

David Attenborough quotes

by [Phil Stubbs](#)



Pic by BBC Studios / Alex Board
We've pulled together the best David Attenborough quotes about environmental issues such as climate change, conservation, population and sustainability. And of course, quotes about nature and animals.

In his older age, Attenborough is increasingly sounding like an environmental activist – speaking out about the effects of human activity on the natural world – and the impact this will ultimately have

on our ability to survive.

If you've watched David Attenborough's programs over the years you may well have noted his shift toward environmentalism. As he's said in his most recent documentary '[A Life on Our Planet](#)' he has witnessed the decline of the living world over many decades. Now in his 90's Sir David clearly feels he can't just stand by. Nature needs his advocacy.

We've collated David Attenborough's quotes by topic. (Click on the topic below to jump further down to that category.)

Advocacy

"I would much prefer not to be a placard-carrying conservationist. My life is the natural world. But I can't not carry a placard if I see what's happening."

"Our imprint is now truly global. Our impact is now truly profound. Our blind assault on the planet has finally come to alter the very fundamentals of the living world." From '[A Life on Our Planet](#)', 2020.

"The living world is a unique and spectacular marvel yet the way we humans live on earth is sending it into a decline." From '[A Life on Our Planet](#)', 2020

"The fact remains that man has unprecedented control over the world and everything in it. And so, whether he likes it or not, what happens next is very largely up to him." From '[Life on Earth](#)' 1979

"It's surely our responsibility to do everything within our power to create a planet that provides a home not just for us, but for all life on Earth."

"Immensely powerful though we are today, it's equally clear that we're going to be even more powerful tomorrow. And what's more there will be greater compulsion upon us to use our power as the number of human beings on Earth increases still further. Clearly we could devastate the world. As far as we know, the Earth is the only place in the universe where there is life. Its continued survival now rests in our hands." From '[The Living Planet](#)', 1984

"The truth is: the natural world is changing. And we are totally dependent on that world. It provides our food, water and air. It is the most precious thing we have and we need to defend it."

"We are at a unique stage in our history. Never before have we had such an awareness of what we are doing to the planet, and never before have we had the power to do something about that. Surely we all have a responsibility to care for our Blue Planet. The future of humanity and indeed, all life on earth, now depends on us."

"Real success can only come if there is a change in our societies and in our economics and in our politics."

Cities

"Now, over half of us live in an urban environment. My home, too, is here in the city of London. Looking down on this great metropolis, the ingenuity with which we continue to reshape the surface of our planet is very striking. It's also very sobering, and reminds me of just how easy it is for us to lose our connection with the natural world."



Climate Change

“As a species, we are expert problem solvers. But we haven’t yet applied ourselves to this problem with the focus it requires.”

“Many individuals are doing what they can. But real success can only come if there is a change in our societies and in our economics and in our politics.”

“People who are going to be around in 10 years’ time, in 20 years’ time, will blame us profoundly if we don’t do anything about it.”

“It is important, it is true, it is happening, and it is an impending disaster.”

“I’m sure things are going to get worse before they get better. But I believe they can get better.”

“For the very first time in the history of homosapiens we are asking people of different cultures on different continents with different moral systems to agree. That’s never happened in the history of humanity. We can’t suppose it’s going to happen overnight. We just have to keep at it.” [‘David Attenborough: Climate change dangers worse than we thought’](#) The Guardian, 26 Oct 2012

“The facts are alarming enough without scaremongering.” [‘David Attenborough: Climate change dangers worse than we thought’](#) The Guardian, 26 Oct 2012

“You can wreck one rainforest then move, drain one area of resources and move onto another, but climate change is global.”



Conservation and Animals

“We’re replacing the wild with the tame. Half of the fertile land on earth is now farmland. 70% of the mass of birds on this planet are domestic birds. The vast majority, chickens. We account for over one-third of the weight of mammals on earth. A further 60% are the animals we raise to eat. The rest, from mice to whales, make up just 4%.” From [‘A Life on Our Planet’](#) 2020

“This is now our planet, run by humankind for humankind. There is little left for the rest of the living world.” From [‘A Life on Our Planet’](#) 2020

“Since I started filming in the 1950s, on average, wild animal populations have more than halved. I look at these images now and I realize that, although as a young man I felt I was out there in the wild experiencing the untouched natural world... it was an illusion. Those forests and plains and seas were already emptying.” From [‘A Life on Our Planet’](#) 2020

“The question is, are we happy to suppose that our grandchildren may never be able to see an elephant except in a picture book?”

“The fact is that no species has ever had such wholesale control over everything on earth, living or dead, as we now have. That lays upon us, whether we like it or not, an awesome responsibility. In our hands now lies not only our own future but that of all other living creatures with whom we share the earth.”

“We only know a tiny proportion about the complexity of the natural world. Wherever you look, there are still things we don’t know about and don’t understand. There are always new things to find out if you go looking for them.”

“To restore stability to our planet, therefore, we must restore its biodiversity, the very thing we have removed. It is the only way out of this crisis that we ourselves have created. We must rewild the world!”

“We can now destroy or we can cherish, the choice is ours.”

“There are some four million different kinds of animals and plants in the world. Four million different solutions to the problems of staying alive.” From [‘Life on Earth’](#), 1979

Earth

“Our planet, the Earth, is, as far as we know, unique in the universe. It contains life.” From [‘The Living Planet’](#) 1984

“Surely it is our responsibility to do everything within our power to create a planet that provides a home not just for us, but for all life on Earth.”

“There is no reason to suppose that our stay here will be any more permanent than that of the dinosaur.”

Economics and Sustainability

“We have a finite environment—the planet. Anyone who thinks that you can have infinite growth in a finite environment is either a madman or an economist.” (Paraphrasing [Kenneth Boulding](#), President Kennedy’s environmental advisor.)

“Human beings have overrun the world.” From [‘A Life on Planet Earth’](#), 2020

“We are going to have to live more economically than we do. And we can do that and, I believe we will do it more happily, not less happily. And that the excesses the capitalist system has brought us, have got to be curbed somehow.” [‘Attenborough: ‘Curb excess capitalism’ to save nature’](#). BBC, 7 October 2020



Education

“No one will protect what they don’t care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced.”

“If people lose knowledge, sympathy and understanding of the natural world, they’re going to mistreat it and will not ask their politicians to care for it.”

“Bringing nature into the classroom can kindle a fascination and passion for the diversity of life on earth and can motivate a sense of

responsibility to safeguard it.”

“It seems to me that an understanding of the natural world is crucial for all of us – after all we depend upon it for our food, for the air we breathe and, some would say, for our very sanity.” From [‘How Many People Can Live on Planet Earth’](#), 2009.

Food

“We must change our diet. The planet can’t support billions of meat-eaters.” [‘Go vegetarian to save wildlife and the planet, Sir David Attenborough urges’](#). The Independent, 26 August 2020

God and Evolution

“I find it far more awesome, wonderful, that creation; our appearance in the world; should be the culmination, or at least one of the latest products of 3,000 million years of organic evolution, than a kind of country trick, taking a rib out of a man’s side in a trance.”

“As far as I’m concerned, if there is a supreme being then he chose organic evolution as a way of bringing into existence the natural world, which doesn’t seem to me to be necessarily blasphemous at all.”

Human Psychology

“It’s extraordinary how self-obsessed human beings are. There is so much more out there than what connects to us.”

“The whole of life is coming to terms with yourself and the natural world. Why are you here? How do you fit in? What’s it all about?”

“Human beings are good at many things, but thinking about our species as a whole is not one of our strong points.” From [‘How Many People Can Live on Planet Earth’](#), 2009.

“It’s clear that we’ll have to change the way that we live and use our resources. We’re at a crossroads where we can choose to cooperate or carry on regardless. Can our intelligence save us? I hope so.” From [‘How Many People Can Live on Planet Earth’](#), 2009.



Nature

“Nature once determined how we survive. Now we determine how nature survives.”

From [Our Planet premiere speech](#).

“It seems to me that the natural world is the greatest source of excitement; the greatest source of visual beauty, the greatest source of intellectual interest. It is the greatest source of so much in life that makes life worth living.”

“I know of no pleasure deeper than that which comes from contemplating the natural world and trying to understand it.”

“We need to learn how to work with nature rather than against it.” From [‘A Life on Our Planet’](#), 2020

Plants

“We destroy plants at our peril. Neither we nor any other animal can survive without them. The time has now come for us to cherish our green inheritance, not to pillage it – for without it, we will surely perish.”

From [‘The Private Life of Plants’](#) 1995

Population

“Instead of controlling the environment for the benefit of the population, perhaps it’s time we control the population to allow the survival of the environment.” From [‘The Life of Mammals’](#) 2002

“If we were to disappear overnight, the rest of the world would get on pretty well. But if they were to disappear, the land’s ecosystems would collapse.” From [‘Life in the Undergrowth’](#) 2005

“Wherever women have the vote, wherever girls stay in school for longer, wherever women are in charge of their own lives and not dictated to by men, wherever they have access to good healthcare and contraception, wherever they are free to take any job and their aspirations for life are raised, the birth rate falls. The reason for this is straightforward – empowerment brings freedom of choice and when life offers more options for women, their choice is often to have fewer children.”

“There are 3 times as many people on the planet now than there were when I started making natural history programs.”

“Today we’re living in an era in which the biggest threat to human well-being, to other species and to the Earth as we know it might well be ourselves. The issue of population size is always controversial because it touches on the most personal decisions we make, but we ignore it at our peril.” from [‘How Many People Can Live on Planet Earth’](#), 2009.

“I was born into a world of just under two billion people today there are nearly seven billion of us. Whenever I hear those numbers I can honestly say I find it incredible, triple the number of human beings in what seems like the blink of an eye and the world transformed utterly. Human population density is a factor in every environmental problem I have ever encountered, from urban sprawl to urban overcrowding; disappearing tropical forests to ugly sinks of plastic waste, and now the relentless increase of atmospheric pollution. I’ve spent much of the last 50 years seeking wilderness filming animals in their natural habitat and, to some extent, avoiding humans. But, over the years, true wilderness has become harder to find.” From [‘How Many People Can Live on Planet Earth’](#), 2009.

“Just as the human population was starting its unprecedented growth spurt in the late eighteenth century, this was published. It’s a first edition of an essay on population by the English clergyman Thomas Malthus. Malthus made a very simple observation about the relationship between humans and resources and used it to look into the future. He pointed out that “the power of population is indefinitely greater than the power of the earth to produce subsistence for man.” Food production can’t increase as rapidly as human reproduction. Demand will eventually outstrip supply. Malthus goes on to say, if we don’t control human reproduction voluntarily, life could end in misery, which earned him a reputation as a bit of a pessimist. But Malthus’ principle remains true. The productive capacity of the Earth has physical limits and those limits will ultimately determine how many human beings it can support.” From [‘How Many People Can Live on Planet Earth’](#), 2009.

“As I see it humanity needs to reduce its impact on the Earth urgently and there are three ways to achieve this: we can stop consuming so many resources, we can change our technology and we can reduce our population. We probably need to do all three.” From [‘How Many People Can Live on Planet Earth’](#), 2009.

“Make a list of all the environmental and social problems that today afflict us and our poor battered planet. Not just the extinction of species and animals and plants, that fifty years ago was the first signs of impending global disaster, but traffic congestion, oil prices, pressure on the health service, the growth of mega-cities, migration patterns, immigration policies, unemployment, the loss of arable land, desertification, famine, increasingly violent weather, the acidification of the oceans, the collapse of fish stocks, rising sea temperatures, the loss of rain forest. The list goes on and on. But they all share an underlying cause. Every one of these global problems, environmental as well as social becomes more difficult – and ultimately impossible – to solve with ever more people.” From [‘How Many People Can Live on Planet Earth’](#), 2009.



TV (his work)

“I’m very surprised I’m still employed.”

“An understanding of the natural world and what’s in it is a source of not only a great curiosity but great fulfillment.”

“I just wish the world was twice as big and half of it was still unexplored.”

“The world is full of wonders, but they become more wonderful, not less wonderful when science looks at them.”

“I can’t pretend that I got involved with filming the natural world fifty years ago because I had some great banner to carry about conservation – not at all, I always had a huge pleasure in just watching the natural world and seeing what happens. But as I went on making them it became more and more apparent that the creatures that were giving me so much joy were under threat. The fun is in delighting in the animals but if you do that you owe them something so you have an obligation to speak out and to do what you can to protect them.” From [‘How Many People Can Live on Planet Earth’](#), 2009.

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