

# The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week: *Springwatch* host Michaela Strachan

**The prized possession you value above all others...** As I'm a vegetarian, it's my vegetable garden at my home in Hout Bay, near Cape Town in South Africa. It has eight tiered veg patches in which I grow everything possible.

**The biggest regret you wish you could amend...** Not learning to play a musical instrument properly. I learnt the flute for a few years, but gave up when I was eight because it made my neck ache!

**The temptation you wish you could resist...** Singing Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* when there's a karaoke night. It's excruciating – for everyone!

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** *Born Free* by Joy Adamson. I read it when I was 12 and it fuelled my love of wildlife. I wanted to be Joy and have my own lion cubs.

**The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...** To be Doctor Who's assistant. David Tennant would be my Doctor.

**The person who has influenced you most...** My mum, Jo. She's 75 and never sees the bad in people.

**The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...** Humans hunting elephants and rhinos just to make chopsticks out of their tusks or grind their horns into medicine. It drives me insane.

**The film you can watch time and time again...** Monty Python's *Life Of Brian*. I knew most of the dialogue even before I saw it at the cinema – my older brother Gary and his friends were obsessed with it and kept acting the scenes to me.

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...** Dian Fossey [the US zoologist who protected gorillas in Africa in the 60s-80s]. She gave her life to save animals [Fossey was murdered in Rwanda in 1985].

**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...**

Cricket! I always thought it was boring, but my partner Nick and our nine-year-old son Ollie love it, so now I go to matches with them and enjoy it – though I often take a book!

**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** My flexibility. I trained as a dancer and used to be able jump off a table and land in the splits. Now I'm 48 I can't do it any more.

Left: David Tennant starring in *Doctor Who*. Above: cricket. Far right: a snow leopard



Michaela at home in South Africa with her Jack Russell Toto

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** Don't judge people by your own circumstances. You have to broaden your knowledge to understand them.

**The poem that touches your soul...** I'm always moved by a poem I wrote about a baby orangutan called Lomon, who featured in a series I made called *Orangutan Diary* in 2007. It was about saving orphaned orangutans and I really connected with Lomon.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** That I know *everything* about British wildlife! People send me photos of obscure insects asking what they are, but I don't have a clue. Chris Packham does know everything, so they should ask him!

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** Buying a holiday home in South Africa in 2002. Because I made that leap, I met Nick, then I moved there and we had Ollie.

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** I'd rescue all the moon bears in China and Vietnam that are locked up while tubes drain them of their bile to make medicine.

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up Table Mountain – you can see the sunset on one side and the moon rising on the other. At the top Nick and I would share a bottle of chardonnay and a packet of cashew nuts. Then we'd take the cable car down and head home to bed.

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** Finding out I was pregnant with Ollie when I was 39. I was filming in Vietnam when I found out and I ran around showing the test to all the crew!

**The saddest time that shook your world...** When I was 16, my dad lost his job and our family lost everything. It resulted in me suffering from anorexia. But we came through it all.

**The philosophy that underpins your life...** Always look on the bright side of life. The world can be a harsh place, but you have to find the positives.

**The order of service at your funeral...** I'll be buried in a biodegradable box, or have my body fed to sharks! I also want people to be sad – having a party and getting drunk seems so disrespectful.

**The way you want to be remembered...** She got children interested in wildlife.

**The Plug...** Michaela will perform her children's show *Michaela Strachan's Really Wild Adventures* at zoos, wildlife parks and family festivals this Easter and summer. [michaelastrachan.co.uk](http://michaelastrachan.co.uk). ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PHOTOGRAPHS: ROMI STERN, ALAMY, GETTY

## PS...

Colin Firth and Michael Caine star in *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, in cinemas on Thursday. Tom Stoppard's first play since 2006, *The Hard Problem*, is at the National Theatre now. And BGT winners Collabro begin a UK tour in Carlisle on Monday



## NEXT WEEK

- Learn how to draw your children or grandchildren in part two of our inspiring series
- Our columnist Rachel Kho's favourite dishes from around the world
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings guide