

## Through Our Eyes: How Sir David Attenborough Shaped a Generation of Young Conservationists

As Sir David Attenborough turns 99 this week, I find myself reflecting on the enormous influence one man has had on my life—and the lives of so many other young people like me who've found a home in nature, behind the lens, and in the fight to protect what we love.

It's strange to think that someone I've never met could feel like such a constant presence in my journey. His voice has been the backdrop to my earliest wildlife memories. I can still remember sitting cross-legged in front of the TV, completely mesmerised, watching his documentaries with wide eyes and a racing heart. It wasn't just the animals that captured me—it was *how* he told their stories. Calm, thoughtful, curious, and always filled with wonder. He didn't just show us the natural world—he *invited* us into it.

And that's the thing about Sir David Attenborough. He never spoke down to us, even as kids. He trusted us with the truth. He made us feel like we could understand, like we could make a difference. And somewhere between those beautifully crafted narratives and breathtaking scenes, something sparked. For me, that spark became a camera. For others, it became a notebook, a pair of binoculars, a conservation dream, or simply a sense of responsibility to do *something*.

Today, I manage Young Wildlife Photographers of Southern Africa—a community built by and for young people who love wildlife, who care deeply about conservation, and who want to use photography to tell stories that matter. So many of our members will tell you the same thing: "I grew up watching Sir David Attenborough. He changed the way I saw the world."

He certainly changed the way *I* saw the world.

I started seeing not just animals, but personalities. Not just landscapes, but ecosystems. I started asking better questions. I started seeing beauty *and* fragility—and I knew I wanted to be part of the solution. Not someday, but now.

That's Sir David Attenborough's legacy. He didn't just inform; he *ignited*. He made caring about the planet not just important, but deeply personal. And in a world that often feels loud and fast and distracted, his quiet urgency cut through. He never shouted. He never blamed. He simply *showed* us what was at stake—and trusted that we'd step up.

And now, we have to.

At 99 years old, Sir David Attenborough has more than done his part. The baton is in our hands. It's up to us—the youth—to carry his message forward in our own ways. Whether it's photographing birds, planting trees, sharing stories, or speaking out on behalf of voiceless species, every action we take in defence of the natural world, honours him.

But I'll be honest—it's not always easy. Sometimes it feels like we're shouting into the void. That the challenges are too big. That no one's listening. But then I remember Sir David Attenborough's voice, steady and full of hope, telling us that *every choice matters*. That change is possible. That nature is resilient—if we give it a chance.

And so, we keep going.

We keep learning our bird calls. We keep chasing the perfect light. We keep building communities of passionate young changemakers. And most importantly, we keep *caring*. Fiercely. Unapologetically.

Sir David Attenborough once said, “The future of humanity, and indeed all life on Earth, now depends on us.” That’s not just a line—it’s our call to action.

So, Sir David Attenborough, thank you. For being our teacher, our storyteller, and our inspiration. For showing us the magic in the small things, and the urgency in the big ones. For giving us permission to fall in love with the world—and a reason to protect it.

We may be young, but we’re listening. We’re watching. And we’re ready.

Your legacy lives on in every image we take, every bird we ID, every cause we stand for. We’ll carry it with pride, with purpose, and with all the hope you’ve instilled in us.

Happy 99<sup>th</sup> Birthday Sir David Attenborough. We are better because of you.