

Natural History with Sir David Attenborough
29 March 2018, Princess Anne Theatre, BAFTA 195 Piccadilly, London

Krish Majumdar: Good evening and welcome to the Academy. My name's Krish Majumdar, I'm the chairman of BAFTA's Television Committee and I'm on the Board of Trustees. Welcome to this special event with Sir David Attenborough. We're all really, really excited that Sir David is coming here to talk tonight. He's a multi-BAFTA-winning programme maker, presenter, writer, and he also received the BAFTA Fellowship, which is the highest award that BAFTA can give, in 1980. He's been working—he's got an illustrious career in broadcasting for over six decades, and on stage tonight David will discuss his love for the craft of programme making, his thoughts on the audience for natural history and how the genre continues to innovate, and also the power of television to harness our sense of responsibility for the environment. Thanks to the very brilliant Sandi Toksvig for hosting the interview tonight, and also thanks to the BAFTA staff, Cassandra Neal, Julia Carruthers and Kam Kandola-Flynn. *Blue Planet II* has just been nominated for five BAFTA Television Craft Awards, so big clap for that.

[Applause]

I've been involved with BAFTA for twelve years, and it's nights like this that make me really proud and feel very privileged to be involved. BAFTA for me is about two things, it's about excellence and inspiration, and Sir David Attenborough absolutely embodies those two things. Before we kick off with me introducing Sandi, I just wanted to say a couple of other things about BAFTA. BAFTA, as you may know, is an Academy, we're not just an awards giving body. We do events like this throughout the year; we do about 250 events in London, Scotland, all over—all over the world, actually. And many of them are filmed like tonight, and if you go onto our site bafta.org and also our sister site BAFTA Guru, there's a real treasure trove of amazing content like this. We've had different masterclasses, just recently we had the brilliant writer Kay Mellor, who gave a masterclass here, and a few months ago we had the BAFTA-winning team behind the comedy *People Just Do Nothing*. So if you

want to be inspired, please go on the website and look at the content, and on Saturday twenty-first of April we have a day of panels here dedicated to the TV Craft nominees. Booking is now open for those and also the Virgin Television British Academy Television Awards, the nominations for those are announced this Wednesday the fourth of April at seven thirty in the morning here, and I think it's going to be streamed on social media to keep you part of the conversation about that. So I hope you have a really great evening and I'd like to welcome to the stage Sandi Toksvig.

[Applause]

Sandi Toksvig: Thank you very much. Well good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I'm going to start by making a confession to you: I am here for the sole purpose of impressing my children. That's it. I've been in show business, I worked out, for thirty-seven years now, and I have kids, they're grown up, they've grown up with all manner of famous people in their lives. Not one of them has ever caused them to so much as blink, until tonight. Normally at the dinner table, you know, they don't pay me much attention, and I happened to remark I'd been asked to interview Sir David Attenborough and honestly stunned silence. Possibly even close to a frisson of respect.

[Laughter]

And I thought this was fascinating, I said, "Is it because he's the man responsible for first televising snooker?" That is what I think about. I grew up in the United States and every summer we would come and stay with my English grandparents in Surrey, and inexplicably we would watch a game played with coloured balls on a black and white television.

[Laughter]

Which on a Saturday we then had to go and pay for at Radio Rentals. It was an astonishing thing and I thought, 'who is the

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genius who thought of that?'. Well it's tonight's guest, and I would have thought that was enough to celebrate any man, but my children weirdly knew nothing about this whatsoever, no. They knew two things: First of all it seems Sir David has made one or two quite popular natural history programmes, and also my son has been invited to a David Attenborough rave.

[Laughter]

Isn't that fantastic? David Attenborough rave, it just sounds like one of those examples of words that don't really go together, like Greek economist.

[Laughter]

Don't worry I'm not here for long. Over the course of a remarkable career spanning over six decades, David has travelled the globe and revolutionised how we see the natural world, and I think he has met most of the animal kingdom who sadly couldn't be with us this evening. I'm sure they send their best wishes. Before we welcome the man of the next hour, indeed the next hour and forty-five minutes, let's take a very quick look at some of his finest moments.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

Please welcome to the stage a true broadcasting giant and not just from my vantage point: Sir David Attenborough.

[Applause]

Right now, David.

David Attenborough: Now

ST: Now you're obviously a broadcasting legend, so I'm not going to sit here and dis you, but...

[Laughter]

Is there any truth to the rumour that you bagged your first job in TV without having really seen any?

DA: Yes.

ST: You're not really qualified.

DA: I'd seen one programme.

ST: What was it?

DA: It was a play by Anouilh transmitted live, I've forgotten what it was called. I hadn't got a television set, my wife-to-be, my girlfriend's parents had and I saw that. I applied for a job in radio and I didn't get an interview, and a fortnight later someone wrote to me from the BBC and said "We've got this new thing called television..."

[Laughter]

"People are being quite rude about it, but we think there could be something in it. Would you like to come to Alexandra Palace and see if you'd be interested?" Really.

ST: So we're talking about 1952.

DA: Yes.

ST: And it was then known as the talks department. It sounds like radio with pictures, really.

DA: Well that's indeed so. But what other name would you give to, it was effectively all non-fiction television and there were about a dozen, no less than that—eight—television producers, who did all non-fiction. This excludes sport and outside broadcasts, but all the rest, I mean religion, politics, quizzes, cooking, knitting, all that sort of stuff. I used to do... it was all live I should say, and I would produce maybe one or two programmes a week and that was quite intense it wasn't always like that. But we did anything, and people would come in to the canteen and say "We've got a problem and the *Radio Times* is just going to press

and we've got absolutely nothing for next Tuesday at seven thirty. Anybody got any ideas?"

[Laughter]

Yeah! No really!

ST: What I love—people probably don't realise we call it the gallery in television, but in Alexandra Palace it was literally, wasn't it? That's where it comes from.

DA: Yes it was at the top

ST: So it's a classic showbiz story in lots of ways, because you were the understudy who became the star in a sort of way. You stepped in front of the camera when the original presenter of *Zoo Quest*, a gentleman called Jack Lester, was taken unwell.

DA: Yes.

ST: And you were producing, is that right?

DA: Yes, it was, the London Zoo set out an expedition to collect animals. We cooked it up with this chap, lovely man called Jack Lester who was an expert on reptiles, and I said, "Look I want to go to Africa." And he said, "Yeah well come on." And we cooked up this idea, and the idea was that we would film Jack collecting things and then when we got back we would show them live in the studio. The first programme, this was 1954, the first programme poor Jack was very ill and so the second programme was going on the next week and it was live and Jack dropped out and the Director of Television said, "Attenborough, you'll have to get on and do it. Staff no fee," I remember he said back then.

ST: Just part of your remit.

DA: Part of my job. And so I did and I did the rest of the series and then the following year we were going to do it again because it was quite a success, but again Jack was going to do it and again he went out and

but this time he became very ill indeed just before the transmission, well halfway through the expedition. And so I took over, and it was too good a racket to let it go. And Jack was very keen on saying, "you carry on," which is what I did for the next ten years, really.

ST: So that first time when the cameras go live and the red light goes on. That very first time, do you remember that? Were you terrified or did you take to it?

DA: Well I'd been doing live programmes as a director, so the atmosphere of the studio, which of course as you know and many of you here will know, I mean it's champagne isn't it? I mean it's really very, very exciting. And particularly when you know it's live. When you drove away from the evening coming down from Alexandra Palace on the North Circular and if there was that eerie glow on the curtains you'd know there were people there with a television set and they will have been watching you, they'll have seen your programme. And you almost wanted to stop and knock on the door and say, "Did you think it was alright? I'm awfully sorry about that last bit."

[laughter]

But it was champagne, itself.

ST: But just think about how the world has changed now, because I mean that programme *Zoo Quest*, there you were going to collect animals for the zoo. It seems unfathomable to us now as a natural history programme, doesn't it?

DA: Oh yes. And zoos don't do that anymore, it was a fag end of a Victorian tradition really, and quite right too. The natural world is under enough problems as it is without people going out to catch more things. But yeah, in those days we didn't have long enough lenses to get close-ups of animals at any distances, so the only way you were going to see a close up of say a Gaboon viper, you know, a cobra about this size—you couldn't film that really properly.

So the thing you'd have to do is film it in the studio. So the excuse was there was a chap from the zoo who understood about catching cobras and Gaboon vipers so on, and he would pick it up and that was on film and then in order to get the details and show this, that and the other, you had it live in the studio. Because it was where you could really get close, could really get cameras close and so on, so that's what we did. I mean if you saw them now you couldn't believe how crude they were, but at that time, you see, nobody had seen an armadillo, nobody had seen a sloth. So everything you did, it didn't matter how badly you did it, they hadn't seen that sort of stuff before.

[Laughter]

And so they'd say, "Did you see the armadillo last night?!"

[Laughter]

ST: I know the thing you kept looking for, and in fact one of the reasons you did *Zoo Quest*, you were looking for a white-necked woodcock.

DA: Yes indeed.

ST: Did you ever find it?

DA: Yes we did. Yes we did. Actually, and we... I remember we actually called it by its proper name, which is *picathartes gymnocephalus*.

ST: Oh I say.

DA: There you are. And I remember, quite unimportant bird, the only qualification it had was that nobody had ever seen it, no European had ever seen it alive. We actually caught quite early on in the expedition, it was three months out there, but we didn't let on in the first programme: "Here we are going out looking for *picathartes gymnocephalus*, you see." And you wouldn't see the damn thing, and at

the end you'd say "so we continued our quest for the *picathartes gymnocephalus*."

[Laughter]

And the cameraman and I, Charlie Lagos who was the film camera, we were in this open MG driving along Oxford Street I remember, which you could do back then, and we were a bit worried about this *picathartes gymnocephalus*. I mean was the Great British public going to become frightfully excited by that? And as we stopped by the lights, the bus driver leant down and he said, "Hello Dave," he said, "are we or are we not going to find the bick ba...."

[Laughter]

ST: It would've been lousy telly if you'd said at the beginning that you'd already got it, wouldn't it? Terrible television. What was it about presenting that made you want to continue?

DA: Oh the racket of going out there, that was the fun. I mean my job was a television producer, and the *Zoo Quest* stuff was the stuff you did half of the year, the other half I produced prime minister's broadcasts, I produced quizzes, all sorts of things, and travel programmes. But you see it was the spring of television, we were just starting, only one network. 405 line pictures, and you just couldn't tear yourself away from it, it was so exciting. People used to just think of programmes and dream them up and say, "Look, what about a programme on heraldry?" and they'd say "Heraldry? Very good idea. First class." We used to do that, that's what we used to do.

ST: I mean that's a wonderful time to be there with lots and lots of first. And I mean presumably, your career has been full of firsts, but the first time you saw, for example, a komodo dragon or the first time you saw a creature that had not been filmed and shown into people's sitting rooms, that must have been a moment of just supreme

excitement to be able to say to people 'come and see what I've got.'

DA: Unbelievable. You see, people hadn't seen anything. The komodo dragon had never been seen on film—that's not quite true, Americans in 1920 actually were actually the first person to actually notice that there was this unknown species so far. They had filmed it, but it hadn't been filmed on television, no one on television had seen it. And that film they took in the twenties, no one had seen that either. So effectively this was the first time and I was able to say quite truthfully and honestly, "Nobody has seen this before, here is the biggest lizard in the world." And everybody said "Yes, astounding." And what a privilege, you know, the thrill of it. Mind you, it was absolutely barmy the way we did it—it took us three months, the cameraman and I just pushed off. I remember the boss, the chap who looked after business affairs talked to us about, for some reason—if you know the BBC you'll be very tickled—in those days, he was an expert in Icelandic sagas.

ST: Oh perfect.

DA: Yes he was, absolutely ideal for the job.

[Laughter]

And I remember he said, "What sort of budget do you want?" and I said, "Well not a lot," because you know we were feeding on rice, and I said, "I don't know, £500 a programme?" and he said, "Yeah, I think that's perfectly reasonable. How many programmes?" and I said, "Well I think about six, probably?" and he said, "Yes, very good idea. Back for Christmas, will you be? Good bye."

[Laughter]

ST: No Health and Safety briefing?

DA: None at all. I couldn't speak a word of Indonesian; I mean it was absolutely barmy.

ST: Did you have to write home and say we're all fine; we're all carrying on?

DA: Yes, if you wanted a reply that was three weeks to get a letter home. There was no radio, there was no telephone, I just said goodbye to my dear wife and I'll see you at Christmas.

ST: Programmes should be made like that now, I think. Absolutely fantastic.

[Laughter]

The wonderful thing is when I watch you and you have moments like a crocodile coming at you or you meet a komodo dragon for the first time, you don't seem to be phased. Did you realise early on that you were not afraid, you were much more enthralled than ever showing any fear?

DA: I am afraid. But the camera's on the animal, and the bit where you've got these binoculars looking straight at the camera and that sort of thing, the animal's not there. That's cut in, you see. So you haven't seen me saying "Oh my god."

[Laughter]

ST: Look at the size of that dragon! Well we've actually got a clip from *Zoo Quest*, shall we have a look?

DA: Very well.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

ST: You can hear how everybody's going "awww." Looks slightly terrifying. Many wonderful shots of you hiding behind bushes.

DA: Well those, fortunately, the audience has got wise to that sort of thing so you don't see that anymore. That's very much a period shot of the fifties, looking straight at the camera and pretending you're looking at a dragon, you know.

ST: I think it's a shame, I think we should do a film of you just behind different bushes around the world.

DA: Well I've got a lot of that.

ST: There was a brief hiatus for you from presenting. In 1965 you were appointed Controller of the newly launched BBC Two. You were responsible for all sorts of experimental commissions, I suppose, *Monty Python*...

DA: Yes.

ST: Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation*, not to mention first regular colour broadcasts in Europe. So I just want to talk about the snooker, just for a brief minute...

[Laughter]

Because I was made to watch this as a child but my grandparents didn't have a colour television. It was because you had some spare colour televisions that you decided to put the snooker on, is that true?

DA: It's true that we hadn't put snooker on television at all because of the problem of seeing it in colour. Equally true is that we had very few colour cameras, believe it or not we were very short of equipment. And with just three cameras and a snooker ball table, you could get hours and hours and hours of television. I remember talking to the commentators for the first one and I said, of course I mean we were doing this because of colour but the number of people with colour televisions is very small. So I said, "Look you'll have to guide people watching it in black and white." And he said "Yes of course, I do understand." So I think it was the very first or the second programme in which he had this rather breathy delivery and he used to say, "Well now he's going to go for the pink, and for those of you who've got black and white sets, the pink is next door to the green."

[Laughter]

ST: I have to tell you, my father who was Danish was baffled by this kind of broadcasting, he just didn't understand it at all. How did you take to being in charge of a channel? I mean presumably, were you able to make programmes at the same time?

DA: No, no, not when I was on Two. But it was a—it was absolutely blissful. You were kind enough to mention some titles which were successful, but the whole point about BBC Two was that it was experimental, and we would not do any programme—what I said at the beginning was, "We will do no programme that are black and white carbon copies of what's on black and white. People will turn on the set and they want to know immediately that it's BBC Two, just from the content, and I don't want any repetition of what's on other networks." So we did just new things all the time. Now people say "oh frightfully brave that was," but it wasn't actually because the number of—BBC Two, people forget, you had to buy a new set in order to see BBC Two. If you had BBC One it was on 405 lines, BBC Two was on 625. And you had to do a great clunking switch. And so BBC Two had a very odd audience but we appealed to it on the grounds that it was different and if it wasn't interesting people didn't turn over.

ST: But it must have been hugely exciting because I mean today a lot of television is decided by committees, but presumably you could have had an idea in the bath and think 'oh, we'll make that.'

DA: Frequently.

[Laughter]

No really, really, absolutely.

ST: And is it true that you did actually get rid of an animal while you were the controller of BBC Two? Did you not get rid of the mascot? There was the kangaroo and her joey called Custard, I think it was. Did you get rid of the kangaroo?

DA: Yes, it was all over the notepaper I remember, an embossed kangaroo. I went, I was given this as the network's notepaper and it looked as though it was programmes for kiddies, you know. And I said "you won't see him anymore. I don't want to do that, we're a grown up network."

ST: I don't know if it's true—were you there for the opening of BBC Two at Alexandra Palace?

DA: No, I only took it over when it was eleven months old, just less than a year old.

ST: Because I think on opening night they got a real kangaroo and the lights all went out and it got stuck in the lift.

[Laughter]

Classic BBC story, I think. Did you continue—you have a passion for natural history, were you able to continue to commission programmes while you were in charge?

DA: Yes, I commissioned a series that was called *The World About Us*, that then became *The Natural World* and one thing and the other. It's still running actually. You wouldn't believe how funny television was in the fifties, you know, there was no one hour or fifty minute documentary of any kind on BBC One or ITV, and so BBC Two, one of the pioneering things it did, it would start a tradition of showing fifty minute programmes. So we made all kind of—I remember one of the things we made in the documentary series it was called *One Pair of Eyes* and it was deliberate that in fact you took someone who had a barmy idea of some sort and allowed him to have a producer and a cameraman and make a programme about what he thought you should do about bullfighting or in support of it or whatever, something odd. And there was no one-hour documentary on BBC One, so it was a thrilling time.

ST: And do you bemoan the loss of that, that slightly more maverick time?

DA: Well yes it was fun but nothing stays the same and it can't remain the same. That was that particular moment in television which had this sort of champagne feel to it.

ST: Well let's have a look at some of the programmes that you went on to make after your role at BBC Two.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

I have to say David, watching that frog giving birth, there's not a woman in the room that's not thinking 'I'm so glad nature didn't give me that form of reproduction.'

[Laughter]

What do you feel like when you see your younger self? Do you think you could possibly have predicted not just the scale of all the work that you've done but the impact that it has had?

DA: No, you have no idea really. And to start with, of course, you didn't because in the fifties it was a minority thing. The number of sets people had was very small. But it grew and it grew and it grew and so you got used to it, I suppose.

ST: In 2011 you broke the record for the most viewed natural history programme with *Frozen Planet*; 2016 you broke it again with *Planet Earth II*. I don't know how you feel about beating your own records; it's like Mo Farah running against himself.

DA: Well of course natural history programmes aren't made in the way we made those. Even *Life on Earth* was a comparatively small unit. I mean *Blue Planet II* there were fifty people, you know, working on it: Directors, several directors and twenty cameramen, editors and so on. And so it's a very big deal now and my responsibility is entirely with the words now on that particular series in that I write the commentary and record the commentary.

But the shaping of the programme, the credit for that, which I regard as great—I think they're marvellously put together—it doesn't belong to me, it belongs to those people who did that. And because my face and voice is associated with it, I get all the credit.

ST: How nice.

DA: Well yes, but uncomfortable really, you know. Everybody thinks I made *Blue Planet II*; I didn't make *Blue Planet II*, James Honeyborne made *Blue Planet II*, the whole group of them.

ST: Sure, but I think you're being modest about your contribution. What do you—what's astonishing is the age bracket: 16-34, I mean much more popular than *X Factor* or any of the reality shows, *Love Island* or those things. What do you put it down to, with that age group?

DA: I put it down to, well because kids, I mean small children are riveted by the natural world. It's something in us: We're a part of it and kids know that. They look at these things and it's alive: How does it breathe? What does it feed on? How does it produce its babies? And once that's in your mind you can't get rid of it. It's such a privilege to make these programmes because I get a lot of letters, but I might get a letter from a seven year old saying I loved this that and the other, but I can equally well the next letter can be from a professor of seventy-five who says "I'm very interested in that particular action. How did you get the shot and what does it mean?" Because for every single one of us at any time in our lives there are things you don't know about the natural world and it's beautiful, it's unpredictable, it tells you things you didn't know, it doesn't try and sell you anything and it doesn't ask for your vote. Now what more do you want from a television programme?

[Laughter]

[Applause]

ST: So of course my children were hugely excited to meet you this evening. What I want to know is have you been invited to a David Attenborough rave?

[Laughter]

DA: I know nothing about it.

ST: You know nothing about it? You're not getting a cut of the profits?

[Laughter]

We've got a picture. Apparently they all have masks of you and the whole place is done up as a jungle theme, apparently, and everybody's you for the evening.

DA: Good luck.

[Laughter]

ST: Let's talk a bit about—you're being very modest about your own contribution, but your narrative style, I wonder whether that has changed, because you must be aware of how it's no longer a niche thing to be interested in natural history, it's very mainstream. And I wonder if it's changed because you get a letter from a seven year old and a seventy five year old professor, and you know you need to address both of them.

DA: Well I think if you've been a producer it helps a lot, and in the fifties we were putting films together we were in the cutting room and you're getting the shots and hanging them up on pegs and putting them together in a certain order to tell a story and your aim was to have no commentary at all, what you wanted to do was the pictures to tell the story because it could. All you had to do was restrict your words to the bits of information that were necessary to understand the pictures. And for a start you don't need adjectives: No need to say it's wonderful and so on, people can see it is. And you don't have to—so you cut down the commentary to a minimum. And when I

look at stuff I did years ago, if I have a criticism—which I do on all files—but almost always I say to myself ‘too many words.’ If you cut down that by another ten per cent you’d have done better. So it’s editing the pictures to tell the story and you just add those little bits of information as necessary. Keep it down to a minimum.

ST: And is there a difficulty in balancing out because as you say you want the pictures to speak for themselves but you’re also educating as well as entertaining. Is there a moment when you think ‘I know so much about this creature but actually I need to tell them less, in a way. I need to let the creature make those decisions.’

DA: Yes, yes, absolutely. I mean if the thing tells enough to make the majority of the audience hang on to see what’s going to happen, don’t interfere with it.

ST: Yeah, well I have to say one of the standout moments for me, for audiences—in fact it was voted Virgin TV’s Must See Moment at the Virgin TV British Academy Television Awards, it was the snakes versus iguana chase. Am I right, people? Unbelievable. I tell you what, let’s revisit this moment, also with a few familiar TV faces.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

ST: Look how we’re all cheering!

DA: Quite right. And the answer of course, you see first of all there was the director, a woman director who had gone to the Galapagos in the earlier series and had spotted this happening at the end of the time. They were doing something else. And she had the wit to say “We’ve got to go back next year because that’s a thing.” And secondly of course, the editor was skilled—those are Hollywood skills, the way you cut away, the way you build the tension, the way you bring it up to a climax, ‘oh it’s going to be killed,’ and so on—and then you add music by a Hollywood

composer, so the end, that’s a powerful thing. The last thing you wanted was commentary. Those words I hope were there because you needed that bit of information.

ST: Yeah, to know what’s going on.

DA: But that’s, you know, a team effort.

ST: But what’s amazing, you see there people on their sofas anthropomorphising like mad saying “he wants his mummy” or “maybe he doesn’t know where his mummy is,” and so on... We’re absolutely all there cheering an iguana. Not something I ever thought...

[Laughter]

Do you know what I mean? You might cheer your football team or something, but you wouldn’t think ‘ooh let’s go and sit on our sofas and cheer an iguana.’ But it doesn’t surprise you that we identify so closely?

DA: No not at all it doesn’t surprise me. I mean it’s only too easy, really, particularly if you edit it in the way we have edited it. I mean...

ST: Well the music is fantastic, I looked it up and the composer is Jacob Shea and Jasha Klebe of Bleeding Fingers and it does make a bit difference.

DA: Absolutely. It’s a confection in a way, in a kind of Hollywood movie tradition.

ST: It’s like a James Bond movie, really.

DA: Yes it is.

ST: With the iguana on our side.

DA: But all the drama’s there, you see, you don’t create it.

ST: Well the social media engagement with this clip, I mean it was absolutely huge, in fact we have a rather handy slide showing

how it took the internet by storm. I mean it just—people just loved it. Look at the emotion on the girl's face.

[Laughter]

I love this because they're observing nature and we're observing them; it's rather marvellous, I really like that. Your programmes have been shown in over thirty international territories, I imagine you can't avoid being aware of the impact your shows have on today's audiences. Is there anywhere you can go that you're not known now?

DA: I suppose they've been shown worldwide so people do it.

ST: So what sort of things when people come up to you, what are the sorts of things that they want to ask you?

DA: Nothing much really. I mean they do occasionally, I remember a taxi driver "Hello, mind if I ask you a question?" and I said "no," and he said, "What's it all about?"

[Laughter]

ST: I hope it was a long journey.

[Laughter]

New technology has been one of the hallmarks of your career, so we talked about broadcasting in colour, then introducing audiences to 3D Television. You've always been a leader and pioneer in technology and television and broadcasting. In fact I have to say you're the only person to have won a BAFTA for shows in black and white, colour, HD, 3D and 4K. So let's take a quick look at how technology has played a role in your programmes.

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

So we talked about in the beginning in *Zoo Quest* you had to get the animals into the studio because you simply couldn't get close enough. So presumably all the changes in technology have changed that now, how you approach the production.

DA: Hugely.

ST: What are the sorts of things you think have made just the most enormous difference?

DA: The huge, the one big change, was from film, which you couldn't see once you'd shot it, to electronics. And I mean just underwater for example, when I started filming underwater we had a hundred foot load camera, it took two minutes forty. It was in a sort of can with a bit of glass on the front and a wire viewfinder which showed you approximately what you were looking at. And if you shot something, once you'd shot two minutes forty seconds of it you had to go up, back to the surface and that tape you had to decompress, take the lid off, take the camera out, put another thing in, shove the other and go down again. And that would take you half an hour, or an hour, depends how deep you were. So it—once you got an electronic camera that could go on filming for twelve hours, it made a huge difference. But more things than that, the fact that you could see it immediately after you'd shot it. When we shot that dragon film, we had to put that on an aircraft and you wouldn't know for three weeks what it was like.

ST: Because in the beginning the BBC had required you to do thirty-five mm film, and you persuaded them to do sixteen because the cameras were lighter. But you couldn't have possibly known when you were putting it in the can whether you'd got the shots or not.

DA: Absolutely not. And indeed in Paraguay I remember we got film back after I think it was about five weeks, and after when we went back into the jungle I came out again we got a telegram, went to the nearest

place with a report and it said 'regret to inform you that all shots on the 400 mm lens have a hotspot.' That means there was a big white spot in the middle of it and it was all unusable. So all the close-ups we had were unusable.

ST: How heart-breaking.

DA: Absolutely heart-breaking, disaster really. But not only that, and those are as it were the obvious advantages of becoming electronic. But the other advantages that now you see with electronic cameras, they're much more sensitive, you can film in the dark, lower light conditions than you could with celluloid. Not only that but you can actually take a small camera the size of an apple, less, and put it on the bough of a tree where you know a bird's going to hover.

ST: And leave it there.

DA: And leave it there. And you can actually watch it with transmitted pictures to your monitor and you can see whether you've got a shot or not.

ST: And how marvellous because you're not disturbing the creatures in any way.

DA: And now you can put it on a drone. All those aerial shots, which you used to have to have aircraft, the drone will take this little camera and you can get all the aerial shots you want. And so it goes on. That change to electronics transformed the whole of natural history filming.

ST: And presumably it had an impact on discovering new species. I'm thinking in particular about going down into the deep, to that part of the planet that fewer people have been to than have been to the moon. That is full of wonder, to me it's like a place where art students have been allowed to go crazy and design fish.

[Laughter]

It's just wonderful. And presumably with this new technology that is when you get those astonishing bioluminescent creatures.

DA: Yes, and that was coupled with a new technology of deep-sea craft. Huge privilege, I remember the first time I sent down into one of these submersibles you had to lie on your stomach and a great palaver about how long you were going to stay under and one thing and another and you had to compress and you had to think about air conditions, how long it was going to take, and you'd look you, you'd squint and look out of a thing the size of a tea plate, you know, and I could only go down for a certain short period before you'd have to come back.

Well now you see for *Blue Planet I* and *II*, we had marvellous submersibles. It's like a huge bubble of Perspex, transparent. You sit there alongside the pilot and you can see all the way around you and you're the same pressure and temperature as you are on land because they have a re-breathing system, so once you get in it's all clamped down and you're rebreathing and recycling and getting the oxygen back and so on. And you're sitting there eating a bar of chocolate and saying, "oh look, that's a shark! Oh wow!" I mean I went down nowhere near as Orla Doherty did, the woman who directed *In the Deep* in *Blue Planet II*. She went down very, very far, I've never been down as far as that, but I've been pretty far. What a privilege. It's just like watching television, as it were.

ST: It's breath taking. We talked a little about fear and you do have fear. I would find that terrifying, because you don't know what's going to come at you through the deep. There are creatures we still don't know down there aren't there?

DA: Oh yes.

ST: Does the wonder overtake you and you leave the fear behind at that moment?

DA: Yeah I mean you're just so amazed. And you know by and large animals aren't aggressive to you unless you interfere with them. I mean, what is there to be gained, from their point of view? In an animal behaviourist sense, why should they attack you if you are just there being passive, and taking it slowly? I mean if they are getting worried nearly always what they do is push off. And that of course is a bad technique on your part because you don't want them to push off.

ST: No you want to keep them all nice and calm.

DA: Yes so you do what you can to be submissive and quiet and just observe so they're not alarmed. And that's all. I've been, one of the worst things was I've been charged by a rhinoceros when I was in a Land Rover and it destroyed the Land Rover around me.

ST: That's quite bad.

[Laughter]

DA: Well.

ST: I mean tricky to ring the AA and say "funny thing..."

DA: That's the worst, and that's only once in fifty years.

ST: What's wonderful is that you always sound so confident when you say "and this is the angler fish and this is their particular way of procreating" and whatever. How many times are there shots where you just think 'I have no idea what I'm looking at and somebody else is going to have to take this home and work this out?'

DA: Almost—this is the unromantic thing to say, almost never. The fact is you should have done your homework. My job is to know what the possibilities are that could happen and you want to know what they are. You shouldn't be caught unawares. And I don't think I ever have in a series. And

not only that, you just don't go out into the natural world, into Africa somewhere and say 'I'm bound to see something interesting.' You know, I'll squirt around. You've got an idea what your programme is and you know this is a moment when you want to see, what, monkeys self-anointing using special leaves. And you traipse around with that monkey troupe, and there's a scientist who told you about it and he comes along and helps and says "yes go after this troupe there doing it and what not." And you traipse around until you get it. And if they do something else you don't say "oh well I'll forget about the self-anointing, I'll do..." because that's not what you're about. You've got a very strong idea what the function and why you're there, that's what you're after and that's what you get. You stay there until you get it.

ST: You talked about it; you paid great tribute to the astonishing production team who have won BAFTAs. I mean you have won BAFTAs personally but they have won BAFTAs as well. Are there any shots that come to mind that you think that was particularly challenging for me and the team? Are there any shots where you think oh my goodness I can't quite believe we got that?

DA: Oh yes, I mean lots because cameramen, you've worked with them, they are extraordinary people. And when we were working on film you were maybe going to try to get some particular shot of, I don't know, a snake doing something odd, and it would be over in a trice and you don't know whether he'd been changing the film or whether it was in focus or whether it... And you'd say to the cameraman "Did you get it?" and he either says yes or no and I've never known them to be wrong. Not one cameraman has said he'd got it when he didn't. Not one.

ST: They absolutely know. What I think is there must be so many bits that ended up on the cutting room floor that didn't make it to the programme. I just wonder whether

those are ever going to be picked up and used for something else?

DA: Yes, well what they are is actually not quite as good as the shots that you put in, because if it is a snake or monkey self-anointing, and you may shoot it three or four times until you're quite sure you've got it right, so what you're left on the cutting room floor is maybe ninety per cent of what you shot, but it's not as good as the ten per cent that you've shown, so you might as well chuck it away. There are occasionally sequences that you actually get a very good sequence but in the overall package of the film there's no place for it, the film would be too long. And those you do put on the shelf and those you can bring out and put later only for the press to say 'oh they didn't shoot all that on that. Oh they shot that last year.'

ST: Does that annoy you, when you get those kind of critiques?

DA: I think sometimes people criticise the thing because we get enough praise, we do get a lot of praise and if they say something and particularly if you think it's not deserved it shouldn't worry you.

ST: And do you keep a note of everything? Have you kept a diary of all the things?

DA: I kept journals, yes, on all the trips.

ST: Presumably because you see so many things it would be impossible to remember everything.

DA: Yes, absolutely so, and particularly if you're going to write about it. And of course the thing is, well I expect you keep diaries but I only do it on trips. But the trouble is you have all these programmes and you have interview programmes where you're explaining exactly how it was with the gorillas and after ten or fifteen years of having been absolutely honest about how it happened, you happen to read what actually happened and it wasn't like that at all.

[Laughter]

ST: Selective memory. Now I've got a quick question for the audience. What do Tupac, Elvis Presley, Kate Moss and Sir David Attenborough have in common? Anybody know? The answer is holograms. You now have your very own hologram at the Natural History Museum, is that right?

DA: Yes, that's correct.

ST: Shall we have a quick exclusive look at it?

[Clip plays]

[Applause]

That is astonishing. What did you think about it when they came to you and suggested what we want you to do is to be a hologram? How did you feel about that?

DA: I think, you know, it's fun doing all these new things. I don't know whether it will catch on or not, I don't know how popular it's going to be, but it's fun to do and see how to do it. And this is a system, it is high definition of course, it's three dimensions of course and not only that but it allows you to interact with...

ST: You can pick things up as it were.

DA: You as viewer can pick things up, look at the object, turn it round, see what the skull looks like, or you can actually enlarge it to a huge size or shrink it in size. We look at a whale, for example, and you can see how its jaws open and how it filters exactly as it were within the mouth.

In order to get the hologram which you saw of me, I had to go to Seattle in the United States with the head of Microsoft and there they have studio in which everything is green because you use an optical device that filters out the green when you watch. And there are 309 cameras looking at you, all round, and they take—you have to

speaking your spiel and they use these 300-odd shots to compile statistically an electronic formula that produces you and you can make it do anything. So it looks as though I was in the Natural History Museum but I'm not, it's just a hologram that's in the museum.

ST: Think of that, you have sometimes one camera with sixteen mm film and now you've got more than 300. It seems astonishing, doesn't it?

DA: Yes that's right. I mean it'll be interesting to see where that goes. But that's what we said in 1952: It'll be interesting to see where this goes.

ST: I mean I have to say I've been to the Natural History Museum many times, I didn't even know there was this cryptogamic herbarium with 780,000 specimens of mosses. What I love is you don't know what child you're going to wake up to deciding that that is the thing they want to study. I think that's absolutely fantastic. What do you think this is going to contribute to an audience's experience of natural history?

DA: I think it'll produce a one to one relationship. I mean the trouble is when you go into the Natural History Museum, there it is; there's that fossil or that stuffed bird or whatever it is, and that's it. And you can't get closer because there's glass, and you can't see what the underside of it is like and so on. And this enables you to take this object and manipulate it, to look and it upside down, see the underside of a trilobite that hasn't lived for what 450 million years? And then you put it down on the table and it walks away. And so it means that you can have a one to one relationship with really important objects. And of course there are objects that are unique in the world in New York or in New Zealand or in London, and it means if this spreads that you'll be able to take and look at these objects in that sort of way and examine in that one to one way and get a feeling about it, which I'm sure will captivate children but should captivate everybody, it's fascinating.

ST: Well I wonder as well if it'll change the way in which specialists work because they know somebody is going to be able to do that and turn it round. Maybe they would look at it differently themselves.

DA: Yes, I think they do. I mean one of the things we look at in this group which we've just done in the Natural History Museum is the jaw of a pterosaur, the flying reptile that flew above the dinosaurs. And it's the only one in the world and it's the kind of thing no one's ever seen before and I'm sure that there are specialists in pterosaur biology on the other side of the world who will be thrilled to be able to look at this thing and think 'oh I always wondered just how that tooth, how that fitted into the upper jaw.' And you can make it do that and you can see it, you see. So I mean let's not exaggerate, scientists are very clever people and they don't actually need all those kind of visual aids, but a lot of lesser people do like me. So the thought I could be looking at an object that's in a New Zealand museum that I was interested in, it's lovely.

ST: I'm slightly worried now that people can do it to you, now that you're a hologram. Can they move your mouth and...

DA: I've got someone with a hand up my back, yes.

[Laughter]

ST: How did it feel to see yourself in that way? Was it strange?

DA: Er, well I mean I suppose you ought to say modestly "yes it's extraordinary. So worrying and upsetting, as well." But the fact of the matter is if you work in our game you actually see yourself all the time.

ST: Yes I've seen myself from hideous angles, I'd say.

DA: Hideous or whatever, there's not much you don't know about your face, the way

you are. If you're working on making programmes you've got these shots in which you do things and you run them backwards and forwards and so you know this character in there perfectly well. He doesn't really have much connection with what you are, but you know him perfectly well.

ST: What I love is that you're so up to date and you love all the technology but you don't do email, don't drive, your mobile phone is the oldest one I think I've ever seen. It is astonishing. Why is there that division in your private life that there isn't the new technology? It doesn't seem to particularly appeal to you.

DA: Idleness and stupidity I dare say, some might say. But actually there's quite enough for me to cope with as it is. I mean I get a lot of, thirty, forty letters a day, five or six days a week. That's quite enough to deal with. I know I've got lots of friends and I bet you—how many emails do you get a day?

ST: Oh it's hideous. And it's the ones from Lakeland that annoy me.

[Laughter]

I don't know how I've ended up on their list, I don't know how that's happened.

DA: Exactly so. My view is, if they want to say something to me, write me a letter. And immediately that's going to cost twenty p. That cuts them down

[Laughter]

ST: I love a proper letter though. Do you have a letter opener? I've got a letter opener I think it's a very nice thing.

DA: Yes I do.

ST: Quite right. Let's just talk a little bit about the negative impact that our actions are having on our planet. It is one of the things that I think the younger generation are absolutely awake to, and I think the finale of

Blue Planet II was very important, it saw you address this negative impact. Let's just have a quick look.

[Clip plays]

I mean it makes me just want to sob. And I can't bear it. You have loved the planet; you have loved it for all the time that you have been showing us its glories. How does it make you feel to see those things?

DA: Oh dreadful. I mean it makes you weep, really literally. One I remember seeing in actuality—those shots, I wasn't there for any of those shots by the cameraman—but I was there on South Georgia in the Antarctic when there was an albatross chick, which takes a long time to grow because they're so big, and the parents go off for up to three weeks at a time scouring the ocean in order to find food. And the chick waits there patiently for two or three weeks just in the blizzard. And the female came in and her crop was full and she opened her beak and the little chick begged and out from her mouth came a torrent of food and every single part of it was plastic. And when you see that, how profoundly can you be moved by that? And when you think of the implication of all over the world that sort of thing is going on. So you have an obligation to do something about it. The least you can do is to say what happens.

ST: And do you feel, I mean you have the most enormous reach, do you feel you have a responsibility then, to try?

DA: Well yes you do. I mean in a way it's a complex thing, isn't it? Because you've got a huge privilege and do you exploit this privilege, I mean you can't exploit it politically, you can't put political views on, but when does politics end and when does morality begin, you know? So I think you have to be very careful about what you say and how you say it, but there are overwhelming truths that cannot be avoided that you have to say and that was one of them in *Blue Planet*.

I must say that I think all the team, all of us, we felt powerfully about those things but we were astonished the effect it had. And it isn't as though we've never mentioned it before, we have, but there was something about the timing of that particular programme, not only as it were in the schedules—it certainly got a bigger audience—but the timing in the nation's awareness of the world. I mean we are devastated by all sorts of problems in the world at the moment which we needn't enumerate because the world's in a rough state. So people look to natural history programmes in a way for some sort of consolation, that at least that is something that's true that's happen and often is beautiful and so on, but when that too is infected it makes you aware of what you've done and are doing very directly. We can't do much about global warming or climate change directly, but we can stop using plastic. And kids feel this very strongly and kids say to their parents "we mustn't use that. Look what it does to the albatross." And so all you have to do is to be honest about it. There it is and it rang the bell at that particular moment. Why it hadn't hit the bell before I don't know, but certainly it did do this time. And we were gratified that actually people see that it is an important truth that has come to them through their television set and it is something they can do something about and something they can ask politicians on their behalf to do something about. And that's the sort of communication that broadcasters ought to have, I think, with their public.

ST: Well I have to say, the only bit that heartens me is the young people. It's my kids' generation who are now saying, "you don't have to have that mum," and "don't have that," making you have another look, and it is because of programmes like yours. Just yesterday McDonald's announced that they're going to stop using plastic straws and are going to have paper or cardboard ones, which I think is absolutely fantastic. So as well as feeling depressed, maybe one could also think well what's good is we've woken up. I mean do you think we have?

DA: Yes, but if we have it's only the beginning. We've got a long way to go, we've made a real mess of the world. We really, really have. I mean animals—I've been doing this, as you know, for fifty, sixty years, and the animals I saw in the sort of numbers I saw sixty years ago have gone, and we've got to do something about it.

ST: Well I think is there not a floating area of plastic in the oceans now that's the size of France? It is a terrifying thought. So do you think about those things when you're writing your commentary, do you think 'how can I say this without sounding political or preachy?' but still trying to get the message across?

DA: Yes, and again one speaks to the team. I didn't edit those pictures in the film, the production team did. I supplied the words, but we all feel the same. And speaking to the Natural History Unit down in Bristol, the greatest unit of its kind, you know, in the world, and a huge privilege to be working with them. Something this country can be very proud of, and that unit's message from this has gone round the world.

ST: So when you sit down to write your commentary, do you agonize over every word or does it sometimes flow straight out of you?

DA: Never, ever flowed, ever. I don't know how it is with you, but with me I sit with a script in front of me and a television set and we go through it again and again and again and you've got to hit the right picture with the right word again and again. It's a kind of carpentry, it's a kind of joinery and it isn't inspiration in that sort of sense, it's hard work. And it mustn't sound like hard work, it's got to sound as though it's absolutely natural.

ST: As if you're just chatting and this is what it's always sounded like.

DA: Yes.

ST: I'm going to ask you to dust off your channel controller hat just for a second and imagine that you are going to commission a programme with the goal of empowering meaningful environmental action. What kind of programme would it be, do you think?

DA: Erm, well you'd have to show what the consequences are. And you can't—it's irresponsible just going on showing the consequences without, and if what you are asking me to do is not just a three minute segment, which is what was there—but an hour's programme. Well you can't go on just 'woah, woah, woah,' you've got to say what can be done.

ST: Yeah. There has to be an action plan, doesn't there?

DA: That's right. And again I have to be grateful that politicians are taking notice of it, and I needn't name names but in this government whatever its colour was politically, whatever is in power you've got to take—this is serious, this is serious.

ST: When you look at all the clips that we've been showing, it's an astonishing range of material, the scale of it is stupendous. You have dedicated your life to natural history, introduced us to the most amazing locations and animals... When you look back, do you have any regrets? Do you have any things you think 'oh I wish I'd done that differently?' or 'I wish I hadn't done that particular thing?'

DA: Oh you can always think—if you look at a programme of the past I bet you're the same, you can think 'oh I don't do that very well' and 'oh I muffed that, what on earth allowed me to put that through?' but by-and-large in general terms I am very grateful for the opportunities that have come my way. I can't believe I'm that lucky, I really can't. Who wouldn't give their right arm to do that sort of thing, you know? There are thousands of people who could do it as well as you. That's immodest, tens of thousands, and you just happened to be

there at the right time, and you should be grateful. And I certainly am.

ST: I am confident you have a million other things you still want to do. What is next for you?

DA: Well I'm off going to Africa in over three weeks time.

ST: Of course you are.

[Laughter]

DA: Yeah, which is a new series. And again it's the Natural History Unit, it's their idea not mine and it's a brilliant idea. I don't know whether I'm really supposed to talk about it, but I mean...

ST: We won't tell anybody.

DA: We're all professionals in this room. And what we're going to do—what they've already done is they've gone to a group of animals, a little community of animals, nearly always a family—cave hunting dogs, lions, chimpanzees, and we say we are going to follow this pack for three years and we don't know what's going to happen. Whatever does happen, we will be there and we will show it you and we will tell you the truth. Now I won't go into details as to what does happen, but I can tell you there's some fairly dark moments in it as you might imagine. And we won't tidy it up and we won't conceal it. We'll say what actually happened. And that's a new concept, and that's to the credit of the Natural History Unit, and I'm privileged to be asked to write some of the commentary.

ST: Magnificent. Now you got rid of the kangaroo as the mascot for BBC Two. If you had to choose a mascot for yourself, is there a creature that you say 'that's the one. That's the one that I like the best?'

[Laughter]

DA: I can think of some fairly salacious... I don't know. Human beings are a very odd

thing. I don't want to be a fish. I don't even want to be a monkey. I am fascinated the opportunities a homosapiens individual has are extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary. And we have that in our hands, and that I've been allowed to do what I've done is just the most extraordinary privilege. So I don't particularly want to be a hummingbird or a sloth—well a sloth, that's not bad...

[Laughter]

Various other polygamous animals I can think of—well never mind...

[Laughter]

ST: I think you should just be yourself, I think that's absolutely fine. I'm just going to go to the audience now and see if anyone would like to ask a question. We have somebody down here. If you are a member of the press please could you identify yourself so we're clear who you are. What's your name?

Q: Julian.

ST: And you're not a member of the press.

Q: No.

ST: Too well dressed.

[Laughter]

Q: Given you're one of the most well travelled people on the planet and you've been doing this such a long time, I was curious in the context of the environment: When did you first start to notice yourself the impact that humans were having on the places you were going to?

DA: When did I start to notice what?

ST: When did you notice in the places you were going to the impact that humans were having on the planet? I mean is it a relatively recent thing or was it quite some time ago?

DA: Well you have to be very careful, because if someone says to you in a challenging way, and it's a perfectly reasonable question, "When did you decide that the climate was changing? When do you decide that you see things are warming up?" I could tell you and I can tell you: I saw it on South Georgia and I paid my second visit to South Georgia after about fifteen years or something, and where I had stood before I was at the front of a glacier and now the glacier at front was way up in the valley, so it had retreated in a huge way: Warming. Absolutely true, absolutely correct. But if you then say—someone else might get up from the back and say "Well it's funny you should say that because I was in the Antarctic and I can take you to a place where in that period of time actually it's got colder." And it's true, so if you pick individual answers to these things as examples and conclude what the situation is just from those examples, you're in trouble. So the fact that global warming is taking place is a consequence of scientific readings over long periods of time over all parts of the globe. That's when you have the right to say this globe is warming. Individual—I can go on I mean that particular glacier was one and there are others that have changed, but to be responsible you have to take a proper, scientific, objective view.

ST: Thank you, just here.

Audience member: Sandi, can we just, this little girl would love to ask a question.

ST: I'm so sorry. Hello my lovely, can you stand up so we can see you? What is your name?

Q: My name is Goldie.

ST: How old are you?

Q: Eight.

ST: Excellent work. What is your question?

Natural History with Sir David Attenborough

Q: I wanted to ask: What is the most exciting animal you've seen?

DA: The most exciting animal I've seen? I suppose one of the most exciting animals I've seen is a small ruby throat hummingbird. And hummingbirds are only about that big and they beat their wings so fast you can't see them. They even make a humming noise like that. And it can hover in the air absolutely motionless while it drinks nectar from the depths of a flower. And that hummingbird up in northern North America has come all the way from South America during the spring. So it's gone all the way up to North America to make its nest and lay its egg and gone back again to South America. And one of the exciting things about it is people on the west coast in California and so on love these little hummingbirds and put out food for them, so that now in fact this hummingbird and relatives of it can go farther than they ever did because people are putting out food for it. Isn't that nice? I think it's lovely, apart from the fact that the hummingbird is the most beautiful little creature with all its iridescent feathers and it can do this remarkable thing of hanging in the air. It's fabulous

Q: I also wanted to ask if you remembered Attenborough class sending a letter to you?

[Laughter]

ST: Say yes. Repeat the question, darling, which class?

Q: Attenborough class in Chestnuts Primary School.

ST: Can you remember that Attenborough class in Chestnuts Primary School... Say yes. Can you remember that Attenborough class in a primary school sent a letter to you, of course you can.

DA: I can, actually.

[Laughter]

ST: Thank you, Goldie. Wonderful, very, very good.

[Applause]

Down here, just here. Thanking you. Hi what's your name?

Q: Katie Hall. Hi, mine's kind of continuing from the first question. I've just done my dissertation on ocean plastics and I noticed that micro plastics, for example, were first found forty years ago around the same time CFCs were, and I was wondering what you thought was the main reason it's now becoming a movement and why it took forty years to become one?

ST: So she's just done her dissertation on micro plastics in the oceans and she says they were discovered, people knew about it forty years ago, why has it taken so long for people to wake up to what's going on?

DA: Well it's quite hard to spread that sort of message, isn't it, actually? Supposing you put out something that says you can't see them, they're tiny, and they are spreading in the ocean and they're the result of some of the plastics we've been doing. Human beings—who's going to take notice of that? We've been going on about it, telling people about it for a long time but it's taken a long time for the penny to drop.

The really tragic thing is I remember when I was perhaps your age and in a science lesson we had in the 1930s, and the science master came in and said "Boys," because it was a boys' school, "Boys, I have to tell you, you're living at an historic moment. You have been living in the time of steam and so on, but the age of steam has passed. What is now coming is the age of plastic and we will replace all sorts of things with plastic, and we've been so clever as chemists inventing this plastic. We've invented stuff that is unbreakable, you can't destroy it. It's wonderful, it won't wear out, how extraordinary that is." And do you know not one of us in the class, nor indeed the chemistry master, or indeed the politicians

or industrialists at the time, apparently said, "if we can't destroy it, what's going to happen to it when we don't want it?" Nobody said that. Extraordinary isn't it? It's a fairly simple question. That's what human beings are, you know, not all that bright.

[Laughter]

Q: Can I just say, finally, I want to say thank you as well because I became a documentary—well I'm trying to become a documentary filmmaker, specifically wildlife, because of you.

ST: She wants to thank you that her career that she's pursuing is entirely down to you.

[Laughter]

[Applause]

Right, up and the back, up at the back. Oh yes, I will come to you my darling next over there, waving at me. Hi what's your name?

Q: Hi, my name's Nick McCarthy.

ST: Nick.

Q: It's a bit of a tricky question but I just wanted to ask, have you thought about all of things you've done in your career, what is it you hope your legacy might be?

ST: So he's asking what you think your legacy might be? I expect you haven't done it yet, plenty of time.

DA: The legacy is the library of the Natural History Unit, as I've explained where it all came from and how many people have contributed to it. That will be the legacy I'll be most proud to be associated with, and let us hope that it's not as valuable as it might be. It might be the case that quite a lot of the things that exist in those electronic pictures will no longer exist in fifty years time. I hope that will not be the case, but it could well be that people will go back to these films in fifty to 100 years time and say, "Gosh, look at that creature. What a pity it is that it

doesn't exist anymore." So that footage will be fairly precious, where you could suddenly see a titanotherium or some other dinosaur that's not on earth, you could be able to see how it actually was. And that's a nice legacy to feel you had a hand in creating.

ST: Right up at the back, hi.

Q: Hello.

ST: Hello, what's your name?

Q: My name is Variety, the stand up comedian. And I wanted to cheer up the atmosphere a little bit because it's getting a little bit too sad, man.

ST: Oh! OK.

Q: And my first question is how are you two doing down there, because I am way up here. You guys look like ants. But my main question is on behalf of the dozen comedians I know: Sir Dave, do you get any royalties if any comedians do impersonations of you or any impressions?

ST: The lady is a stand up comedian and she wants to know if you get any royalties if people do impressions of you?

DA: How can I fix it? Have you got a pal who can make that arrangement for me?

[Laughter]

Q: I might owe you some change. I might have to call equity or something, because me and my friends have been doing a lot of impressions and stuff and we got paid for it, so want to give you some of the money.

ST: She's offering you a cut, I think.

DA: How exciting, thank you very much, I'll give you my address later.

Q: Thank you, yes. That's what I want. Deal.

ST: I've got time—have I got time for one more question, I think? Here.

Q: Hi.

ST: What's your name?

Q: Faye White, I am a member of the press, I'm from the Daily Mail.

ST: Oh I changed my mind. So...

[Laughter]

[Applause]

Down here.

Q: Oh that's so sad.

ST: I got the power!

[Applause]

What's your name?

Q: Hello, my name is Theresa and I first of all would like to thank you, Sir David, for being here tonight. It's just been fantastic. My question is really from my mother who is ninety-three, not this lady sitting next to me. She's younger than my mother. My mother actually phoned me after I'd left the house and said "You have to ask Sir David about his early programmes that were on television." And one of them specifically she would like for you to have it shown on TV again, she called it about Persian nomads.

DA: The Persian nomads, yes.

Q: Do you have any control about getting those put back on TV for my mother?

ST: So the lady's mother is ninety-three, she wants you to make sure that you get the programme about the Persian nomads re-broadcast, do you have the power?

DA: They were a group called the Bakhtiari as I'm sure you know, and they regularly migrated from the mountains down to the

sea. And I wanted to make a programme about them, the wonderful rugs, the Persian rugs which the nomadic people make, which are individual creations that they weave on the way down. And we travelled with them on a migration, it was a series called *The Tribal Eye* and it was about the way in which different communities and cultures make things. And it was such a privilege to travel with these fantastic people and they followed a route that they had been following for at least 1000 years if not more and we slept in the same places, we slept on the ground, and I remember very well the traditional place that the migration had been year after year for centuries, and I stretched like that and put my hands into the sand just by my bed and I found a coin and it was 350 years old. Silver coin.

ST: Could you get the show shown again, please?

[Laughter]

Could you get them to broadcast it again?

DA: *The Tribal Eye*, it's called.

Q: Do you still have the coin?

DA: Yes.

Q: Good. Thank you.

ST: I'm afraid that is all that we have got time for. On behalf of the audience, I have to say David this has been one of the greatest privileges of my life sitting here chatting to you. Thank you on behalf of the audience and for our wider audience who are going to watch it online, but most of all I thank you on behalf of all the creatures of this planet who you have cared for and focused our attention on. On their behalf, thank you so very much.

DA: Thank you very much.

[Applause]

Natural History with Sir David Attenborough

ST: Sir David Attenborough.

DA: Thank you very much. Thank you.

[Applause]