

Pentland
12:30

To say that Sir David Attenborough needs no introduction is such an understatement it's a cliché. Aged 80 and with a career in broadcasting that's lasted for more than 50 years, what more can possibly be said about the man with the most reassuring voice in the whole of television?

That voice works its magic, even by telephone, as we discuss his *Planet Earth* masterclass with former BBC One controller Peter Salmon, which will include a preview of Attenborough's new series, *Life in Cold Blood*, currently filming for transmission early next year. Yes, he's still working.

With just the trace of a slur to give away his age, Attenborough is otherwise formidable. It's impossible to ask him anything that isn't fatuous about the great body of superlative programming he's made over the years or the immense change he's witnessed in the half century he's worked in broadcasting.



We discuss the two radically different TV industries Attenborough knows: that of the 1960s, when he was controller of BBC Two and then director of programmes for both BBC One and Two; and the industry of today.

Attenborough says the TV industry is "totally transformed" from the days when he was a senior manager. "It's unrecognisable. How can you compare one network with black and white, course, grainy pictures available for no more than four hours a day with what we've got now?"

We try our best. "There have been huge technical improvements. The ability to record, alone, is huge. In 1952 there was no way anybody could record anything. There was such a thing as a kinescope, but it was so muddy it was scarcely acceptable for replay. That's why hardly any of the programmes from those times exist any more. Those that do purport to be programmes but some of them resulted from 35mm cameras put into studios - they're not the actual programmes."

Attenborough says that "technically, yes" things have improved vastly since those days. Although he won't be drawn, there's a suggestion that not all the developments of the past 50 years have been beneficial. "The question is what do you use it [technology] for?" he asks.

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Of course, the genre that Attenborough has come to dominate, natural history, has benefited hugely from improving technology. "From every point of view," he says. "The ability to film in the dark, down burrows, to use time lapse and high speed have all meant the TV camera can see better than the human eye."

Disappointingly, Attenborough won't be drawn into giving advice to executives

struggling to cope with the changing broadcasting industry today. "I don't think I could produce just one sentence. It's highly complex. I don't fancy myself as a composer of mottos to hang over the fireplace." And that guarded comment is perhaps the most revealing of all - of a man who is so grounded in the rigours of scientific knowledge and thought that he avoids easy cliché.

LUCY ROUSE



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