

Doug Anderson & BBC Wild Isles

by Peter Rowlands

Congratulations on your involvement in the latest BBC 'Wild Isles' series. There must have been both a simultaneous feeling of the culmination of a career tinged with a fear/responsibility. When did you become involved and/or was it an idea which you have always wanted to materialise?

Hi, Pete. Yeah, definitely. I couldn't sum it up better. That's exactly the way that I felt. I was incredibly excited to begin with. An opportunity to have a shot at filming in the United Kingdom for a wildlife series, and particularly with Sir David narrating but at the same time there was that kind of nagging anxiety and feelings of responsibility for just making sure that it was as good as possible.

So many people that I know have been fighting for better marine management in the UK over the last 20 or 30 years and although these films may play a small part in their ability to be effective and get things done, they still do play a part. And I just wanted to make sure that we helped in some way to develop

a greater understanding of the extraordinary pockets of life that we have in the UK and at the same time impart how important it is to protect much more of it.

It's completely breathtaking that in the last 30 or 40 years we've gone from what we had, to the destruction of it, to what we lost, to the position that we're in now, where there's the giant potential for recovery given good management decisions. I think generally I have a feeling of responsibility for making sure that these small films could be a part of that conversation.

Modern documentaries, especially underwater, are very much a logistics team game until the cameraman hits the water. Does HSE requirements play a major role and roughly how many were involved in, for example, the Orca sequences, how many trips were needed/budgeted for, what specialist equipment did you use and did you get all the footage you had hoped for?

All of the diving was done under the HSE diving at work regulations



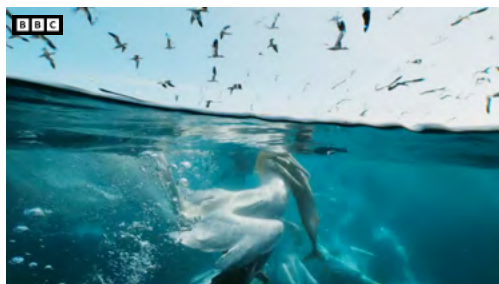
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and, yeah, obviously that did add a degree of complexity to the project but, at the same time, didn't because the diving at work regulations actually aren't massively restrictive. We pretty much work under them everywhere on the planet anyway. We were very lucky to get Catherine Buckland, a Plymouth based diver/skipper and supervisor, in on the project from early on and she basically guided us through the nuances of the diving or work regulations in terms of the type of photography that we wanted to do on this series and then also oversaw the design and build of the boat that we purchased to do the job.

We decided on a 7.5 metre



Tornado RIB and after a few months we ended up with a really good 4 person dive team - Catherine as Skipper/Supervisor, me and Jacko Divo and then a 4th who was either from the production team or more often than not a local with knowledge.



Underwater, do you have a go to camera, housing and lens or is each rig built for the subject material?

Most of the series was shot on RED cameras but underwater we used RED Geminis which have better low light performance.

Lenses were mostly Nikon including the Nikonos RS 13mm and the housing was the Gates Deep Weapon.

In addition we used the much smaller Z cams in Nauticam housings mainly for motion control and the small housing meant we could get low angles which is crucial for this style of work.

Talking of equipment, it is obviously more complicated and capable than ever before but are there times when it becomes slightly overwhelming and slow you down?

It's a constant process nowadays whereas 20 years ago there would have been one camera, a couple of lenses, a scuba tank and away you'd go. Nowadays there's a lot more equipment including rebreathers which add a lot more complexity in themselves. We go through a process of 'Ready Reckoner' which is basically deciding whether a sequence is worth 'taking the kitchen sink' or whether we should reduce and yet still be more effective. These are conversations and decisions we have almost daily and

we must ask "Just because you can, do you need to?". More often than not, we'd start with a lot of kit and then, as time went on, reduce. This was particularly so with Wild Isles where a paired back system was often better for the uncertain water conditions and shorter weather windows in the UK compared to the tropics and even the Poles. We always aimed to get some footage under our belts first before thinking about how to improve sequences.

The underwater programme was full of big subjects, exquisitely filmed but were there other subjects on the list which either didn't work out or got ruled out and finally:

By the end of the series we felt that there were still so many more subjects/sequences out there and I found myself amazed how rich the UK is underwater and for every sequence we got I'd say there are at least half a dozen more still to be made. There is always a frustration that we never achieve all that we want but it's



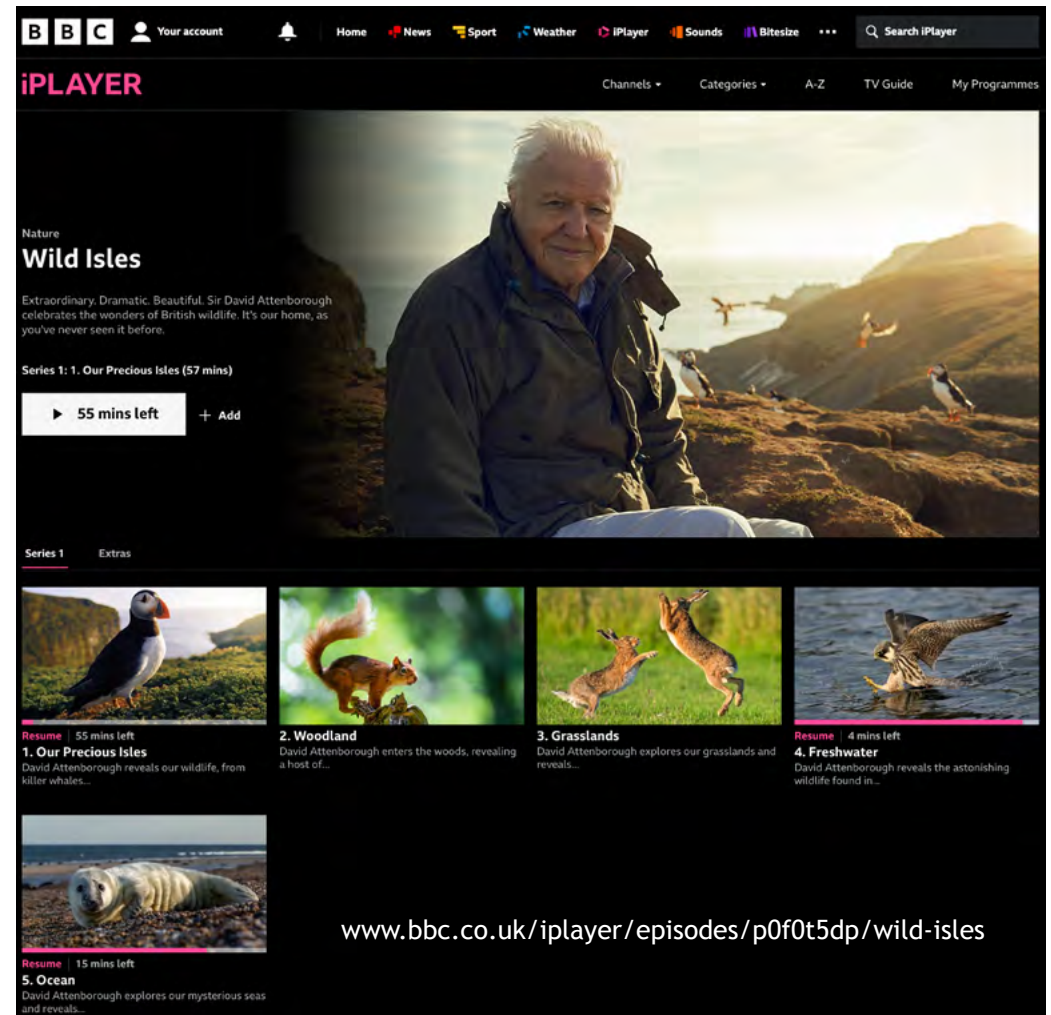
reassuring to know that they are still out there for the taking and I hope that I will be back to record them.

What has been the most gratifying feedback about the series?

The feedback overall has been very gratifying and I was very pleased how the production team, headed Alistair Fothergill and Gisle Sverdrup, edited the sequences and I was very pleased with Sir David's narration,

obviously, and also George (Fenton)'s music. I sat down and watched the film with my son Charlie and just let it wash over me and it was a really good experience. It was nice to see the UK in such a light.

Even more gratifying has been the response from within my industry and especially those from the UK. It was in these waters that we started before our careers took us overseas and to receive well wishes from UK based cameramen, producers and



colleagues said to me that this film meant a lot to a lot of people and, for that, I am immensely grateful and also, to be quite honest, immensely relieved now that the responsibility has lifted.

Congratulations, once again, and thanks for your time.

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