

# The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week it's wildlife presenter **Steve Backshall**

**The prized possession you value above all others...** A wooden head hunter's mask which I got from West Timor, Indonesia, in 1991. Out of all the tat I've brought back from my travels, it's the one genuine cultural artefact.

**The biggest regret you wish you could amend...** That I took a degree in humanities at university. I'm now having to study for my masters in biology in my spare time – I need the letters after my name so I'm not out-gunned by others in my profession.

**The temptation you wish you could resist...** It sounds boring, but I'm so disciplined that I keep anything out of reach if I think it's not good for me. I'm addicted to exercise, but I don't want to resist that temptation. I like being fit.

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** My Family And Other Animals by Gerald Durrell. It's so similar to my childhood in Surrey with lots of animals and adventures.

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** The greatest gift you have is time. Treasure every single second to learn about life.

Right: Steve's fiancée, Olympic rower Helen Glover. Above right: an Indian curry. Far right: a grizzly bear catching salmon in Alaska

**The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day...** I'd visit Environment Secretary Andrea Leadsom's office. She's pro-fox hunting and pro-fracking, so there are conflicts of interest. I fear the horrors to come.

**The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...** The demonisation of certain wild animals, especially sharks. It's so misinformed and makes my blood boil.

**The film you can watch time and time again...** The Shawshank Redemption – it has great acting and is wonderfully crafted.

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** I'd saw the oars of the rival rowers before my fiancée, the rower Helen Glover who won a gold in 2012, competes in the women's pair final in Rio. She doesn't need help, but it would spare me the stress!

**The person who has influenced you most...** My parents, Dave and Pat, who gave my sister Jo and me the perfect childhood. They worked for BA and took us on wonderful trips abroad.

**The unending quest that drives you on...** To inspire kids to enjoy nature and learn about conservation. It's the driving force behind my work.



'I'm fascinated by the evolution of parasites. They can be bizarre and sinister, but they blow my mind!'



**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...**

The 19th-century Welsh explorer Alfred Russel Wallace. His book *The Malay Archipelago* inspired me as it was full of thrills. I'd love to chat to him about his adventures.

**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** Parasites. I'm fascinated by their evolution and how they interact with their host. They can be bizarre, grotesque and sinister, but they blow my mind.

**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** The eight diaries I wrote during my travels in my 20s. I found them in the garage last month and they'd got wet and been reduced to papier-mâché. I had to dump them. I was gutted.

**The poem that touches your soul...** Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening by Robert Frost. It captures a moment in the beauty of nature.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** I went to a comprehensive and I find it an insult that people assume I'm posh simply from the way I speak.

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** Falling 10m on to rock while climbing a cliff in the Wye Valley in 2008. I broke my back in two places and shattered my left foot. I had 11 operations, but I'll never be physically the same. I'm 43 now and it's slowed me down. These days I rationalise every risk before I take it.

**The song that means most to you...** The Wind by Cat Stevens. My dad sang it a lot to me when I was a kid and it takes me back to happy times.

**The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...** I'd have porridge for breakfast at home in Buckinghamshire, then go to the Western Isles of Scotland with Hels. We'd paddle around Skye, Rum and Muck, stopping for a barbecue on a beach. I'd cook mackerel with samphire stew and I'd have a nip of local whisky. Later we'd climb a peak in the Himalayas and have an Indian curry while looking out over the world. We'd end the day in Alaska, which is the wildest, most bewitching place I've ever visited. We'd watch grizzly bears catching salmon in a river, then crash out in a tent to the sounds of nature.

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** Proposing to Hels in the Namib Desert last September. I cried like a baby before I'd even finished! I was completely overwhelmed with relief and joy when she said yes. We're getting married this autumn.

**The saddest time that shook your world...** Watching my mum going through breast cancer when I was 13. She was seriously ill, but she came through. She's a fit 73-year-old now.

**The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...** To be a dad. We'd like a big family. Here's hoping...

**The philosophy that underpins your life...** Trust your instincts and surround yourself with the best people.

**The order of service at your funeral...** It'll have to be in the countryside, not a church. I'd like a blooper reel from my career, so everyone can have a laugh at my expense, then they can enjoy a party at my expense too. I want my ashes chucked off a cliff in Cornwall.

**The way you want to be remembered...** I'd rather people get on with their own lives than remember mine.

**The Plug...** Steve is helping Center Parcs find The UK's Top Treehouse made by a family. The best entry wins a short break in a luxury treehouse in Elveden Forest, Suffolk. Visit [blog.centerparcs.co.uk](http://blog.centerparcs.co.uk) to see the winner. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



## PS...

*Ingrid Bergman In Her Own Words – a documentary revealing the Swedish film star's innermost thoughts – is in cinemas from Friday.*  
*And Michael Morpurgo's WWII family show 946: The Amazing Story Of Adolphus Tips is at Shakespeare's Globe from Thursday*



## NEXT WEEK

- Michael Buerk on raising Pompeii from the ashes for a new documentary
- The tastiest picnic treats from designer Cath Kidston
- PLUS Britain's most detailed TV listings guide