

David Attenborough's 60-year career celebrated in BBC series

The BBC is to broadcast a documentary series looking back over Sir David Attenborough's remarkable 60-year broadcasting career, including a return to the Borneo jungle, where he first encountered an orangutan in the wild in the 1950s.

In the three-part BBC2 documentary, Attenborough will review advances in programme-making technology, science, and the study of natural history and the environment over the past 60 years, and revisit award-winning shows including *Life on Earth*, *The Blue Planet* and *Frozen Planet*.

Along the way Attenborough, who celebrates his **86th birthday on 8th May**, will recount anecdotes – including being rejected early in his career by BBC Radio because his teeth were judged to be too big – an alleged defect fortunately overlooked by the BBC's nascent television service.

"It is in the can, all done. It really covers the three areas which fascinate me, the technology, the development of science during my lifetime, and the environment," he said.

He is also presenting Kingdom of Plants 3D on Sky Atlantic later this month and at a launch for the show last week he paid tribute to the scientists who have been willing to share years of research with him during his career, making his TV documentaries possible. *"My job could not be done without the scientists. Provided the scientists believe you are playing fair, they are not in any way possessive of the difficult things they have discovered."*

Attenborough's career is perhaps unique in UK broadcasting in its breadth and longevity. After establishing himself as a BBC natural history presenter in the 1950s, he studied for a postgraduate degree, returning to broadcasting as BBC2 controller in 1965.

During his tenure the channel was the first in the UK to switch to colour, in 1967, and commissioned shows including Monty Python's Flying Circus and landmark documentaries such as Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation*.

Attenborough was promoted to director of programmes in 1969, overseeing all BBC TV output, but returned to programme-making four years later. He developed and presented *Life on Earth*, broadcast in 1979, which in its scope and ambition set the benchmark for the landmark BBC natural history documentary series his name has been synonymous with ever since.

Attenborough, **60 Years in the Wild** will air in October, spanning a broadcasting career that began when he joined the BBC in 1952. He returned to the Borneo jungle for the documentary, to shoot new footage where he was filmed with an orangutan for the 1956 BBC documentary *Zoo Quest*. Later in the same series Attenborough came face to face with a giant lizard, the Komodo dragon.

The new series covers the developments in programme-making Attenborough has lived through and exploited, from the early TV cameras used for Zoo Quest, which only recorded noisily for two minutes at a time, to the latest high-definition, 3D and micro-camera technology.

It also charts the rapid advances in science he has witnessed – ranging from discoveries about the structure of DNA to a better understanding of continental drift – since he was a zoology student at Cambridge University, and the often grim environmental consequences of rapid economic and population growth.

Attenborough is working on the new series with Alastair Fothergill, a longtime collaborator and BBC Natural History Unit executive producer, who told the Guardian that in Borneo Attenborough was filmed standing in the exact spot in the river bed where more than 50 years previously there was pristine jungle, but which is now planted with oil palms.

The series also features archive footage from Attenborough's many documentaries and interviews recorded in his study at his home in Richmond, London.

Fothergill said: *"David is unique. Think about it, he has seen more of the natural world than anyone ever before him. He was able to make use of the start of commercial international air travel. He started just after world war two, when much of the natural world was still pristine, there was such a different feel. In his life time he has seen all that change."*

On the perennial question of when Attenborough will retire, Fothergill, who has worked with him since The Trials of Life series in 1990, admitted he thought last year's Frozen Planet would be his last major BBC series.

However, Attenborough, who will be travelling to the Galápagos Islands for his next Sky 3D documentary, was sounding as sprightly as ever. *"Retire? The world is infinitely complex. Major things have happened in the last 50 years year ... extraordinary."*

