# David Attenborough: A Biography

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David Attenborough at Great Barrier Reef by dfat.gov.au

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## Early Life

David Attenborough is a renowned television presenter, scientist and writer. He was born on the 8th May, 1926, in West London. His parents were Mary and Frederick Attenborough. David grew up with two brothers and two adopted sisters. As a child, David loved to collect fossils and rare stones. In his collection was a prized 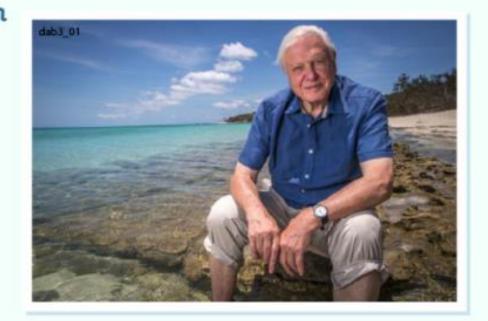piece of amber with prehistoric creatures trapped inside it, which his sister had given to him. Following on from that childhood fascination, David went to study geology, zoology and **natural sciences** at Cambridge University.



*fossil ant in Baltic Amber by Manukyan Andranik (wiki commmons)*

## The BBC

In 1952, David started work at the BBC. At that time, most people didn't even own a television! David became the producer for some early live programmes about various subjects, from ballet to **archaeology**. The head of the department at the time didn't think that David should be a television presenter because she thought that his teeth were too big!
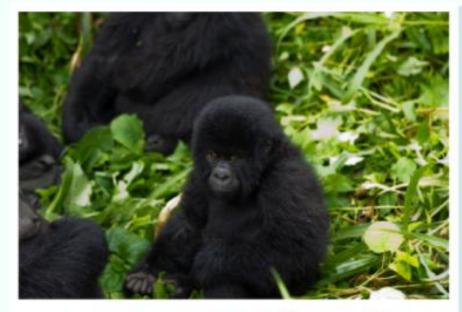
In 1954, David was working in West Africa on a programme called 'Zoo Quest' when the presenter of the programme became ill, so David stepped in front of the camera that day. He went on presenting programmes for the next 60 years and more.



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# Life on Earth

In 1979, David wrote and presented the 'Life on Earth' series for the BBC. The 13 episodes of 'Life on Earth' covered the variety and **evolution** of life on planet Earth. With compelling titles like 'The Swarming Hordes' and 'Lords of the Air', this series captured the public's attention, and the episodes quickly became natural history blockbusters. David and his team worked closely with scientists like Dr Dian Fossey to make sure that each episode was up to date with the latest research. A clip filmed for 'Life in the Trees' shows David presenting while being sat on by a young mountain gorilla!



a young mountain gorilla

# Filming Challenges

After the success of 'Life on Earth', David spent the next 25 years travelling the globe making **documentaries** about the natural world.

There were many serious challenges for the production teams as they filmed in risky situations and inhospitable locations. For 'Life in the Freezer', the team spent three years battling with extremely low temperatures, blizzards and rough seas. They had to film underwater scenes in cages to avoid being eaten by leopard seals.

When filming for 'The Life of Birds', David was chased by an aggressive capercaillie, but fortunately he was not hurt.



a capercaillie

## Legacy

David Attenborough continues to fascinate, amaze and inspire awestruck global audiences with his documentaries about the natural world. His passion and enthusiasm for all forms of life on our planet is uplifting and motivating. David was knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 1985, so his title is Sir David Attenborough.

There are several **species** named after Sir David:

- a large carnivorous plant called Nepenthes attenboroughii
- a Namibian lizard named Platysaurus attenboroughi
- a Madagascan frog called Stumpffia davidattenboroughi

There is even a dinosaur named Attenborosaurus!

David Attenborough at Great Barrier Reef screening by dfat.gov.au

# Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| archaeology | the study of ancient history by looking at the remains of buildings and objects from the past |
| documentary | a factual film, television or radio programme |
| evolution | the development of animals and plants over many centuries from earlier forms of life |
| natural science | sciences that are involved with the study of the physical world |
| | |
| species | a group of living things that are similar in some way |

# Questions

1) Read the contents page. What is a biography?

2) Find one word from part 1 that means a golden piece of fossilised tree sap.

3) In part 2, why is the word 'archaeology' in bold?

4) In part 3, what is the caption on this page?

5) Read part 6, can you suggest a different title for the information on this page?

6) Read the glossary. Can you add another word from the text and its definition?