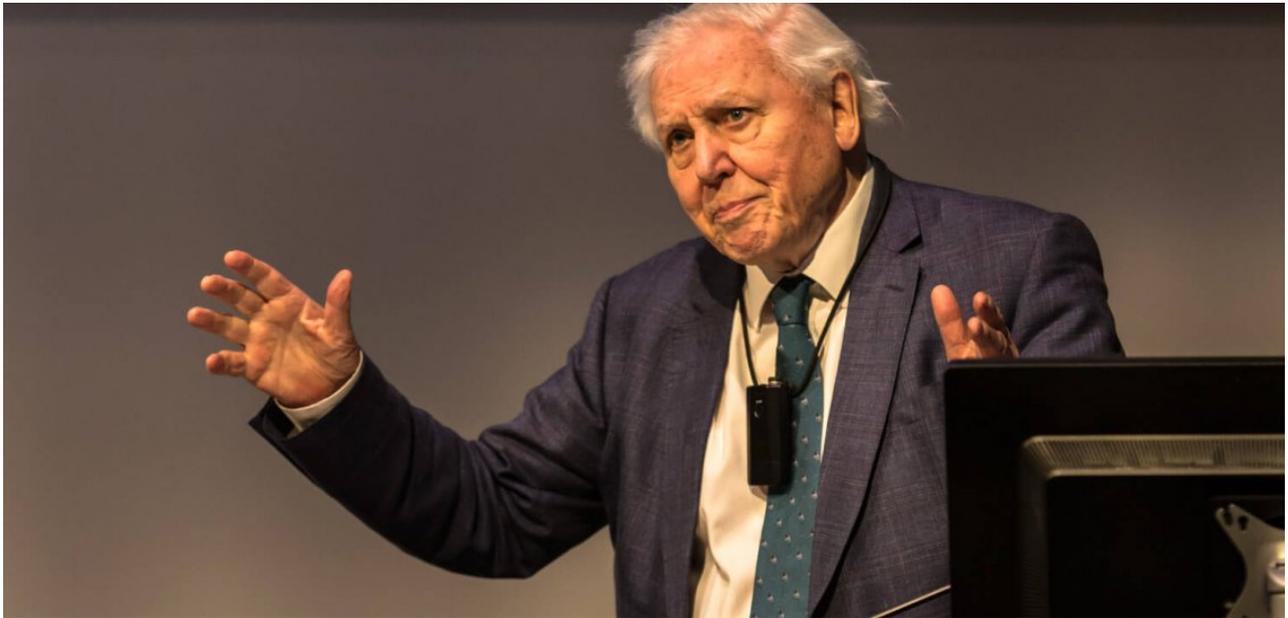


“The world has cause for optimism”: Sir David Attenborough’s keynote speech

birdlife.org/worldwide/news/world-has-cause-optimism-sir-david-attenboroughs-keynote-speech



David Attenborough addressed a sold out audience © Cambridge Conservation Initiative

By Jessica Law

Biodiversity loss is a huge problem for the conservation community. Not only are extinctions occurring at a rate up to 1,000 times normal levels, but public awareness about this crisis is lagging far behind that of other environmental issues such as climate change. It was precisely to address this problem that the Godfather of modern conservation communication, Sir David Attenborough, came to Cambridge Conservation Initiative on 12 April.

Watch the full event below, and join the conversation using #OurNatureOurFuture

Sir David delivered closing remarks following a discussion from an all-female panel of experts, including BirdLife CEO Patricia Zurita, on how to break the communication barrier surrounding the biodiversity crisis. The inspiring nanogenarian spoke without notes, looking back on how conservation has changed over the past 75 years, and what the future might hold. Here is his speech in full:

Sir David Attenborough: closing remarks

[Applause]

Thank you.

I hardly know what to say, really!

Three quarters of a century ago, I was an undergraduate here. I was here because I've been, for as long as I can remember (like, I suspect, every single one of you) – fascinated by the natural world. It didn't occur to me to think whether that was important, or significant, or anything much – except that it was the one thing that I needed to know about.

I don't think I heard the word "conservation" used once in 1946, and perhaps the problem wasn't there. It certainly wasn't a problem of the dimensions that it is now.

A lot has happened since then. One of the things that's happened, of course, is that the population of the planet is three times greater now than it was then. So we didn't have same sort of problems – nor was our technological capacity anything like as powerful as it is now. A vast change. What I know, and what you all know, is that the dimension of the problem has grown beyond all measure and all imagination from what it was 75 years ago.

There is one further thing that has changed since then, and that, of course, is the way in which the people of the world communicate to one another. I joined television – the BBC – in 1952, when only a tiny proportion of the people of this country could see television. The only programs came from Alexandra Palace in North London, and could only be seen in the London area. Now, of course, everybody – rich and poor – can see television. So we have a mechanism that is at our disposal if we know how to use it, to bring the sort of problems that you have been discussing in front of the people who can do something about it. That is to say, ordinary people.

How we're going to do that, I don't know. We're having a go: Netflix is preparing a series of programs right now on the problems that face this planet, which will be available to everybody and for a very long time around the world. That is one thing. In a certain way, that's the easiest thing, because we have to produce subjects that will appeal to everybody around the world and every continent in the world. So we will be dealing with the things that speak immediately to people. I don't have to list them to you: you know them very well. The glories, the splendors, the marvels of the planet. And you only have to say that it's in danger, and you will recruit support. Of course you will.

| *"The world desperately needs what you're doing."*

But as the small sample that I've been listening to this afternoon makes absolutely, patently clear – transparently clear, and depressingly clear – the problems are enormous, and they're also varied, and there is no single solution. Every country, every community will have their own problems and their own solutions.

As I said, just listening to you talking with such insight, and such passion, and such knowledge, makes me proud that this university has this institution, and that it is able to marshal this sort of intelligence and knowledge and insight. There are no simple solutions to these problems. There are solutions to some of the problems, but there is no single solution to them all. Looking back those 75 years: of course, there has never been a simple solution

produced over those years, and of course, the problems have increased beyond imagination. But while there are people like you putting your heads together, people like you getting together and spending time together, it does seem to me, as an onlooker, that the world has a cause for optimism and cause for gratitude.

The problems are indeed increasing, but the solutions are there, and I wish you every success in your conversations and debates and arguments that will lead to China, to Beijing, and every success – my goodness, every success – for the deliberations that take place there: because the world desperately needs what you're doing.

I wish you every success.