation. It's a wonder that simply cannot be missed. But it's incredibly fragile. If I could, I would isolate it completely and lock it within Mother Nature's grasp."

During a career spanning seven decades, Sir David has travelled to some of the most remote regions in the world and witnessed all the wonders of nature at first hand.

"I can't remember when I wasn't interested in the natural world," he says. "It's a great source of joy and delight and great importance. I would do what I do if it was possible, whether people paid me for it or not. I have a great time. You see in the Sunday papers all these advertisements saying 'Go to the Galapagos', 'Go to Timbuktu' or wherever, and I get to do that. And people pay

me to do that and go there – why would I ever want to give it up?"

EARLY STARTER

Even as a child, Sir David had a love of the natural world, and he built up a collection of fossils, stones and other natural specimens. He went on to study geology and zoology at Cambridge University, gaining a degree in Natural Sciences. He joined the BBC in 1952 as a producer and produced and presented a series called *The Pattern of Animals*, the first of many natural history programmes.

In 1965 he became controller of BBC Two, but continued to make documentaries, including one in which he joined the first Western expedition to a remote highland valley in New Guinea to seek out a lost tribe.

After being promoted to director of programmes, Sir David realised his career was taking him away from the programme-making he loved and so, in 1972, he resigned from the BBC to become a freelance broadcaster. His landmark series, *Life on Earth*, set the tone for wildlife documentaries to come and covered all aspects of the natural world from *The Life of Birds* to *The Life of Mammals*. *Wildlife on One*, narrated by Sir David, became a British institution and was the BBC's flagship natural history programme for nearly 30 years.

In 2001 Sir David filmed *The Blue Planet*, his comprehensive series on marine life, which won multiple Emmy and BAFTA TV awards for its music and cinematography. As narrator of the series, Sir David was not involved with the diving, leaving this part to the film crew.

"I can dive in tanks and so on," he says. "And when you dive alongside really good divers you realise how inadequate you are. I don't dive much now – I snorkel. I must never stop saying that I am a very fortunate member of a large team, and when it came to *The Blue Planet* my part was limited to words. I didn't get those extraordinary shots that were done by skilled divers. I wish I had that skill, but I don't."

A PASSION FOR ISSUES

After the millennium, Sir David began to turn his focus towards environmental issues, tackling subjects like global warming in the 2006 film *The Truth about Climate Change* and the population explosion in 2009's *How Many People Can Live on*



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Planet Earth? They are topics that he obviously cares about passionately.

"Since I started making television programmes there are three times as many human beings on earth," says Sir David. "We've tripled in size and everybody like you and me and everybody else wants houses to live in and we want schools for our children and roads to travel upon. And most of these things have to come from the natural world. There's less space for the natural world. It isn't necessarily a disaster, but what we need to do is to recognise what the problem is, and then we can be a bit more sensible about how we invade the natural world and do it more economically, so that we can look after the people who are born onto this planet – but unless we do that, we will simply spoil the entire world."

The population explosion isn't the only thing that worries Sir David. The pollution of the seas is another issue that is at the forefront of his mind.

"It isn't one particular species, it is ecosystems which I despair for; the whole community of animals and plants," he says. "The crucial one I despair of at the moment – because it's a disaster that's staring us in the face – is the marine environment. There is no place in the ocean, even the most remote part of the Pacific Ocean, as far away as you can get, where you won't find plastic floating on the surface of the sea. The tragedy is

that it's our fault. Plastic is long-living and we can't get rid of it, yet we are polluting the world with it. It's dreadful."

ANOTHER DIMENSION

Sir David's documentaries are well known for their pioneering use of filming techniques and his recent 3D series with Sky is no exception. In *Galapagos 3D*, 3D cameras were used for the underwater filming, showing the marine world in clearer detail than ever before. The series also featured the first known footage of the Galapagos pink land iguana, a species of lizard which was identified in 2009.

"The Galapagos Islands are so fantastic in that they showcase their own unique ecological base," says Sir David. "I recently filmed a piece there on the marine iguana which, having been swept by the seas across from mainland South America and lived to tell the tale, adapted its very being in order to be able to survive on seaweed (the only plentiful vegetation), swim, and even dive to the floor of the ocean. Its physical structure has evolved to enable it to do this, and it's this utter uniqueness that fascinates anyone passionate about wildlife and nature. And the iguanas are one of many incredible 'one-offs' on the Galapagos Islands, both in terms of animals and plants."

The latest developments in underwater filming have enabled Sir David and his film crews to get closer to marine life than ever before. He describes his film-making colleagues as "extremely skilled, brave, intrepid underwater cameramen, who have produced amazing shots and taken us to the bottom of the ocean." He also praises the

deep-sea rovers: "The things that can take the cameras down to depths that human beings can't survive in. We now have pictures of the under-sea world but, of course, the sea covers two-thirds of the planet, and that is the least explored part of our planet."

ELLUSIVE GIANT


Over the past few decades Sir David has certainly witnessed some incredible sights, from the majestic migration of wildebeest in the Serengeti to a very close encounter with a mountain gorilla in Rwanda. But there is one creature that still eludes him – the mysterious giant squid.

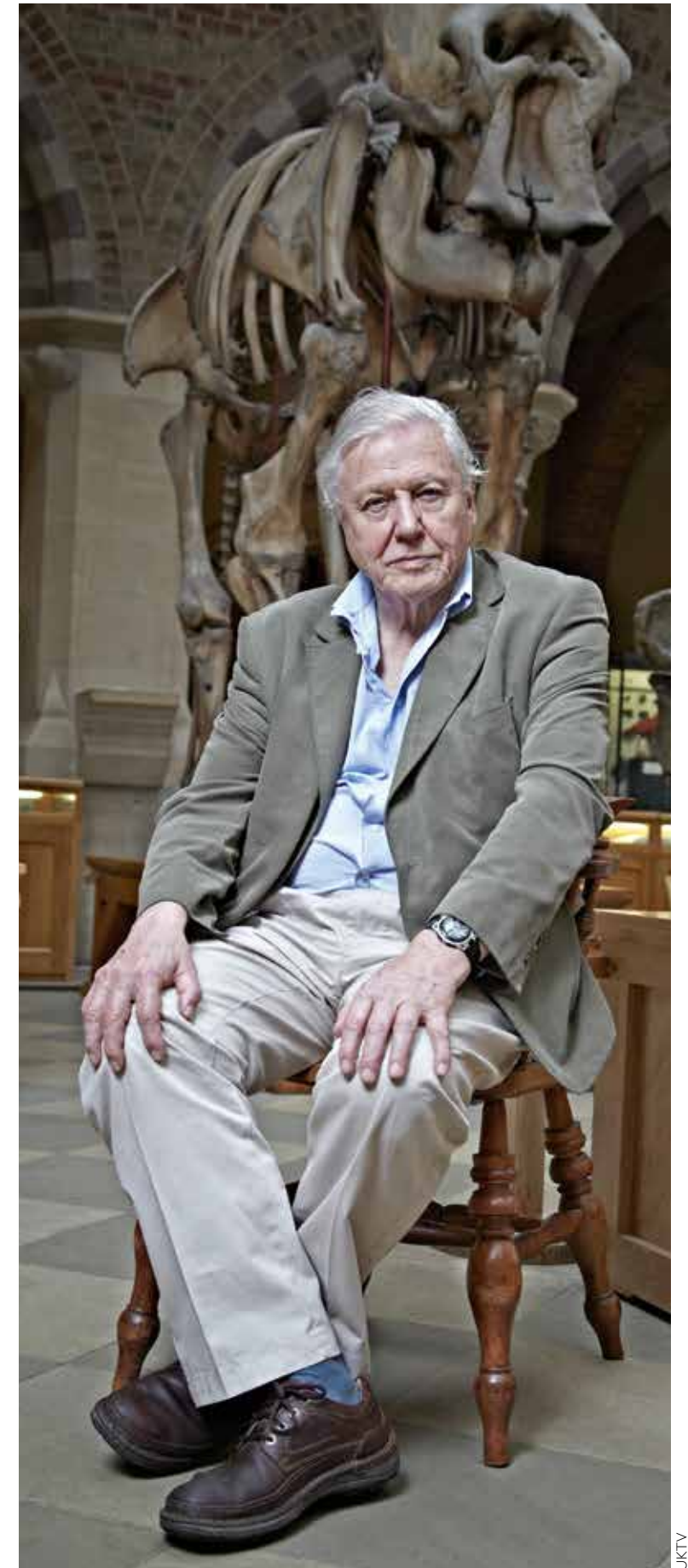
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"One of my vaulting ambitions is the story of the giant squid, battling against sperm whales at a depth of three miles in the Pacific Ocean," he says. "That, to me, is the holy grail. The Japanese have just filmed a giant squid. It's about 50ft long with these giant tentacles; it's an enormous beast."

"The problem with filming it is that because it lives in the very depths, nothing lives there. You can't push human beings alongside him, so you see this looming shape, but you have no idea how big it is. It's this excitement, but also this faint disappointment, because you can't really appreciate the size of it until it's washed up dead on the shore."

As he approaches his 10th decade, Sir David can look back on a rich and fulfilling career in which he has brought the wonders of the natural world right into our living rooms.

"I'm certainly proud of the work I've done over the years," he says, "but I'm lucky that I've loved what I've been able to do. I've been granted a tremendous opportunity, afforded relatively good health, and even stepped into the realms of longevity, when you look at my age. I'm simply a lucky person." 



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