Richard Brock: Oral History Transcription

Name of interviewee:

Richard Brock

Name of interviewer:

Miranda Krestovnikoff

Name of cameraman:

Bob Prince

Date of interview:

28/03/2007

Place of interview:

Chew Magna, Bristol, UK

Length of interview:

c. 120 minutes

1. The early years and natural history inspirations

Int: Can you give us your full name and any nicknames that you've ever had?

RB: Right. John Richard Brock.

Int: And your nationality?

RB: English.

Int: And what's your current job title, how would you describe yourself?

RB: It's rather grand, executive producer.

Int: Of?

RB: Of Living Planet Productions.

Int: And what's today's date?

RB: 28 March 2007.

Int: And what's the location?

RB: This is Chew Magna near Bristol.

Int: So basically if we can start at the very beginning. How did you get involved….become interested in wildlife? What was your earliest memory of that sort of spark that started this whole career?

RB: Well, I was at school in Dorset and I was living with my family in Devon, two wonderful wildlife places. So I just did the usual things as you do, at school, which is take bird's eggs which you're not supposed to do and kill butterflies which is what you're not supposed to do now, which is great. But that's how I got into it and I used to go birdwatching a lot on the coast and the natural history society at school. Then when I went to university I did zoology and botany which is obviously relevant. So it was really just a continuing interest from the beginning.

Int: Was there any encouragement from your parents, were they very outdoorsy sort of people as well?

RB: Yes, they were very country people. My father was always sailing and out in the country, did a lot of walking, and we lived in a pretty rural place near Exeter. So you know, it was all round me, that was the point. It was, very good.

Int: And what was your earliest memories of seeing wildlife on television? Was there anything that you saw that you remember that really inspired you to then move into making wildlife television?

RB: Yes. I think it was the series called Look (1) which Sir Peter Scott presented and ran a long time. In fact, when I eventually got in the Unit I worked on that series and I met Peter Scott at that time. But certainly the famous woodpecker (2) film where they showed the inside of a nest, the sort of thing now you see every day almost on television, those amazing inside pictures. But at that time people were talking about in the pub and in the street - did you see that film about woodpeckers?

So it was that series which was on more or less at peak time on BBC1. It had a high profile and a very good track record, and eventually it sort of ran out of steam but it was very famous.

Int: So if we can start at the very beginning and what is your earliest memory of something in the natural world that gave you that sort of stimulus to get involved with wildlife and nature, and eventually make films? What's your earliest memory of something, your connection with wildlife maybe?

RB: You mean on television or in nature?

Int: No, just when you were child, the environment that you grew up with and what you used to do as a child, yes, earliest memories of the natural world really.

RB: Well, I think living in Devon, in a rural part of Devon near Exeter meant that I was amongst nature all the time and I was able to get out and go bird watching and collecting bird's eggs, and killing butterflies and things that you don't do now. But at the time that was all around me and there was more of it probably than there is now, certainly on farmland. So that was it. It was around and my parents encouraged me to do that. So that's how it started.

Int: And how did that continue through your career? Before you actually moved into the TV industry, how did that sort of interest and passion continue through?

RB: Well, it was encouraged at school because you could do biology and you could join the society and go to talks and go on trips, and so on. Certainly when I was at school in Dorset we used to cycle down to a hide on Poole Harbour and go bird watching. It was quite a long way, it was about 15 miles, and we always had to get back for church and we didn't want to do that. So that was good and that was one particular master who encouraged us to do that sort of thing. And again, in Dorset I was surrounded by nature and other people encouraged me, so just carried on, it was just more of the same.

Int: If you'd grown up in a different environment, if you'd grown up in a city, do you think you would have still had that passion and love for nature?

RB: I don't know. I mean it's quite an interesting thought that people who live in cities almost enjoy nature more if they can get to it. All right, you may have to go to the park but at weekends you can go out and you probably get more of a contrast from where you normally live. I remember giving a talk in London to a bird group, these were aviculturists, people who keep birds and I was talking about humming birds. All the people in the audience were really poor people, they were very, as I say, drab people and drably dressed. I was talking to David Attenborough about it and he said this is what happens. You get these people who live in city, who see no colour and no nature, but they keep these birds. They keep these brilliant, brilliant birds. It's like an escape to the tropics and that's why they were there.

Int: And what about earliest memories of wildlife on TV? I don't know when the first wildlife film was actually on television but what are your earliest memories of images on television?

RB: I think it would have to be Zoo Quest with Attenborough (3). Now, again, that's all changed. You wouldn't now bring an animal like a Komodo dragon and stick it in a zoo. I remember talking to David about how they filmed and when I filmed with him later it was actually the same to start with because he would just arrive somewhere and start filming. It was literally an adventure. So now with these big series, of course,

everything is very carefully organised and slotted together. But he would just turn up with Charles Lagus on the beach and start filming, and if they got stuck in the mud that's a sequence you know and every now and then you saw some animals and, of course, they brought the animals back and that was the thing that was fine on television then because it was David with the animal in the studio, which usually bit him or something, so there was some moment of humour.

And then after that, more predictably, wildlife was Look (1) with Sir Peter Scott and he had different guests, and he had Heinz Seilmann who was famous for the woodpecker film (2). That was the one that sort of shook the country and the next day everyone was talking about this film where you got inside the nest. And it had a very clever sequence, I remember, of the woodpeckers drumming and it was cut together in a very effective way for sound. So that was definitely a milestone. I think it would be very interesting to see that film again now. I don't know if there is a copy even because it's a long time ago.

Int: So when you were watching these programmes on television what was going through your mind, was it like I just need to do that? Was that just drawing you in to —?

RB: I think it was probably because I was a bad scientist. Because when I went to Cambridge University I studied zoology and botany and I also studied biochemistry but I got 4% for that. And then I was on vacation afterwards my tutor phoned up and said are you sure you want to be a biochemist because you got 4%. So I switched to physiology which was actually much more relevant to zoology and botany and I got a Third and I played a lot of sport. So I wasn't going to be a scientist, I wasn't going to do a PhD but I had this great interest in communicating. And I think that it, certainly at that time, and probably still today, if you're looking a job in, say, the Natural History Unit, what you have to be is keen on communicating. Alright you might be mad on spiders as well but what you've got to be interested in is communicating spiders. And you have a —

I nearly went into advertising because I'm very interested in the media and how the public behave – and you know I'm doing stuff now about supermarkets. And then I got very interested in popular music. So it's the sort of interface between the subject and the receiving end of things, and I think I can use that now to persuade people more about protecting nature by reaching them in different ways and that comes later. But that's really what happened after university. I just wanted to communicate and I came down to Bristol because this was the Natural History Unit.

2. Early days at the BBC Natural History Unit (NHU)

Int: So what was the Unit like at that time when you'd left university? What was it…you know the Unit now is just world famous is a very large business. What was it like then?

RB: Well, I suppose it had about four producers and I was actually a general assistant for six months.

Int: What were you doing?

RB: Well, it was dogsbody really. So actually was — it was quite good because I had to go and work with these different producers. So there was a team doing Look (1) with Peter Scott and Peter Scott always had

a row with the producer. So I was new and I just sat at the back of the room while these sparks were going backwards and forwards. That was an education. And then Jeffery Boswall, he was the sound producer, he was responsible for a sound series, I think, every Sunday and I got attached there.

So that was my way in really as a dogsbody, and then Jeffery very kindly said would you like to do a programme. We did a programme called Wild Goose Chase (4) and I went up to the Island of Isla in Scotland where these wonderful barnacle geese come in, and great sound for radio. And that, so that was a start, that was a foot in the door and I think in a way radio's more interesting. I mean you tend to meet more people. If you're interviewing all the farmers on Isla you meet some wonderful people, and the RSPB people and so on too. In a way television can be quite limited in that you're dealing with a crew but you don't meet that many people very often. So I really like radio.

Int: We'll come back to radio in a second but I just want to go back a stage. Because if you were to get a job in the Natural History Unit nowadays, you have to do work experience and you have to send CVs and all that sort of thing. You sound as though you left university and just came down to Bristol and walked in the front door. How did it work, how different was it back then?

RB: It was the same. I got into Cambridge University in the same way and I would still recommend this - persistence. The trigger's to be not too persistent because you become a nuisance. But I got into Cambridge that way by persisting and saying you must take me in, and they said well you aren't very good, are you, you know?

Int: What did you get then…go on…what were your A level results then?

RB: Modest. And the same with the BBC Natural History Unit that you know I just kept saying, look, I want to be in this place and I want to work here and that's why they gave me this general assistant. I've still got the letter, in one marvellous typewriter script.

So that's what I would advise anyone trying to get in, is you just keep trying. I mean obviously it's more complicated now because the Unit is so much bigger. But I think in the end if you've got some talent, and certainly you've got the dedication and you want to communicate, I mean those are the key elements that you need to have or appear to have. These days, of course, you can make your own film and so on, and make your own radio programme for that matter as a test, as a sample, and offer that.

3. Working in radio and Richard's move into television

Int: So lets get back to the radio side of things because actually doing wildlife on radio I would imagine is quite difficult. You've obviously got great sounds that the animals are making but when we see wildlife on TV we're always wowed by the images. So what were the challenges of doing wildlife on radio?

RB: I think it was getting a good story, it's true of any programme, isn't it, any book for that matter. You know you need to have something. They used to call it narrative tension so that you wanted to know what's going to happen next. So, so say with that goose programme, it was just a question of going up there, working out how you were going to structure it. In that case, of course, who you were going to talk to, who were the key

people involved with these geese, you know what did the farmers feel about all these geese on their farm, what are the protection people doing? The bird is protected but people were probably shooting them a bit, so there were those people. So I guess the research about who was involved in the story and then the way you design it, you know, you shape it, and of course you were cutting on tape then with a razor blade. I mean that was how it was and pretty basic.

Int: And apart from the way you cut the programme, if you were making that programme nowadays how would it be different?

RB: I don't know in radio. I mean —

Int: But I mean story wise, content wise?

RB: I think the story is probably fairly similar. I suppose people are a bit more educated, if you like. You can do things quicker like in the way film changed when the Beatles did their first film. You had these jump cuts, what we call jump cuts, whereas before that people would go in a door and come out the other side and so on. You had this structured sequence of shooting and now you just make a jump, don't you? So people have got used to this, things are just quicker, life is quicker, isn't it? I mean whether it's radio or TV I think we just accept stuff very quickly like we do with the advertising, it's very very fast isn't it, when you think of it. And I'm not sure how much sticks quite frankly. It just whizzes through.

Int: So how long did you work in radio for?

RB: A couple of years I think and then Jeffery Boswall he then went into television himself and he gave me a film to do which was a compilation called Masters of Movement. (5) And it was just a compilation of different ways animals move which is pretty obvious really for TV and it actually won a prize somewhere. He kindly entered it somewhere, some small festival, and so I was terribly proud I got this award. It was called Masters of Movement.(5)

And then, of course, the Unit was starting to expand anyway because Look (1) had been very successful, it had got some more producers in. Then, of course, BBC2 got going and David Attenborough, who was running BBC2 and started colour, he started what was then The World About Us (6) which is still there in a way as The Natural World. And it was shared with London, so London did anthropological stuff in that slot, I think it was still Sunday night. Then the Natural History Unit did the natural history.

The trouble for colour was that David said, well, we need a colourful show when we start so let's do volcanoes, London can do that because they're bright red and the BBC Natural History Unit were going to do scarlet ibis which are scarlet. The problem was that very few people were actually seeing it in colour, so what they saw were these rather drab birds and this lava that wasn't red, it was black because it was in black and white. So they judged colour on a black and white version. So it was a bit of struggle to get it working but, of course, then some people did see it and then it got around and it was very important, of course, colour.

Int: As I say, is that what almost kick-started the explosion in natural history film making? Was that the

invention of colour TV because the two happened almost at the same time? Did the Natural History Unit suddenly expand because of colour television because people were suddenly seeing things for what they really are?

RB: I think it must have made a lot of difference. Also it was another channel so there were more slots, and then there was a studio show which Desmond Morris introduced called Life (8) and that was quite wide ranging. It was fairly scientific and they'd have really good scientists and quite intellectual subjects about animal behaviour and human behaviour, and so on. So again that was another slot which needed a team. So teams lead to more teams and more assistants and so the thing starts to grow.

So that was probably almost the fastest growth at one time in the history of the Unit, I think. I mean it's now much bigger but it's—apart perhaps a big series where they take on people for two or three years, I think that time way back with the colour coming which was probably the fastest expansion. You're probably right because it was colour and it really got going.

4. Working with David Attenborough and other famous names at the BBC

Int: Obviously you've worked with David Attenborough and I want to talk about a number of people that you've worked with. But are there any fond memories of times that you've shared with him or anecdotes of working with him that you'd like to share?

RB: Yes. When it — my first real break came when I was appointed to work with him and he was Head of BBC2. He was destined to become—no he was Head of BBC2 he then became Director of Programmes and he was destined to become number one and everyone expected this. He knew, and I think his brother probably knew, few other people knew that he was actually going to leave and not become number one. And so I was appointed for some reason, because I was just an assistant producer, to be a producer with the great David Attenborough who was number one in the 24,000 staffed BBC.

And I used to go up to London, and Television Centre is this big circular building and you kind of walk across the middle, and I used to be walking across the middle with my little plastic bag to see David and he was on the sixth floor which is where all the execs are. And he would quite often he would open a window on the sixth floor and he'd say, "Ricardo, Ricardo, come on up." So I don't know what he was doing looking out the window. So I used to go up there to the sixth floor, absolutely terrified, and he was protected by two large ladies who were his assistants. And I used to go past them, just sort of wave at them and they wondered who the hell I was because he was, of course, keeping all this secret. I'd go in and we'd get out the map of Borneo because that's where we were going, and start planning this. But, of course, it was quite daunting to me to be in that position. We went and we were there for three months with an excellent crew, three people, and we made a series called Eastwards with Attenborough (9).

So that was his comeback really after Zoo Quest(3). He'd gone into the BBC from Zoo Quest (3) and then reappeared on Eastwards with Attenborough (9). Again it was quite daunting, not only being in charge of this crew in quite dangerous places but also trying to direct David because he'd got this tremendous track record. He still had this thing about, oh, let's just turn up and do some filming and I said, well no, let's make six programmes with six different subjects with six different stories. "Oh well why do we need to do that?" He was very nice about it but he didn't think it was necessary. So I, I did that with him and it was a great success, and you know the rest is history really.

Int: Did you work with him on many projects?

RB: Yes.

Int: What's perhaps the most memorable?

RB: I think, looking back it's got to be Life on Earth (10). I think he would say that too, partly because at the time it was a landmark series because no one had done as big a story as that. I mean it is the biggest story on the planet. I think they're now doing another one somewhat like it but it is the biggest story of all. People said you can't do it, you can't walk out of a savannah in Africa and into a savannah in North America, you know people will be confused. But he knew and he used to spend a month writing each script. So it took him a year that's 12 -12 or 13 films. So it was a year writing the scripts and those scripts were so clearly written that he could walk out of shot in one place and into a continent somewhere else and because it was so clearly written.

And then, of course, he did the books so he'd sort of written it already but the books were pretty successfully. And of course, the jigsaw of all the crews being in different parts of the world, that was quite new, quite complicated. And I suppose the fact that it's apparently been seen by 500 million people and it's used in universities, I think it has to be number one for those reasons. And it was – it got some unusual stuff. I mean it's amazing to me that they can still go out now and get stuff that's brand new. I mean I think it's running out a bit, obviously the bigger animals. But at that time we filmed the coelacanth for the first time. A lot of stuff was brand new so that was a great advantage and we had a good budget, so we could spend time. So in lots of ways it was, it was number one.

Int: Did you actually realise at the time how ground breaking that series was or was it just like, oh, we're just working on another show sort of thing?

RB: Well, it seemed to go on and on. I think, yes, I think we felt it was quite important and I think because of the overall story, it is the biggest story. It was on every continent, it was every animal group. I did the one on frogs (11) which was the one I enjoyed really and it was probably one of the most successful shows because the stuff was so unusual. So I was going and talking to these frog people and I also did the one on bats, and what was nice about that was that these people who'd been studying this frog, for example, that produces its young out of its mouth. There was someone actually in the world who knew all about this animal, dedicated their life to it, lived in Chile, and the female lays the eggs, the male picks up the eggs and incubates them in its mouth, and you can see the throat moving because they'd turned into froglets. Then it spits them out, gives birth out of its mouth. And we had one of these frogs with its mouth full down in Devon and the cameraman was waiting. He waited 180 hours gazing at this frog with its throat going, and then he went across the road to collect something, came back and the frog had, the baby had come out so he missed it, but he got it later.

So it was that kind of thing that you felt, well, the world's biggest frog, things that people had never seen really. It was really a privilege with that and more — bats were the same. The people working on fishing bats and really weird creatures that you find in a book and you think I don't believe it, and yet there it is alive with the world expert. I think that is fantastic. I think that's gone a lot now. I think anyone you go and talk to,

certainly about famous animals like bears or whales or dolphins, the scientists may, well say, how much are you going to pay me or I've already had three crews this week.

So all that pioneering excitement is bound to have changed I think. I suppose you would still do it with insects and small creatures. I think you can still find some pretty unusual things, and that's what producers must be doing. I think, we know because the business is quite competitive and people are on short-term contracts in the Unit and so on, that if you got an idea, if you got one of these special things, then you really hide it and you don't share it with anyone because, you know, your job may depend on it. If you bring back that sequence and no one else has got it you get promoted. It's probably something like that anyway. So I think that — creates a different atmosphere within the Unit.

Int: I mean ideas back then, were they more simple, were they two a penny because you just proposed anything and it would have been, oh yes, well, we haven't done that, so you go out and make it?

RB: Well, yes, and the budgets were very loose. I mean it was only fairly recently that all got tightened up and you had to fill in anything. But, no, if I wanted to do a film on dolphins in India, oh yes, okay, well here's £10,000 off you go, good luck, sort of thing.

Int: And you just disappear and come back some time with a film?

RB: Yes. Well, Eastwards with Attenborough (9) was like that. I mean it was three months on the road which is a long time to be with a small group of people, really tough. You know it was the famous thing with David and the bat cave. Now that was really dangerous. I mean you can get this fungus.

Int: Can you tell us about that? What happened?

RB: Well, we'd heard about this cave with a lot of bats in it and we arrived at the end of this track and there was the cave, and for some reason I think David was somewhere else. Anyway he hadn't seen this but I saw it and the crew saw it and I said, look, this is going to be a great place to put David. I think David might have guessed we had something planned for the next day. Anyway the next day of course we said, David, we've got a little trip today and we climbed up this enormous guano mound, and it's just bat droppings basically. It's like a dune so you sink in, it's all round your feet, and it was covered in these cockroaches. So these golden cockroaches are just its moving carpet over this dune of bat droppings. So, great, we'll go up there.

You go up there, sort of slipping down all the time. Then when we go to the top, and this was the famous bit that David always talks about, the bats started coming out, we'd disturbed them. So you get this huge wind and lots and lots of bats and ammonia coming off the dune, so he started choking. As I say, these days you'd have to have special breathing gear. I mean it would be really a dangerous place to go. Then he does this piece about bats had this wonderful echo location and never hit anything, in which case a bat immediately hit on the head and that was a classic sequence.

And as I say, I don't really know if he knew what he was in for but he's such a good performer. He's got some acting genes from his brother, I think, so he can just top up a performance. He's obviously a very genuine person but he can just colour it depending on the situation. So I think that's a key to his success

actually and he's a very charming person, so he's a winner.

Int: Any other moments with David that you really remember, really treasure?

RB: Yes, I mention the early ones because it was risky, if you like. And on that same trip we went up to Krakatoa, and Krakatoa has now stopped erupting but there was a smaller one that was erupting. We went out in this boat to do a piece about the history of Krakatoa, the amazing statistics when the big one went up. We went spent the night out there and because of the eruptions there was lightning and rain over the sea, and we were in this boat. So the rain was bringing down the ash, so we were all covered in black ash, wet black ash, trying to sleep and we got no sleep. Then the sun came up and we said, well, we'd better do this piece. David, having had no sleep, covered in black, wet ash, did this piece to camera with all these statistics, probably 10 facts about the height of the tidal wave, how far it reached, you know, how many people were killed, and all that stuff, word perfect. A brilliant, brilliant piece of broadcasting.

So again I'm complementing him but I certainly complement the crew because at that time the equipment was very heavy and it was you know it was very humid out there, and it was quite dangerous really. We could have been attacked by people, quite unfriendly people in some places.

Int: And nobody would have known where you were, you were in the age before mobile phones and you had no schedule, so nobody back in Bristol would have had any idea.

RB: No, and it was amazing that they let us go really or sent us off. Maybe they were trying to tell us something.

Anyway so there was six of these frogs out there and I thought of some old lady is going to die of shock, and it's going to be awful, awful.

Eventually I got them all back. I managed to go up to somebody and say, excuse me, I think that's my frog and there was still one missing. And at the back of the plane I could see this little group of people with the crew, you know the cabin crew, and they had the frog in their hand. It's great credit to British Airways because I went up and I said, excuse me, I think that's my frog. [laughter]

And this steward said very politely in British Airways tones, well please keep your frogs under control, sir. That's all he said, as if it happened every day.

Int: Oh god could you imagine that happening nowadays. We've just been talking about frogs. You have a bit of a fascination with frogs, there are frogs all over house in you know various different guises. What is the fascination with frogs?

RB: I don't know because I wasn't interested in frogs before I was given the programme. What happens on a big series like that people sort of bid for the one they want to do, and you normally have three producers so that's 12 programmes, so that's four each. And so, so obviously some people want to do frogs and others

definitely don't, and I didn't particularly want to do frogs. It was actually more than frogs, it was amphibians, so it included salamanders and funny things called caecilians which are a bit like a snake.

So I got given that and I didn't know, you know, anything about them. But I think that was really interesting because I also did birds and I know quite a lot about birds. So it certainly wasn't dull doing birds but it was the same stuff that I knew about but frogs was brand new. So like the one that has babies out of its mouth I'd never heard of something like that.

And as I say, I met all these extraordinary people. I mean there's some quite weird people who work on frogs and pretty weird people who work on bats. And I used to go to these conferences and there were really quite odd groups of people who work on these really quite odd animals. I remember doing something on stick insects and turned out there was a stick insect association or society of Britain, which actually also include leaf insects, so it was stick and leaf insects. I used to go around the country, I was very intrigued about who these people were going to be. You know I'd knock on the door and it was usually a very tall spindly person who'd got these stick insects in a room upstairs which his wife wasn't allowed to go in. So you used to go up and go into this room and it had all these amazing creatures in there.

A chap called Mike Linley who went to *Survival* (12) he was actually in Bristol, well, he wasn't odd but he had a room like that, and you'd go in and he had all these amazing geckoes and frogs and toads and things in this little room in Knowle in Bristol. He ended up as a producer on *Survival*, (12) so being a helper on *Life on Earth* (10) led to him getting on. I mean that's how it happened for him. And he's fanatical about frogs. And he got arrested in Australia by trying to import some. So —

Int: Really? They didn't escape on a plane did they?

RB: No, they didn't. I think he was innocent actually, I don't think he was…I think it was just a mistake.

Int: Was there a lot of stuff that you did back then, like bringing frogs over on a plane, that you just wouldn't be able to do now?

RB: I imagine, yes, I imagine, certainly any, any any protected species, any rare species protected by law and there's a lot of smuggling. The wildlife trade is the biggest illegal activity after, after drugs. You know, if you include all sorts of animals, parrots or frogs or whatever they are, that is the second biggest trade in the world. So you know there are bigger attempts to control it but I imagine it happens a lot. Because a woman was arrested yesterday in India for having three crocodiles attached to her, which is quite interesting. I think they must have been strapped round…you know and she had a rather large dress on and they said, no, we think you've got a crocodile in there and she had three crocodiles in there.

Int: That's funny. Are there other characters that you've worked with in the industry, people like David and Jeffery. I mean you've worked with just some great names. Are there any other people who really stand out in your memories, like I'm really glad I worked with that particular person, whether it was a cameraman or a presenter or a producer?

RB: I think some of the specialist cameramen were great. The BBC in the old days it had film units with film

crews on the staff and all the equipment was there. Now there aren't any film crews on the staff really. I mean there are people on contract for quite a long time or on a big series *Planet Earth* (13). I mean they'd be on the books for two or three years perhaps. But in those days they were in base and when I went to Borneo with David, I mean that was a BBC film crew.

And also what happened then is you had people who were independent who had their own equipment and were very often naturalists who became photographers. So it was a pleasure to work with them because they really knew their stuff. I'm not saying the BBC guys didn't know about animals but they were just very competent cameraman. They might have been at a football match one day and then they'd be doing wildlife. Whereas these wildlife cameramen —and they became quite famous. There was a chap called Eric Ashby who filmed foxes in the New Forest and he, he lived in this little cottage, and the foxes were in his garden. So he just really knew the New Forest. So working with him, although he often worked independently of course, was a great pleasure. And of course, you'd go to the most wonderful places with these, they were terrific guides apart from being cameramen and good company.

Int: Any other names that stand out? I've seen the foxes with Eric Ashby so I know what you're talking about.

RB: There was a chap called Ron Eastman, he lived in a mill down in Hampshire which the river actually went under his house so of course you saw wonderful river stuff. He did a fairly famous film on kingfishers called The Kingfisher (14). He used to train these kingfishers. He wanted a shot of a fisherman with a fishing rod with a kingfisher on the end of it. So he, he had this dummy person sat on the bank with a rod you see and the kingfisher regularly came and sat on end of the rod, and got used to this dummy. And then one day he put a man there and got the shot with a real person. And so he just knew his birds. Again it's working with someone who really likes natural history.

Those people are still out there. I mean Martin Colbeck, for example, worked on elephants for eight years, I think, the same group of elephants. So he knows every single elephant so…and a scientist helping him. So if you're the producer on that show it's a really privileged place to be. And now I make my own films with a small camera with profession broadcast quality, so we can all do that in a way and spread the market. I mean not to the quality of Planet Earth (13). That is high definition, that is special stuff and a very good budget for a very long shoot if necessary or I think with the snow leopard I think they went three times to really hard, tough, mountain places and eventually got some good stuff.

5. Difficulties during filming

Int: And have you been to places — you must have been to places where people had no idea about films and television. And what was it like working with the local people there and trying to explain to them what you were doing? Before we —I mean now you can just turn the camera on and you could replay what you've, what you've just filmed. But back then when you were working on film, when you were working with local people, how did you explain what you were doing with your Bolex or Aeroflex camera?

RB: Well — it's not easy because there's obviously a language problem. If you go back to the Borneo thing, obviously we didn't speak their language. But in fairness, you know we weren't filming people that much. We were perhaps with people but maybe we hired a guide who would translate. So I, at that time I was not actually filming interviews or filming people very much. It was as it were pure wildlife and certainly Life on

Earth (10) and Living Planet (15), obviously that was pretty pure, pure natural history. Yes, you normally have a guide. Those kind of people, as I was saying with scientists as well, you just have to have that. You can't just turn up and you know start filming something successfully.

Int: But how do you go about explaining to somebody who has no concept of television or film? If you need a local guide to help you to find your rare frog, how do you explain what you were doing? You're making a film but they had no concept or didn't it matter? Did you just—?

RB: It's difficult to know back then really. I think most people knew what a camera was, I mean they knew what photographs were.

Int: But even tribes that have, never had any contact with white man really. Or did you not—?

RB: No, I didn't really do that. I mean do you remember the famous sequence where David meets, it was in New Guinea I think, where he met a tribe that had never met man before and were possibly cannibals? (16) And he didn't know what to do and they came down the hill towards him. I think, yes, I think it was filmed, the meeting was filmed. And they come down the hill, some big black things with spears, and I think David said, oh, good afternoon and it was fine. Obviously they didn't understand what he meant but didn't know what to say you know he might have been speared but he said, "oh, good afternoon."

Int: Were you there filming with him?

RB: No, it was nothing to do with me. But that was an example where you really were head on with potentially dangerous people who certainly didn't speak your language.

Int: And I mean did you have any classic misunderstandings or dangerous situations that you got into because people didn't understand you and you didn't understand them?

RB: No. And you know….

Int: And you must have been in some life threatening situations which may or may not be due to language?

RB: Not with people. I mean people always ask what is the most dangerous animal you've met or filmed, and normally you know, it's good to say something. But I mean I've been more scared of a mosquito or something on a lettuce leaf, that'll get inside you and give you some awful disease, than being attacked by a giant snake. I mean, don't often seen snakes. I was nearly killed by a bear, everyone's got a bear story.

Int: Give us your bear story.

RB: The bear story, yes. Well, that was with a BBC crew in Alaska and there was these two grizzly bears, quite big bears, on the other side of a valley, and they were quite a long way away. So I said to the crew you guys stay here, safely on this side of the valley, and I'll go round the back of the hill on the other side and nudge these bears towards you. It shows how naive I was, right, right? I'll move them down the slope so you can get closer pictures of them. So, of course, I turn up around the back of this hill to nudge these bears towards the camera, and of course the bears weren't nudgeable. They just turned round and saw me and ran towards me.

For some reason, and this was all on film actually, I threw down my anorak. I had a rather sexy anorak with a red lining and I threw that down. I don't know why I did it because what you're supposed to do, if you're charged by a bear, is to lie down and pretend to be dead. Which, of course, is absolutely what you don't do because all your adrenalin is running and you just think I've got to get out of here. So I ran back up the hill and down the other side away from the camera, disappeared from view. On the other side, because it was north facing, it was all covered in snow and ice so I sort of skidded down this slope and these two great bears were standing on you know, their hind feet, six feet high each, and they didn't follow me down.

So I got back to the crew and they said, that's fine, we got that, nice. Everyone's got this bear story so I was in the pub later with an old-timer, an Alaskan bloke, and I said have you ever been charged by a bear? I thought it was going to be my story and he said not more than $10. So he just knocked me down and that morning I'd been chased up a tree by a moose as well. So it wasn't a great day. I survived.

Int: Any other very dangerous encounters? You must have had a few.

RB: Well, it was just me being silly. No, not really. I think you're always frightened of these small things or parasites or something sort of scary like that.

Int: Have you ever got really sick on a trip because of something you've eaten or drunk, a mosquito bite or something like that, and that's really affected the, the filming?

RB: No. I think because of health and safety now you have to fill in a great form, don't you, to say what you're going to do and what the risk is, and obviously protect yourself. No, I just think you just have to be careful, take local advice. I mean, I know, it's not very interesting that one doesn't have lots of stories but the thing is, is you're good, if you know what you're dealing with and if you do get help locally, then you just don't get into this situation. It is remarkable when you think of all the crews, for example, now that are going round the world and go into more and more difficult places, that there aren't more accidents I think. I mean you'd think every now and then someone would certainly be badly injured or even killed. When you think people go skiing you know, and they're damaged all the time.

6. Life in the field

Int: And what about life in the field? When you're going — in Borneo for three months with the same crew of people, what is it like? Is there a great camaraderie that has to exist to just survive those three months with each other? Or how…what's that relationship like with your crew? How do you work at that if you're working with people that you maybe don't get on with or you don't work with them in the first place?

RB: Yes. I mean suspect the best crews are those people who are good with other people. I think you'd be kind of selected out if you were someone whose short-tempered or somehow unpleasant, or wasn't good in a small group. You just wouldn't be in a job. You would have been selected out or you wouldn't get much work. I think it's true of any small group, isn't it? When you go on holiday you know you get on each other's nerves, and you have to watch out for that and be honest with people, say I don't like the way you move your hands or something. Some little thing that gets on your nerves you actually have to come out and say well I hope….

Smoking would be a problem. I mean in those days everyone smoked. I think now you'd have to say, well, I hope you don't mind but you don't smoke. You just have to be honest and tolerant. But I think cameraman are tolerant anyway, I mean that's why they're there, they're survivors and they are adaptable.

Int: Have you had any really big bust-ups with people on location?

RB: No, I don't think so. I think managed to head it off that's probably what's happened, you know, that we've seen something coming, some tension building up. I suppose it comes back to the fact that if you're well organised and you're getting good help then you're successful. And you know, there's this thing about always try and shoot something on the first day, and obviously if it's good that's even better. But as soon as you feel you're winning the morale, of course, goes up and that what I really admire about these cameramen who go and wait and wait and wait you know, trying to film a snow leopard, and it's cold and you know they're in a tent. Day after day there's nothing and then they find some footprints or something.

There's the famous thing 'you should have been yesterday'. And you know its even 'you should have been here 10 minutes ago' and that is a real killer because you've just missed it, and maybe Geographic got it the day before, you know that kind of thing. So morale is crucial and so one of the jobs for the producer, well for everyone but particularly the producer, is this team thing to keep spirits up you know. If you can get good stuff early on then that sort of sets you up.

Of course in the old days with film you didn't know if it had come out, as you say, you had to send the stuff back and I went…I remember going to but that's another story… you had to send the stuff back, and you didn't know until you get a report if you had got it. Of course, if there was some fault, a problem, it was probably too late, you'd left the area.

Int: Have you had any situations like that where you've thought got a sequence and then you find out that there was a hair in the gate or the film's been exposed or something?

RB: No. I think it's great credit to Kodak or somebody or the labs, the labs were pretty good then, the film labs. I've only been to China once and we went there to film these very rare Siberian cranes. No one knew at that time where they bred, they just knew that they wintered in this huge lake called Poyang Lake in China. So I went there with Hugh Maynard. He was actually the assistant when I was in Borneo and been a great friend of mine ever since. So we went and filmed these cranes and we brought the rushes back out of China to bring them home and it had been a really tough trip, difficult.

It went through this X-ray machine and I think it must have been said in Chinese as well as in English somewhere, because I realised that it had gone through this X-ray system which wipes film. So I thought I've got to look at these cans and I thought, well, that's it, its damaged, its wrecked and the tension till the labs processed it was terrible and it was, in fact okay, but that was a very nasty moment.

7. Films Richard is most proud of

Int: On a more positive note. If you look back at all the work that you've done, all the films that you've made and all the projects that you've been involved in, what is, what are you maybe most proud of?

RB: I suppose Life on Earth (10) in that it, you know, it is an important piece of television. I think it was voted the seventh most important documentary in one of those Channel 4 things. I think if you can measure a difference from a film you've made that is probably the most satisfying thing because mass television, it's really difficult to know whether it's made a difference. I mean there's different reasons for making television. If it's just a job, that's fine, if it's playing football that's a job and it can be I'm sure very interesting, particularly if you're interested in football.

If you're interested in wildlife and it's future, then if you can make a film that's helped that wildlife that is really pleasing but it's very difficult to measure. I mean you can change people's attitude. The British public are more interested probably now in polar bears or protecting polar bears, you know than if they had not seen them on television.

When we did a film in Sweden on wolves, that was very satisfying because it was a very interesting story about this last family of wolves left in Sweden, in one remote area near the border with Norway. And there was a female and some cubs, and a man had shot this female. And so we went and interviewed him and of course the cubs had died because they didn't have a mother. So that was the end of wolves in Sweden, zero, and we made a film about this story. We used a lot of news footage about how these wolves had survived until then and then tragically this man had shot one, or the female. It was run on Wildlife on One, I think, on BBC1 and actually people stopped buying Volvo cars as a protest, Swedish car. They wrote or they phoned up the embassy in London and they said Sweden, you're supposed to be a civilised country, a rich country, yet you haven't got room for one female wolf, you know.

All right, the chap shouldn't have shot it but the fact is there was a tremendous outburst and the Swedes were quite embarrassed. The government changed the law and there are now 100 wolves in Sweden, that's the sort of quota they're allowing. So I mean the wolf is doing well there, not entirely because of that programme. But I mean if you wanted to say, well, did that programme do any good, I was say it did.

A lot of other programmes don't do any good directly like that. Yes, they increase interest and sympathy. I think what I do now, which is local stuff which may also go on local television, is particularly satisfying because you know you can change the lives of a community or children, or indeed reach an important businessman or minister with different films at different levels. So it's rather different from mass television where you're reaching 6 million British people. You might be reaching six people but they might be more relevant to the future of that place or that wildlife than the people at this end. Who really in a way they can't do much.

You think of all the people that have been and filmed in Madagascar, all the big people have been there. Attenborough's been there, Charlotte Uhlenbroek's been there, Steve Irwin went there. They've all been there but those films never end up in Madagascar. So when you go there you can see awful things happening and people don't realise what's going wrong. They don't know what the animals are. One of the first films I did when I left the BBC was actually about a lake in Madagascar. We made a 17 minute film with a local crew and we had people in the film. We went and asked them what they wanted to be seen doing in the film, and so on, and this film has effectively changed the lake. Now that might have slipped back but they were killing a very rare animal that only lived on that lake, and they didn't know that animal was there.

Now that film could have been shown in England, it wouldn't have helped the lake. It would have made an interesting programme but the fact that it was shown to all the villages round this lake, and they got very excited that they'd got this animal, they didn't know. They were eating it, in fact they were barbecuing it because they would burn the reeds which were actually very useful to them. If they'd managed the reed beds they could have had a long-term product there. But they were killing this lemur, this little animal, they were over-fishing the lake and they were basically trashing it. And, you know, they just didn't understand the lake.

So this film, this single film, with these people in the end saying we're going to save this animal, we love it, we're not going to burn the reeds, we're not going to over-fish, we're going to stop fishing for two months you know so that the fish can come back. You know to see the audiences in these villages, that is so much more satisfying, not the Life on Earth (10) I suppose because it's a completely different. But for a lot of television that I was doing I wouldn't say it wasn't doing any good and I enjoyed doing it, I was very privileged to go some of these places and see things. But I mean on Natural World (7) and so on it wasn't what I wanted to do. That's why, you know, I moved on.

Int: So you think you get more of a kick now from doing those smaller projects than you did back then doing something as huge as Life on Earth (10)?

RB: I do and actually it can build back the other way. As I say, these films can go on local television. It's a really different, when I say discipline, but what we're doing is making lots of films. In that case we only did one film but we then moved on to a different sort of pilot scheme if you like, where we made quite a lot of short films, again with local interest, including the local people.

My colleague Ben [Please], he's one of my Bright Green Sparks, so I've managed to encourage people who want to do this kind of thing and they do it sort of independently of me. They do different kinds of films. So Ben was very interested in water and in Tanzania he got this group of children to do the music, and they all sing this song. Then the film was shown up in Kenya and the Kenyan children were copying this song and singing it, and that became a hit in Tanzania. It became, it was in the hit parade.

Then there's a girl called Sarah [Matthews] and she actually specialises in music videos. She was in West Africa, in Gabon, and she did like an X Factor session in a village, and she got all these people to do rap and singing, and selected the winners. Then she filmed this music video of this action which was terrific and that became a hit, and President Bongo no less, President of Gabon, thought it was a great record. It was all in French about conservation and now it's all over Gabon.

And then these films can be combined together, so you can put together a package of music videos and

send them out to different countries. So this stuff is shared out and it can get on local television, as it did in Tanzania, and it's even possible that it could come back oddly onto the BBC if the Natural History Unit said, well, this is an interesting project, we'll run it on a Natural World. I've offered to them, they may or may not do it. But I think it's a positive sign of what can be done by local people and with small crews. And you know people are going to make films on mobile phones soon. Africans are going to be competing, they're going to have a little film festival in the village. This is just the way things going and for a non-tech person, you hear me, I think it's rather exciting.

8. Memorable experiences and embarrassing moments

Int: Yes we were talking about best moments, most memorable experiences. If you had to put down the worst experience that you've ever had when filming what would that be? Apart from that guano with David Attenborough. The lowest point.

RB: It was probably something like at Krakatoa where it was very, very uncomfortable. I don't think we've ever missed something we were really going for. I mean that sounds rather arrogant but because of the help that people give you. I think that would be the worst thing to have some crucial sequence and just not get it, and that's the sort of nightmare that you have. Or get there just after the animal's flown off or the nest has been destroyed or something like that. So I really don't have a —

Int: But have there not been any moments where you've lost kit or somebody's got injured and it's just all going horribly wrong, and there's this incident pit that you just fall into. Have you never had an experience like that?

RB: No, it sounds awfully arrogant but not as bad as that.

Int: Not arrogant. You're obviously very well organised

RB: I don't think it could have been that bad. I'm sure there are lots of disappointments and frustrations, and all those sort of things. But, no, and it is really that in terms of the subject, filming the subject, you shouldn't set out to try and film it if it's stupid or impossible. Of course, there are some things like Life on Earth (10), we went to film the coelacanth which had never been filmed in the wild at that time, and that was in the Comoro Islands. So we went out there, we had David with us and we had a very good underwater cameraman. He had this idea, it sounds a bit Heath Robinson now, but it was a long cable with a camera on it. The idea was just to float up and down on the sea with this cable with the camera on hoping to bump into a coelacanth and it bumped into a rock so one minute we had a picture of the seabed and the next minute we had nothing. So that was out and that was disappointing because we'd gone all the way there to film the coelacanth.

In fact, we then packed up and came home. I think we probably had a spare camera but we just weren't going to get it so we left, apart from this chap Peter Scoones who was a rather eccentric, brilliant underwater cameraman. He was there on his last day picking up some extra shots and that day there was a government revolt, so that wasn't a great day from that point of view politically. The second thing that happened, there was an eruption and the road was closed with red hot lava

The third thing that happened was that he was in his room and a chap knocked on the door at the hotel and said oh there's a coelacanth in the harbour. In fact, a chap had caught a coelacanth, a fisherman, and towed it in, so it was a very big fish about this big still alive. So Peter grabbed his stuff. He didn't speak French but he went down there, persuaded this fisherman to release this great fish that he'd proudly brought in, and he got these few shots, just a few shots, of the thing sort of moving. And then he came back with the rushes and we said how did you get on Peter, and he said there was this revolution and then there was an eruption. Oh any luck with the coelacanth? Well, I think so, he kept it right to the end. The whole Unit turned out when we went down to the viewing theatre and there were these rather poor shots really now but at the time this was a marvel.

So that was a very much up and down experience, and for Life on Earth (10) it was really a crucial animal in terms of evolution, one of the earliest fishes.

Int: What about embarrassing and funny moments when animals had done what they were meant to do? Anything to do with poo perhaps and animals?

RB: Well, there was that guano, that was quite a lot of poo I suppose. I don't know, not really. Again this sounds really boring but things tend to go, even with animals which are typically unpredictable. As people say, combination of animals and weather. If you're in a place where the weather's tricky then that's a pretty dodgy combination. But maybe it's just that one forgets those bad moments. They aren't bad, they aren't disasters. I mean the coelacanth perhaps was the nearest thing we had to a complete failure, and that was so good in that it just squeaked through at the very end.

Int: So you've never had the star of a show die on you or you fried a frog in the lights in a set or something like that? Have you never had any really major issues with any animals that you've filmed? I'm digging deep here —

RB: You are. I'm trying to think of these terrible moments. I have already thought about this a bit but I couldn't really dredge anything out of the archives in my mind as bad as that. I mean yes disappointments and frustrations and all that sort of thing, it sort of comes with the job really. I mean it is more positive really because when you do get a bonus, when you are lucky with the weather or the animal, that is when you feel good, that's when you really feel pleased. Of course, if it makes a great sequence and then if people really like the sequence then, of course, that just carries on, that pleasure carries on. I think when you work with a good team like Life on Earth (10) team to get that recognition after three years work.

People used to ask David at the end, they always ask him, journalists always asked him what are you going to do next, and he says he doesn't know. Actually I don't think he does and he's usually so tired, and we're so exhausted, that we don't think ahead. I think my biggest general depression was after those big series, of the two big series, because you get so tired and there's such a high in a way that when it goes out and if it's successful, everyone loves it, you feel great. Then it's flat, there's nothing, and that's pretty bad. You just don't have no energy, no interest, and you don't think you'll get out of it. You go to the doctor kind of thing and say I'm going to commit suicide. Well, what have you done? I've done the series. Oh, that's a great series you know and you think oh gosh — you just drop down.

I don't know if that's typical. I think it's typical of life though probably when you go down, maybe like having a baby if I might say so. Is it postnatal depression? Is that what happens if you didn't —?

Int: But I think it's the way with musicians as well. They have these tremendous highs. They've just performed in an amazing concert and had this amazing audience and this amazing emotion, and then there's that terrible — the next day it's like after you've been on drugs or something like that. It's that terrible low that you hit and I think it is probably the same way when, you've done something unbelievably successful and rewarding and it's like, well, what do I do next?

RB: Yes

9. Life after the BBC NHU

Int: We've talked about Life on Earth and we've mentioned Living Planet a little bit. But you went from Life on Earth, the next major series was Living Planet. What did you do after that in the Unit and then how did that lead you to eventually leave the Unit and set up on your own?

RB: Well, it was this problem of following on. In a way I'd been given my two big series to do and that was fine. So I think, I wasn't in line for another of those. There were other people coming up who did Trials of Life (18), for example. Interesting, by the way, that all David's big series have got the word life or living in, and in fact when we did Living Planet (15) we wanted to call it Planet Earth actually. David, because it wasn't really his decision it was a BBC decision as to what to call the Living Planet (15), and we wanted to call it Planet Earth. David very politely but firmly, he would say things gently like, well, if you call it Planet Earth I don't want to be in it, little things like that. So he steered us round it and it'd be interesting to know actually now whether from the start he had this encyclopaedia idea which is now culminating now in Life in Cold Blood. But Trials of Life (18), Life with Plants (19), Life with Birds (20), life or living is in all those, so that's his life's work apart from fish. I don't actually mention that to him because he's missed out fish, he's 82 now, I don't think he'll do fish.

So, you know, these big series are really the end of your career you could argue, in terms of feeling that you'd arrived. So there is this difficulty. On the other hand, you can go off and do single Natural Worlds, if you can choose single programmes that you want to do, your favourite animal or something very worthwhile. What happened really with me was that at that time there was not much interest in conservation, it was always seen to be as not very good for the ratings - it was very often seen to be gloom and doom. It became labelled as one of those gloom and doom films, and on Sunday nights if you had made one of those films it usually ended with the bulldozer arriving or a chainsaw. So you had this beautiful forest in Costa Rica or somewhere and then you just knew at the end, five minutes from the end, that this bloody bulldozer would show up or this man with the chainsaw would come along. You'd go to bed Sunday night miserable because you'd seen yet another of those programmes with beautiful things just being destroyed.

And quite understandably really the controllers, the people who actually choose the films, you can point the finger at the Unit to some extent, but in the end it probably is someone in London who is saying we don't any gloom and doom, we just want nice cuddly animals or something. So I got very frustrated because the places I'd been to, for example I've been back to Borneo and read about it, Borneo's just been trashed for palm oil and so on, and the orangs were in bad shape and no one was telling us this. I mean you could read about it magazines perhaps and people would tell you, and cameraman saw what was happening but were

powerless because they were doing a nice cuddly film on orangs.

I even remember filming with David and talking about orang-utans by a bit of forest, and the soundman kept saying hang on, hang on, we've got a chainsaw in the background and even David just didn't want to know about that problem. He just wanted —alright he had to do a programme and he had to do a sequence. But people know this was happening but it wasn't being seen by the audience. No-one knew and that was really frustrating.

Int: So how did that change? If the controllers don't want to show those sort of programmes how does anybody else have the power to get those programmes on television?

RB: Well, I don't know. Attenborough in a way help start the change when he did Save the Planet (21). So he committed two years, I think it was six programmes, it was probably two years of his life to a subject which actually didn't interest him very much at the time. I mean he's an optimist and he was always associated with good news and beautiful animals and positive, that nice man David Attenborough. So he really didn't want to spend two years explaining that actually it wasn't like that. But he did and obviously whatever Attenborough wants to do the controller will probably accept it, even if it's gloom and doom.

So he kind of broke through there but then it all went quiet again because he'd done his series, he'd put the message out there but no one else was doing it. It was still labelled gloom and doom. So even though the controllers changed in London, BBC1 and BBC2, they still didn't want that on their channel. So it was because really of the press and particularly radio actually that this subject became more relevant. I think producers got cleverer at not making it gloom and doom with a bulldozer at the end. Maybe they put the bulldozer at the front and said, look, there's a problem here which can be fixed. It was just a different mindset.

But we had this legacy of those old gloom and doom programmes which is still there and you still see programmes like that. I'm not saying you shouldn't do them because it's a fair way to tell a story. But it's bad for conservation and there's so much more positive stuff you can do and ways of telling stories. I mean these days anything to do with supermarkets, everyone's interested in shopping and air miles and organic and stuff. So nature is part of everything we do as we now know with climate change but then it's taken that long. We were talking about climate change 10 years ago, 15 years ago and ignored, and it's just extraordinary the way it has taken off, I think, in the last, well, certainly the last year.

10. The Brock Initiative

Int: How does the way that you work now, the films that you produce now, how does that fit in? Well, how is it different from the films that you made when you were at the Unit and why did you need to leave the Unit to make those sort of films? It brings us up to the current day, present day, about what you're doing and the films that you make.

RB: Well, I suppose the frustration was that the gloom and doom films killed themselves off, apart from State of the Planet(21). So the frustration for me was this stuff wasn't getting out there, nothing was being done about this. It was a con almost and it wasn't an organised con, it was just the way the system was working with controllers and, you know, their attitude to those sort of programmes.

So I felt I had to do something else and I had to do it out there, even if it went on British television. Even though gloom and doom might have been shown occasionally it wouldn't do any good. Alright, people would send money to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) or write to their MP or something. But I mean it wasn't reaching Madagascar, it wasn't reaching Borneo. So what's happened now is because there are, not just me, but other people, people attached to me or people not even attached to me. But they are doing, if you like, road shows in Borneo to try and deal with the palm oil problem and going into villages and working with the local people, and making films with them. We now do this, as it happens, in eight countries and we do these music videos, that reaches people who don't have TV. There's the technical side about how you show them.

So on the website we have what we call a formula which is a sequence of things you can do. Six or eight things you can do, given any issue anywhere, to turn film into something useful and make a difference there. So the first thing you do is you go to the place and talk if you can, obviously you need a translator perhaps. But you talk to the people in that place about that issue and maybe take some footage of similar things, or take a camera and do some filming with them. So you invite them to help you make this film, you consult them, that's what we did in Madagascar.

When we went to the lake in Madagascar there were four things that they wanted. They wanted cattle, they wanted fish, they wanted themselves, and they wanted the lake, that's actually all they wanted. Now we put the lemur, this little animal, we added that in and we made it an interesting story. So what you do, you do your market research if you like upfront. So that's the first thing you do, find out what they're interested in, show them some footage and get some results, and take some footage perhaps. If there's someone there who can use a mobile phone camera, you know pull them into the operation.

The second thing you need to do is find out at this place who you need to reach. So instead of making one film as you would for television you might make 10 films or 20 short films. For example, it could be for the minister or the top businessman, it could be for a single individual who is a decision maker, a stakeholder at the top, right down to the child in the school on the beach, the fishing village. So if it's a fishing problem, for example, you need to think of all the ways that you can interest those people with the films for those people. So when you're talking to the minister or you're talking to the businessman, you talk in not just their language, Spanish or whatever it is, but in business-ease or political-ease. Obviously for a child you talk in a different way and you use music and make different films. So you tailor make these film so that they hit the target hopefully.

So, a) the content is what you think they want. I mean you can't really ask a businessman what kind of film he wants but you can certainly ask a villager what kind of film. So these people are joined in the making of the film, it's targeted for them. You then have to make sure they can see it. So obviously businessman or minister would have a VHS or DVD player or something. But certainly when you get down to school level and people who don't have television you've got to project these films and that's really exciting, to go out and we've filmed this many times. In fact, a few weeks ago I was in Africa and we went to a very eroded place, it's really trashed but it could be recovered. It's basically been overgrazed by too many cattle and goats. And we knew — they told us there was a village near here but the place we set up was not in the village, it was just in this desolate area.

In this case we used a generator, a small generator to run the projector. So we started the projector and the noise, of course, got some interest. So first the animals turned up. So some goats start arriving and some cattle and stand around looking at this generator which is making a bit of a noise. Eventually the people

came from the village, they heard the noise, and it was about 5 o'clock so it was going to get dark in about an hour. About 30 people turned up with their babies and the dogs and everything. They clustered round and of course by then we'd set up the projector and the screen, and we showed them films about how you can repair a damaged landscape.

There were a bunch of different films, I mean the great thing about these films is that they are very varied in terms of their style. So again this is completely different from television, it's a completely different approach. Instead of making one film you're making 20 or 30 short films, and some are funny films, there are sorts of things that you can do in different places. You can take a child from school and go up in a plane and see it for the first time. Very interesting also people who'd never seen where they live from the air.

Int: How do these people react when they see these films?

RB: You see some people have seen television or have seen — they have these video clubs, the village has a place where they show videos and they've seen very sophisticated like Kung Fu movies. So aerial images are not new. On the other hand it might be. They certainly would be new of their village. So, for example, if you flew over the village and had a five minuter just with music on it. What you'd find is that they would be so excited to see their village and they all start talking to each other, and they say there's my house down there and there's my goat and so on. Or if you're on the shore, they see the reef, they've never seen the shape of the reef. So, it sounds a bit cynical, you've got them if you got their interest then you can put on another film about something else to do with their lives. If it's about fisheries you could talk about fisheries in other places which have gone wrong like in Newfoundland, and what can go wrong or the idea of creating a reserve somewhere where the fish can breed up and come out.

All these things are in your potential library and every time you have a show you can combine these short films. You can design this package - every Wednesday there's an half an hour show in the school hall or whatever it is, every week it's different. Every week they can have a repeat, their favourite. The teachers, if it's a school, can design this into a course and that what we intend to do in Kenya. We intend to get into the curriculum of the whole country.

So it's almost like making a film out of sequence, it's making a show out of films. If you want a bit of light relief in the middle you do put in a little music, you know, show. But you really need to know what these people want because the thing is it's flattering. I mean if you show the film upside down they'd still watch it. If you show it on a small screen in a big room the people at the back can't see it, they can't hear it. They'll still gaze at it because they wouldn't be doing anything else. So you really have to be quite ruthless with the potential equipment that you take to that event.

So you design the content, what the show is. You make sure if you can that you've got the right kit. So if you're in the bush, yes, you have to have a generator and a sheet and a projector and your films. So that's in the formula as well. Then ideally you have someone locally who will keep this going because what happens, as we know, sadly, very often when you leave the thing falls down, the momentum runs out. So it's really good if you've got almost like an agent who will keep this going and then that might be a question of money.

The other thing, very important, I should mention is that right at the beginning you have to find out if there's anyone else doing this. Because sometimes it's doubling up or in some cases it becomes competitive which

is a great shame. But what we've done is in Madagascar we did that one film as a pilot on the lake which apparently has saved the lake in Kenya, we're doing a whole country. So we're going to make 60 films there. It so happens that in Kenya there are 15 places which are already education centres. They're not connected up yet because no-one's wanted to do it but they've got facilities. In some cases they've got an education officer but they don't have any films or they have long, old films about bears in Alaska or something, not really relevant to the place.

So what we intend to do in Kenya is actually establish 60 films of our own. We can invite other people who have films to put them into the library, so you've got this big supply to come. Then, as I say, you devise, or get other people to devise, a combination of these films appropriate to their community. Then these films can be moved around these 15 places and that's just Kenya. So you start moving across into Tanzania, expand into Tanzania, more films from Tanzania, that can work together. So in the end potentially you have a network, you could have a global network, and we are trying with sea turtles to do that, to connect all the sea turtle people - and there are many, many of them all over the world, very often dispersed, very often isolated, quite often demoralised. But if they could have access to films about turtles and all sorts of ways about the problems that turtles have or the solutions about helping them, then that's another use of this idea.

As I say, I think with mobile phones and people doing it themselves in the end, what they should be doing is making their own films. Not trying to do it from here but encouraging them, getting them started. When people see it working it's so exciting because it's proven. You can talk about this forever but you have to do it, you have to show that screen, show that film on that screen to that audience, particularly the children. You like to think that in 20 or 30 years they will be fishing better, they will be repairing their landscape if they've seen it on film. Because if there's only a single way to change things to make a difference it's got to be visual. I've nothing against music and sound and commentaries, and so on, but I mean those images which are now so deliverable on a mobile phone or an IMAX screen, probably not in Africa, but that's the way to go.

Int: So if you could make any film, anywhere, about anything have you done it or is there still that ultimate still out there to be made?

RB: Well, I think it's so many films you see. I think it's almost like going back to the old television idea that you make a film for a slot. It's a 50 minute film for Sunday night, BBC2, that's what you do and you're proud of it, it takes you a year. That's what you do if you're in television or a series. But this is not that.

Int: Well, maybe what's the next project that's so important? Obviously you're working in Kenya at the moment, Tanzania. Where's the next place for you that is absolutely critical that you go to and change somehow?

RB: You see I don't think it is that. I mean we are working in these eight countries. Now they've emerged almost by chance. I mean this formula can be applied anywhere and everywhere there are some changes that can be made. So a chap called Alan Pleace he desperately wanted to go to Galapagos. So he went there, he took some friends there and he worked with the Galapagos people, and they made a music video there. They got the local pop singer to do it in Spanish and it's really a social problem. They had to really work out how to help Galapagos and it was really about reaching the people to talk about people, not about saving iguanas particularly.

So I mean that was a place, that just emerged because that guy wanted to do that, and the same with

Sarah. She went to Indonesia and Gabon. So the places really sort of emerge. But what I would say is that when I've finished, as it were, what I would like to leave behind me is the formula. Because I think the formula, those things I said you need to do or you can do, those six things you can do. Now that's on the website, that is being, a, tested and things coming out about how you apply it in different places, it works in some ways than others. It's been tested and it's been proved. So if you can actually point, and this may take time, but after 10 years if you can say, well, actually that formula, applied in that place, saved that lake or whatever it was. That formula is then shown or available to the whole world as a Brock Initiative Formula, that would be the greatest pleasure really, and you could die happy with that.

So it's not really one film or even a bunch of films. It's an idea that has been borrowed from television, and I've nothing against television but it's so fragmented now and fortunately I mean there's still a lot of range, from really trash wildlife television stuff to you know Planet Earth(13). So as long as there's a lot of slots I think we've got a lot of choice.

11. Opinions on current wildlife television and environmental issues

Int: What do you think of wildlife TV today? I mean there is a huge range from the sublime to the ridiculous but what do you like and dislike about what's on television about wildlife? The best and the worst I think.

RB: I mean obviously I have an interest in conservation so something that's got that element. Not sort of in your face, not preaching at you necessarily but I like to have that perspective. I think these days it's really, I was going to say misleading. I think if you don't the mention the situation, if you do a purely escapist film then these days people are actually going to be thinking - they want a perspective on the situation. They can't perhaps just escape and look at flamingoes for 20 minutes. They need to know, well, what's happened to this lake? Are there any people living here? What is the future for these flamingoes? A lot of people will be wanting to know that and it needn't necessarily be particularly good or particularly bad. They just need to have that dimension and that's what I would look for.

Int: What happens if they don't? Is there still a place for a wildlife film that doesn't tell you that, that is just purely escapist blue chip? This is a lovely planet, look at these amazing things, shouldn't we celebrate it?

RB: I think there's a place for that. I mean the easy answer is, of course, as long as there are enough slots and now you've got BBC3 and BBC4, there's going to be all of these things. I mean if you find your way round it and frankly you can go to DVDs and all sorts of other things you can look at. I mean for me the meerkats have been very successful but I just don't like that anthropomorphising and giving them names. I just feel uncomfortable about that and I'm not that interested in pure animal behaviour.

So for me I wouldn't watch that but I think it's great it's on there, in the same way you've obviously got something big like Planet Earth (13) or Blue Planet (22). I think those are always going to be popular. If you've got that sort of money you will attract people by the sheer brilliant quality of the thing. I don't like fang television as I call it. This almost adulation of fierceness and death and destruction. I know this is natural behaviour but this jeopardy, to use your word, it's got to be in there, that music's got to be in there, and it's almost that the programme makers are revelling in this killing. You'll see killing and predator and predation very often in the titles, Natural Born Killers. There's almost a snuff movie flavour to it.

The odd thing is I don't think actually people want to watch much agony. They probably want to see the kill because it completes the event and, of course, that does happen all the time. It's just the way it's portrayed and even Attenborough's got a special voice for that kind of stuff. I mean I notice he switches into a certain kind of voice, 'the gazelle has no chance' and the music's going along, and then you see this crunch. You have a whole series on this, Born to Kill. What's it called?

Int: Killing for a Living. (23)

RB: Killing for a Living, (23) yes, that's a perfect exact example. So I'm not one for fang television. I think there's a risk with blue chip that these days, because it might be avoiding the truth, what I call the truth about the place, whether it's the planet or whether it's about Chew Magna or Somerset or Madagascar. I think if the controllers are putting that sort of stuff on BBC1 this would be my comment on Planet Earth (13) which I admire technically, enormously. But the risk they ran, but I think they got away with it, was that the Controller of BBC1 was obviously proud to have that on his channel with Attenborough doing the commentary. There was criticism from me and actually quite a lot of people saying, look, this is misleading. The planet is in trouble, we now know that definitely, but certainly even with Blue Planet (22) which was a few years ago. The oceans are in trouble yet Blue Planet (22) never, ever suggested there was even a b….y fisherman out there, apart from any pollution or anything.

So what happens is that the controller says, yes, I'll have Blue Planet (22), I'll put it on BBC1 at peak time, right. There'll be criticism saying this is misleading because you're not telling the truth about the oceans. Then the producer or the controller would say, ah, but there's something on BBC2 or there's something on BBC3 or 4. Well, BBC4 has about four viewers. So the people that see the truth about the oceans in the programme about the oceans as they really, are four people who are already in the know, that's probably why they've switched on. So it's simply confirming to them who already know.

So what happens because of the way the controllers have operated is that we on a cumulative basis are led to believe, if you like, that the planet is in great shape or the oceans are in great shape. So that is actually a lie. So 6 million people sitting at home thinking, oh, it's not too bad, read something in the paper or heard something on the radio. Or they say hadn't Planet Earth (13) looked at the paper lately because apparently the Arctic's melting and no one's told them.

So I think they got into a real trap there but they got away with it because Attenborough did those two programmes in the summer which told the truth on BBC1, and only Attenborough would get it on to BBC1. So it was at bit like Saving the Planet (21) revisited. Now of course, almost because he gave it his stamp of approval, I think even politically people said Attenborough's approved this. David said to me up till then he wouldn't say anything about this, a, because he's not an expert and, b, he actually thought it was a con. He thought this was made up by conservationists, all this climate change stuff, and it turned the corner earlier this year, no, sorry, the middle of last year, turned the corner when he did those programmes. Because he put his name to it and it was gloom and doom really. He was trying to be constructive but it was pretty bad news frankly.

But because then that reached the politicians eventually, we're now in the situation where it's number one and it's great. Not that I'm saying I tried to do this 10 years ago. I was aware of this 10 years ago and I was trying to do something.

Int: Nobody was listening.

RB: Yes.

Int: Are we at a turning point now with global warming being the number one issue that covers most papers? Is wildlife film making now at a turning point where the way we make films and the subjects that we choose to talk about and the stories that we tell, are they going to change radically literally over the last year?

RB: I think it's interesting. If you'd said, well, will meerkats more or less popular it's really difficult to know because what people might want to do is to escape to meerkats, where there are no problems apparently. I think it's really interesting to see how the public, and you're talking about the whole planet so you're talking about a pretty diverse public, actually get interested in this and want to do something, and learn more about it. Or whether they are going to escape from it or not even turn it on.

I think it's really an interesting reflection on humanity not just us, the British public. I personally — feel like genetically I don't think we're going to be able to make the sacrifices that we appear to need to do. I think right now, as we speak almost, aviation, not only in Britain but round the world, is the first brick wall that we've met and I don't know how they're going to solve it. We want to fly. If flying stopped civilization would collapse as it were. But we know if we go on flying and expand airports we're going to hit a problem. So aviation is the first really uncomfortable problem that we've hit and I just don't think people, human beings are able to deal with it.

So then you could say, well, if that starts to go like that then are people going to bother with wildlife? Does it matter if a polar bear goes? If we're going to go, bugger the bears, too bad. Or you can imagine now that Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, I imagine that their membership is strengthening and Greenpeace recently have had some great victories and they're really working well.

So it's very interesting. Whether this will be reflected on television I'm not sure. I was talking to Neil Nightingale and he had a meeting with Al Gore and David Attenborough, and it's really being discussed at that level. There was another meeting all the news people were brought in. So all the news departments were brought in to talk about climate change. I'm not sure if David was there and Al Gore was there as well. But once it's at that level and once it's on the news, once it's been rubber-stamped by David Attenborough if you like and now the government is talking about it, not doing anything but talking about it, it's right up front.

So it will be very interesting to see whether we shy away from the problem or want to watch more about it. But the fact that it's infiltrated everything we do like shopping and I'm doing stuff on the flower business at the moment which is really interesting. Everything we do, it's in all the sections, it's in the motoring section, it's in the travel section, it's in the financial section, it's probably in the football section somehow. Not because it's just fashionable but actually people have now started to connect these things.

So whether they start connecting us with the natural world and helping the natural world, I think that's 10 years in which these will become sorted, one way or the other. I mean we either make the big decisions or we won't.

12. Dream projects and current emerging talents

Int: Really completely off that topic. If you could go anywhere and film any animal where would you go, what would you film? What you would you experience? Have you done them all? Have you ticked them all off your list or are there still places that you haven't been to or animals that you haven't experienced?

RB: I think it will be a small animal, it will probably a frog.

Int: Back to your frogs again! What is so fascinating about frogs though?

RB: Well, I think it was that they were so unknown. They are quite cute. I mean Kermit, you know I wanted to do a film —as soon as you say Kermit people smile and I wanted to do something with David Attenborough and Kermit because Kermit's friends were in trouble. It was a conservation idea. Kermit's in this studio and David goes out and , Charlotte Uhlenbroek goes out, and people go out and report back to Kermit because apparently he's very expensive if you book Kermit. He flies first class and everything. He's actually interested in frogs, the guy who does Kermit. So you put him in studio, you don't have to send him out anyway because he goes first class but the others go out and report back. So Kermit is an attractive person and people smile when you talk about Kermit.

As I say, I just think they're cute animals. But it's just the most extraordinary adaptations that I admire and that's more interesting in a way with some obscure small animal than it is with a polar bear. I think the problem with the big animals is that they have been overexposed, let's say. So there's probably, what 20 large animals that just are always out there, aren't they - whales, dolphins, tigers, lions, gorillas, you know them. The charismatic mega fauna. You kind of run out of those in a way.

I think the context of their survival is another perspective that could be used now it's okay to do conservation. So the big stories on tigers are going to be about the survival of the tiger, not necessarily bad news. But that'd be good if there was more of that. But, no, I think my interest would be in some extraordinary little star nosed mole. I like the Nick Baker animals because he actually made an hour out of those, do you remember that, and the fish that goes up your willy. It was just well presented too. Can I say that?

Int: Yes you can. Actually talking about presenters, a lot of wildlife that we see on television is presenter led. It's not driven by the animals it's driven by the people and the experiences that people have with animals and the emotions that are attached with those. Who do you—I won't take this personally, wildlife presenter wise, who do you think we're still going to see around in 10 years time? Who's going to still survive because so many people fall by the wayside? The people are flavour of the month and then you never see them again. Who are the names that are really going to carry wildlife forward?

RB: Someone called Miranda somebody.

Int: I said I wouldn't be flattered, no. You mentioned Nick Baker. Do you like him?

RB: But I think you and Nick Baker are similar in that the public can tell if someone knows their stuff? All right, you could put a very good actor. They used to say Tomorrow's World (24) presenters were failed actors because they were actually good at being whatever they needed to be. But the public would or can see through that with wildlife certainly, that this person isn't the real thing. So quite often you'll see naturalist, Miranda, naturalist, Nick Baker, in the Radio Times to remind you that this person knows their stuff. But I think the public probably detect that just by the way they handle the animal or they even just talk about it. They just feel this is the truth, this is the real thing.

So I think anyone who's got that, and I keep coming back to David, David's got that of course a million times, partly because of his track record and of his age and his experience. So I think anyone who's got that conviction, if you like, that truth, is going to do well, and I think someone who looks comfortable in the field, I think that's important. They look as if they're used to being in the water or used to being up a tree or whatever it is. I think that's really important and to some extent delivery. But David Bellamy can't speak properly and he became a star almost because of it.

So I think how you speak is probably not terribly important. I think as long as you're happy with the camera and I've seen promos and so on sometimes with people who are just uncomfortable talking to this piece of glass. And other people it's like a friend, like I'm chatting to you and I think that's a great ability. And it's the way you move as well, isn't it? I mean you know this. You can move well, move with the camera, you're comfortable, you just fit in with that occasion.

Int: And what do you think about the Steve Irwins of this world, if we can talk about him briefly?

RB: Yes. Well I met Steve Irwin in Madagascar. He was very rude to me actually, I don't know why. I think he thought we were Pommies and didn't like us. But I actually saw the film afterwards and it was the strongest piece of conservation about Madagascar I've ever seen. It had him wrestling with things but he talked about these lemurs actually in a very good way and a very committed way I thought (25).

But I think it's bad, there's no easy to this one. I think it's bad that he is always, or so often, dealing with an animal which is uncomfortable or scared. I think that's exploitation and it shouldn't happen. On the other hand, of course kids like him, may get them interested in animals.

Int: Is that the right way to go about it though, always jumping on top of a crocodile?

RB: It is a way to do it. But as I said, I think as long as there's spectrum of broadcasting then you can choose to watch that or choose to watch David being completely different, and almost keeping out of it. I think there are certainly presenters who are on an ego trip and again you keep coming back to David because David is very humble in terms of the animal. He just lets it show how wonderful it is without him jumping around in front of the camera.

But there's a place, or there was a place for Steve Irwin and people like that. I think at one time there were about eight of those clones that were jumping on crocodiles. I mean poor crocodiles but there was a lot of

that action.

13. Advice for young filmmakers

Int: They're all scared of going the same way he did, I think. You do a lot of work with the younger people, with your Bright Green Sparks. You've got this project that you set up and you work with people who are fairly new to the industry but have got a lot of energy and are very passionate about what they do. For people who were starting and they want to go into the wildlife filmmaking industry, what single or piece of advice, or maybe three pieces of advice, would you give people if they're starting out and they want to make wildlife programmes?

RB: Well, it depends which country you're in but say you're in England which has the biggest number of wildlife filmmakers and cameramen. You then come quite quickly down to the BBC because 5 does a bit of natural history but they buy stuff in. You're talking about Bristol being the headquarters really of the business in the world, three or four hundred people working in that group of buildings. So it makes sense to physically be there and be around there because you never know who you're going to meet in the car park or the local pub, and you can arrange to meet people, happen to bump into people of course.

You've obviously got to have I think, as I said earlier, an interest in communicating. Instead of just saying, well, I'm mad about bats, you want to say, gosh you know, I'm mad about bats and I really want people to help bats and be interested in them, as if you were a teacher but you're not a teacher you're a broadcaster. So you want to have that desire. You certainly need to watch television. I mean some people quite proudly, I've even heard about people at interviews for a job saying, well, I don't watch television very much. It's almost like it's a good thing not to watch this awful stuff called television. What you really need to do is certainly before that interview to watch several programmes and get some tapes out or DVDs and do your homework, and then quote them.

So you've really got to appear to like the business, not just making the programmes, but actually what's out there and even looking at stuff you don't like, so you can comment sensibly. So then when you're talking to someone already in the business they realise that you're interested in what's out there and what could be better. So I think that's quite important just to keep up with what's going on.

Technically you can get a small camera, you can make your own stuff. You can see whether you've got an eye for a picture. It's like painting or something, people can't draw and paint but other people can, and I think it's the same with the cameraman. People can compose a picture if you're making your own film or directing someone, a cameraman, then some people just have a natural eye and some people don't. So it's probably worth finding that out, you probably know that anyway.

Then obviously offering it up as a sort of promo and I think these days that's what you have to do. You have to do your CV. You have to probably quite a slick promo because you're trying to reach a busy executive who's got a pile of promos on his desk or her desk, so you've got to get in there.

But in the end I suspect it's doing all those things and then you get a bit of luck. Someone is ill so can you come in and just take over for a day, or work experience, go on a trip. Maybe there's a budget. I think the BBC now is going to have some bursaries again, so you could actually apply and become a trainee and

actually get paid a bit to do it. But you obviously have to go through your selection process because there aren't that many of those opportunities.

But I think most people have got in just by luck. I think when I got in I did it by being persistence and of course the trick is not to be over persistent because people then get annoyed with you. So that is really quite difficult to judge.

14. Controversial moments

Int: Well, we're sort of coming towards the end now. Is there anything that, if you look back at your career, that you'd like to have done differently? Anything you think I should have done that or maybe I shouldn't have done that? Anything you'd change if you could rerun your life again? I think you've probably gone in the direction that you wanted to go in but would you rewrite any of your history at all?

RB: No. I think I was very lucky in the timing. I don't know, they always talk about the golden days of television, I'm not quite sure where that is because a lot of people say at the moment television is really rubbishy. But there is so much of it that you should be able to pick good stuff at any level, there's so much material out there.

So I think doing those two big series when I did them and when they were like original, certainly Life on Earth (13), that was very fortunate. So I would stick to that. I think I would have — maybe I would have left earlier and tried to do more of what I'm doing now. Because I'm my age I can only go on so many times, so that's why I'm interesting in leaving this legacy of the formula as an idea that is being proven now, and hopefully carries on. And I think —

Int: Because you are quite controversial. Maybe upset is too strong a word but you've probably annoyed and irritated a number of people in your time. Do you ever overstep the mark and I think, oh God, I really wish I didn't do that or I didn't say that? Or do you think all the things you've done have been engaged?

RB: Well, depending on exactly what you mean.

Int: But you like to step out.

RB: A Maverick is a polite word I have heard, yes. Well yes, it's usually to do with conservation. So to answer your main question really, what I would say is that I would have liked to been able to do more, either by leaving the BBC earlier and doing what I'm doing, or having more influence. That's what I was trying to do within the system was to have more influence, and that is why I got angry with people and I was in a way working against this system. This sort of anonymous system of the way the controllers choose what they put on their channels. So I wouldn't necessarily attack the Head of the Natural History Unit but that's what I have done because in a way it's not his fault. He has got to employ 300 people in his unit and he knows if he does yet another programme on tigers or polar bears, then the controller will say, oh yes, we like those. So it's then, as I say, the controller's decision.

So if I could have done more programmes on conservation sooner rather than in the last two years when there have been quite a lot, that would have been much better. That's why I got frustrated and I left to some extent because the stuff wasn't getting out there, and actually there was quite a groundswell. The younger people in the Unit all wanted to do this, in fact, there were secret meetings in pubs. It was like a mutiny starting to build up because these people had heard about it or even seen it, going on, and not being able to show it on television because the system blocked it.

But the system didn't do it deliberately. It wasn't the controller necessarily saying I don't want any conservation, it was just, yes, I'll have another programme on koala bears because the Unit suggested it. Because the Unit can then employ people to make films on koala bears. So that was the sort of frustration I felt and if I attack people and criticise them that was, if you like, a genuine motive. It's probably why I got – why I left actually because I took on Alistair Fothergill

Int: That's another –

RB: That's another tape isn't it!

END

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