

Sir David Attenborough

David Attenborough is a wildlife film-maker and naturalist (a scientist who studies animals and their behaviour). He has been making television programmes for over 60 years and is considered by many to be a national treasure.



Early Life

David Frederick Attenborough was born in London on 8th May 1926. Growing up, he lived with his parents (Mary and Frederick) and his two brothers (Richard and John) on the campus of University College, Leicester, as his father was a principal there. In 1939, the Attenborough family fostered two German-Jewish girls called Irene and Helga, who became like sisters to David.

As a child, David loved science and nature: he collected fossils, rocks, and other specimens, such as bird eggs. After finishing school, he went to Cambridge University to study natural sciences. Once he graduated, he was called to do two years' service in the Royal Navy. He spent those two years in North Wales.

Television

In 1952, David joined the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) full time as a producer. In 1954, he began working on a series called 'Zoo Quest'. This was filmed in many interesting places and showed animals in their natural environment. Something that hadn't been done much before. The show was incredibly popular.

David left the BBC in 1972 so he could write and produce his own shows. In 1979 he started a series called 'Life on Earth' which became popular. He continued to add to his 'Life Collection' for over 30 years, with each series focusing on a different plant or animal group. In 2008, he finally completed the collection with 'Life in Cold Blood' – a series about reptiles.

Throughout the years, he has also worked on many other television shows, such as 'Wildlife on One', which ran for over 25 years.

More recently, Attenborough's 'Planet Earth' has become the biggest wildlife documentary ever made and was the first show to air in high definition on the BBC.

David created a new style of wildlife programme - one which focused heavily on the animals, rather than the presenter. He would spend very little time on screen in shows and instead would narrate over the footage. As the footage was so important, he strived to get never before seen shots of creatures in the wild and his team created ground-breaking methods to do this.

His Achievements

Attenborough has earned many awards throughout his career. Not only has he received a knighthood from the Queen, but he has also had several species of plants, insects and birds named after him.

Sir David Attenborough has made significant contributions to our understanding of nature and the need to care for it. He is a leading figure in the fight against plastic pollution and other environmental issues that are damaging our planet.

Did You Know...?

- When David joined the BBC, he had only seen one television programme.
- He was born the same year as Queen Elizabeth II.
- He is one of the most well-travelled people on the planet. For one of his documentaries, he travelled a whopping 256,000 miles – that's the same as travelling around the world ten times!



Questions:

1. When was David Attenborough born?
2. Which is closest in meaning to specimens?

Item of interest
careful

spectacles

precious

3. Where did David serve in the Royal Navy?
 4. Explain in your own words how David's style of wildlife programme was different to programmes at the time.
 5. Why did David leave the BBC in 1972?
 6. What do you think the phrase 'national treasure' meant and do you think David Attenborough is a national treasure?
 7. Why do you think David is fighting against plastic pollution?
Explain your answer.
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