

1. Iolo Williams, TV naturalist and presenter:

I think it's fantastic that a GCSE in Natural History is being introduced into the curriculum. I was lucky in that my mum and my grandad encouraged my interest in wildlife but we have now lost 2 generations of naturalists. I'm confident that this is a big step forward in reconnecting future generations with the natural world.

2. Simon King, Wildlife cameraman and presenter:

My friend and mentor, the late Michael Kendal, helped me hear the chaffinch flight calls from the greenfinches. He saw my interest and passion and poured gentle knowledge in to the mix. Mike was the BBC NHU Film Librarian but a super field naturalist and ornithologist. We made two series of Man and Boy together.

Hugh Miles helped me forge my passion and knowledge as a wildlife cameraman.

I dropped biology as an 'O' level subject because I was disgusted by the way the subject was taught in school. Having now raised 4 children, the youngest of which is just entering her GCSE year, nothing has changed. The curriculum stifles passion and interest for the subject by forcing wrote learning of topics such as the human digestive system and the sex organs of a flower. My 'test' results in secondary school for biology when it was part of the compulsory subject list were consistently in the 90% + scale, and my biology teacher was perplexed by my decision to drop it as an O level subject. My response to her questioning my decision was precocious and arrogant but in essence I stand by it. To paraphrase " You are teaching the subject I most love in the world. But the way you have to teach it is killing it for me. I shall continue to follow my passion and read everything I can get my hands on to further my knowledge, but most importantly I shall observe and learn".

I left school before my 17th birthday before 'A' levels and did not go to university. I have been making natural history films in one guise or another from the age of 10, so thats almost fifty years now, but I regard myself as a naturalist who happens to film wildlife, talk about wildlife, write about wildlife, take people to watch wildlife, try my best to conserve wildlife and wild places and have the good fortune to deploy the knowledge I have gleaned over the decades in a myriad disciplines.

I have employed many people over the years and if any had come to me with a GCSE, A level or Degree in Natural History they would have met with an open door to an interview.

3. Kabir Kaul, young conservationist and wildlife writer:

It was Sir David Attenborough who first introduced me to Natural History. From the age of two, his documentaries fascinated me, bringing the world's most exciting and peculiar species to my television screen. His programmes were a gentle and captivating introduction to the wonders of nature: my passion grew over the years as a result, leading me to notice that some of these species flourished on my very doorstep. Since then, I have campaigned and advocated for conservation in London, and set up a Wildlife Society at school, which is growing in popularity. A Natural History GCSE will ignite this same curiosity and passion for

the natural world in students, giving our generation so many more opportunities to interact with and understand the country's biodiversity. With this, the knowledge of our natural world will be preserved for generations to come.

4. Brett Westwood – Radio 4 presenter and naturalist.

One of the best features of my primary school was a tiny patch of unmown, flowery grassland behind the playground which became a classroom on summer days . The novelty of having our lessons in "the meadow" had us jittery with excitement for days before. As we six-year olds explored our very own grass-blade jungle, brilliantly-coloured burnet moths droned past at eye level and meadow brown butterflies bobbed between the stalks. We didn't know the names of all the things we found, but those shared encounters of wildlife on the school doorstep were worth every bout of hayfever then and since!

In my last years of school in Birmingham, I joined the school ornithological society which had been founded over 20 years earlier by Bill Oddie. Sixth-formers were my mentors and led trips to nearby reservoirs where I was shown my first gadwall and reed buntings. I learned about bird-ringing, migration and studying bird populations in the small woodland next to the school. There were even distant trips to The Wash where the redoubtable Clive Minton would teach us to catch and ring wading birds which travelled around the globe. To say this fanned the flames of a growing interest wouldn't exactly be true...it chucked a whole can of petrol over them. I've never been more grateful of this early grounding in the stuff of nature.