
CRITIC'S PICK

‘David Attenborough: A Life on Our Planet’ Review: Ruin and Regrowth

In this moving documentary, the famed naturalist maps how steeply the planet’s biodiversity has diminished over his lifetime.

By Natalia Winkelman

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The majestic documentary “David Attenborough: A Life on Our Planet” opens with its title subject standing in a deserted location. It’s the territory around the Chernobyl nuclear plant, (1)_____ that was evacuated after human error rendered it uninhabitable. Only later (2)_____, Alastair Fothergill, Jonnie Hughes and Keith Scholey, pull their camera back to reveal that the territory, (3)_____, has grown into a lush wildlife paradise.

Calling the film ([streaming on Netflix](#)) his “witness statement” for the environment, David Attenborough (4)_____ his more than 60-year career as a naturalist, (5)_____ the planet’s biodiversity has degenerated before him. Global air travel was new when he began his work, and footage of him as a young producer encountering exotic flora and fauna (6)_____, note to his plea to restore ecological balance.

Astonishing nature photography accompanies his retrospective. To illustrate the emptying of oceans, the directors intercut (7)_____ with images of large gutted fish, frozen and stacked for market. Equally upsetting is the loss of rain forests, (8)_____ between flourishing vegetation and uniform rows of oil palms planted for profit. Such cinematic juxtapositions are persuasive: A dying planet is an ugly one, while healthy ecosystems please the eye and the earth.

The most devastating sequence finds Attenborough (9)_____ in future decades — global crises that he, as a man now in his 90s, will not experience. (10)_____.

Sustainable farming in the Netherlands has made the country one of the worldwide leaders in food exports. Fishing restrictions around the Pacific archipelago nation of Palau (11)_____. The film’s grand achievement is that it positions its subject (12)_____ humans and the natural world. Life cycles on, and if we make the right choices, ruin can become regrowth.

Match these phrases to a gap in the text:

- a. a once buzzing area
- b. as a mediator between
- c. charting the disasters we face
- d. enabled marine life to rebound
- e. goes on to trace
- f. in its vacancy
- g. lends a moving, even haunting
- h. mapping how steeply
- i. showcased through the stark cutoff
- j. thriving coral habitats
- k. will the directors
- l. Yet he finds hope by extrapolating small successes