Happy 100th Birthday David Attenborough!
from Poets for the Planet

De Montfort Hall, 1991

In 1991, I was David Attenborough's official minder for the day when Leicester Poly gave him a honorary doctorate.

A rudimentary exchange. In return
for an honorary degree, he graciously
gifted us a real education. Mums and Dads
in diligently applied grins and poly-cotton
blend smart casual wear clapped at all
the right moment with well-rehearsed sincerity,
told each other what a natural he was,
how he was even nicer in real life – as he
was only a replica on the television. After
he stayed, unobliged, all day to give
disarmingly honest answers to questions
about wildlife, ecology, growing up in
Leicester, the parents and the graduands
piled into cars and belched petrol and diesel
fumes into the air, desperate to get home
in time to let the pets out to defecate
on the astroturf. He declined his expenses,
caught the bus home, not shaking his head
till he was safely out view.

Dave Wakely

On David Attenborough's birthday: in praise of hidden treasures

Inspired by Emma Woodford

Deep in the dark woods of disbelief
below the dried-out topsoil of dominant thinking
and Western-centric notions of intelligence
(littered with the language of conflict and combatants)
Suzanne Simard, the scientist who
unearthed the concept of the Mother Tree
and continues to embody it
seeds new ideas with new generations of ecologists.
A wood-wide web of distributed abundance
not handouts but sophisticated mutual aid,
not conflict but interspecies co-operation,
not competition but collaborative action.
The knowledge we hold below the surface, these
buried seeds: stamped on but determined to take root.

Jessica Taggart Rose

Spider-Monkey Baby

Inspired by a documentary, for David Attenborough's birthday

Button-black eyes of baby spider monkey
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From the canopy still clutching
His mother’s body pierced by poisoned arrows
Baby spider monkey still attached to his mother’s body on the forest floor
Small hands clutched tight to the still-warm hairs on her breast
Her body splayed, a mother crucified
Baby spider monkey, button-black
Moon-haloed eyes stare up from the fallen body of his mother
Lying still on the forest floor
Blow blow dart blow blow dart
Arrow flying upwards prey pray
Shooting stars falling downwards
Hunters circle with their hungry children
Baby baby spider monkey
Eyes staring up at your mobile phone
At you at me
From jungle floor to WhatsApp video
To TV documentaries so what can we do with all this info as we wheel our trolleys through the supermarket aisles?

Caitlin Kendall

For David Attenborough, May 8th 2026

In his journal *Voyage of the Beagle*, Darwin wrote about the Galapagos Tortoises that he: "frequently got on their backs".

Whereas the long-necked
Galapagos Tortoise
as the years go by
is a heavy engine
pulling up an incline
or a weight
of giant-sized machinery
moving on a chain

and whereas it could be
a Steampunk dome
or fortress on legs
shaking the foundation
as it plods into camera

to outstare us tourists, holidaymakers,
spectators, bystanders, consumers,
for the forces we've set off

and the difficult balance riding
like just-landed gods
with Darwin on your back
looking for meaning and ending
with a truth even he couldn't imagine

or like the side of a house
ship-sized and strapped
to a wild climate ride
on the back of Earth
our *convoi exceptionnel*

and big, like you, David
now 100 for the outback, the kingdom, the science,
and to save us.

Leslie Tate

For Easter, try egg blowing

David Attenborough stood on an ostrich egg
to demonstrate its strength once.
'The toughest egg in the world,' he said.
He may even have jumped on it for emphasis.
Of course, no-one had drilled it and sapped its yolk
with mega-breaths and an extra-thick straw,
which is how it withstood his weight, unlike
the three souvenirs we bought in Oudtshorn,
their weakness apparent under failing coving.
They smithereened the carpet and needed
hand picking, the hoover's inhalations proved weak.
We'd have been better off buying feather dusters
from the hawker pitched outside the super-market.
They'd have been easier to carry home.

Kate Noakes

Earth

where we kissed in a summer meadow rough grasses whipping at our thighs sound of elk rutting in the distance where from a sheer height the river's wash chill & flooding down we made breathless descent the sun setting shadows on the rocks the rocks indiscernible from our scuttered feet where we drove for hours seeing nothing but scarred black stumps on pillow stone and one bright sapling screaming green desert rocks in countless layers seem soft felt in women's hands sprout prickly pears and elk cows graze on roses in florid arid gardens chrysanthemum smell of cum welling up within me—all I want is to remain; there is no other than this earth to bear us and so much yet unseen like a sudden flood through a slot canyon when the earth says go we're gone

Geoffery Sugarman

Meltwater

My time is coming, smell it on the wind
watch raindrops winnowing down glass
touch ice-cube to your lips and tongue
feel the cool chemistry of meltwater
see me submerge fields and swallow crops
spill out of wells to infiltrate your graves
raising the dead; firm ground will swamp
to ooze and squelch and slip, mud-symphony
hear gurgles, trickles, runnels in your sleep
reach for the drifting flotsam of your dreams
sweep river-sludge and sewage from the rug
swell my boundaries with your salt tears;
heave seas, wide breaths to rear up hills
waves come to claim their lost inheritance
listen to the future: rain-rocked, lake-like
nothing divides the waters from the waters.

Maggie Brookes-Butt

A naturalist named David,
on the telly since I was a kid,
turns 100 this year
and he's no amateur
knows cicada from his katydid!

Susan Cartwright-Smith

Here is my vispo Voice of Nature poem in honour of David Attenborough's 100th trip around the sun.

Maggs Vibo

Man of the Century (for David Attenborough on May 8th 2026)

Never off our screens, it seems,
and long may it be so, you blessèd
Titan, defending our planet from ruin.
I have wept, watching you with
other species than our own,
naming coelacanths, Darwin frogs,
animals of all kinds, but forever, your
love for those gorillas lights my heart.
Today you reach your century,
rare and precious man.
Eternal you shall be, praised
always, your wisdom, kindness, love,
spurring us all on to protect, to save,
until the plastic men, the tree destroyers,
retreat, and every creature’s voice
echoes round our blue earth in thanks.

Lucy Coats

(Un)Natural Selection

Your heart is in your mouth, praying
When Attenborough documents snakes
waiting in gangs to ambush baby iguanas,
You can only imagine her ordeal,
when the lions wait in circles
around the labouring elephant cow,
who has carried her babe for 22 months,
and will give birth to a 150kg baby.
You want to scream at the TV
When the young blonde girl in the horror film
turns to her friends and says,
“I’ll be right back”
Your eyes prick with tears
at the small child half a world away
too malnourished to cry
with flies on his eyes
But bring him closer:
put him on a small boat
in the English Channel
and you’d watch him drown.

Caitlin Kendall

Asian bird ‘flu

There are more dead birds now
than can reasonably be used.
Take last month’s magpie
on its ribs in the courtyard,
beak cracked, one wing splayed,
bringing a shiny new thing
into the house you have
yet to find, or today’s
jackdaw flat on its back
on the verge, breast feathers
patchy, snap-thin legs
gripping an invisible twig,
being more than a break
in the weather.

Kate Noakes