

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's naturalist David Bellamy's turn

The prized possession you value above all others...

A compass I bought for my wife on our 50th wedding anniversary in 2009. It's the one that guided Henry Morton Stanley across Africa to find fellow explorer David Livingstone in 1871, and it makes me feel in touch with a very special happening in history.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend...

Selling my Lotus Super 7 in the 1960s when we needed a bigger, more sensible family car. Being so low to the ground gave a great sense of speed.

The temptation you wish you could resist...

Saying 'Yes' to all requests! I'm 81 but I love working and helping others.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance...

A Girl Of The Limberlost from 1909 by Gene Stratton-Porter, which I read with my mum as a boy. It's about the destruction of trees in the US, and it made me want to read more about nature.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day...

I'd visit Florence and see treasures

such as Botticelli's The Birth Of Venus without having to queue.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...

Boy racers playing loud bass music in fast cars.

The person who has influenced you most...

My cockney granny Sarah Low. She lived with our family in south-west London during the war and took over. She was always there when you needed her and she got us through it.

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

Winston Churchill. I queued to see him lying in state in 1965. He was so concerned about our diminishing butterfly population he created a butterfly garden at his home Chartwell.

The film you can watch time and time again...

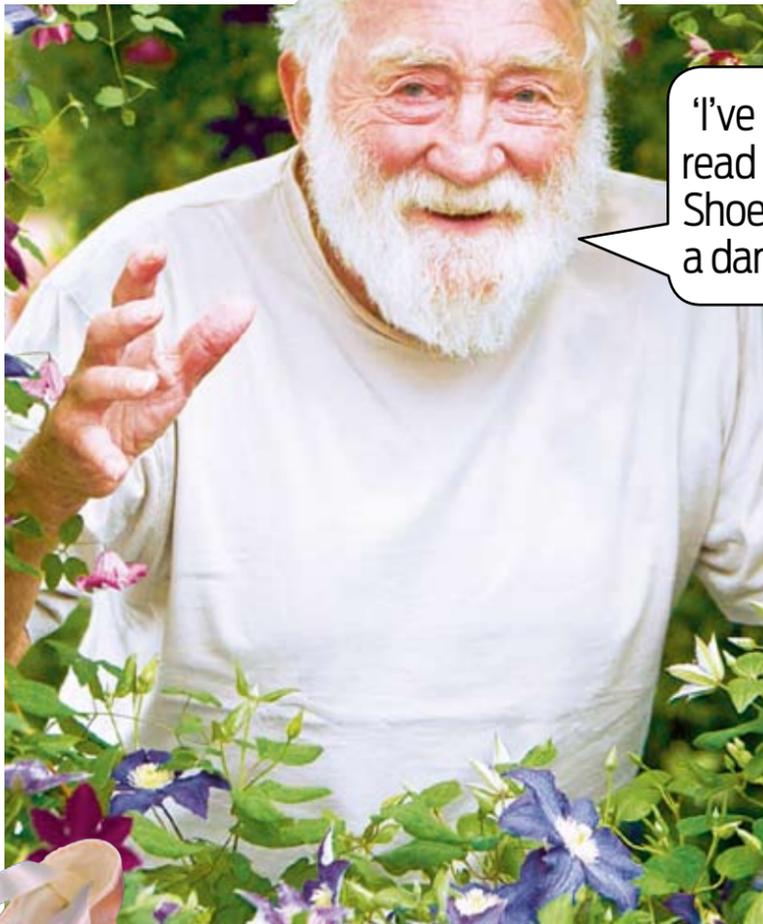
Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. I must have been about 36 when I first saw it but I was still mesmerised. What a car!

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...

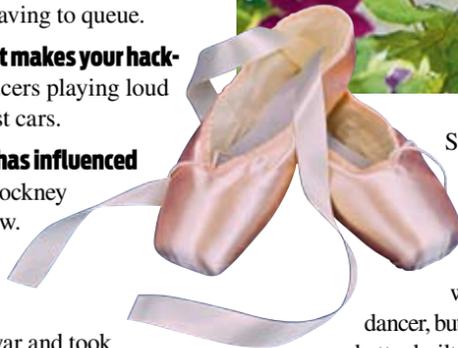
Think for yourself.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...

Ballet. I read Noel



'I've loved ballet ever since I read Noel Streatfeild's Ballet Shoes as a kid. I wanted to be a dancer but I was too heavy'



Streatfeild's Ballet Shoes when I was a kid and it inspired me to want to be a dancer, but I was too heavy – better built for rugby.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...

My sense of smell. I lost it when a hockey ball collided with my nose. Sadly I can't smell flowers.

The unending quest that drives you on...

To save all plants and animals from extinction around the world.

The poem that touches your soul...

The Old Vicarage, Granchester by Rupert Brooke. It's so moving.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...

That I'm the Jolly Green Giant! I'm a botanist and an academic but I've been stuck with that nickname for decades. I'm not complaining though – it's helped my career.

The event that altered the course of your life and character...

Getting a job as a school lab technician in Ewell, Surrey when I was 20. That's where I met my wife and fell in love – and I still am! Rosemary is my pillar.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...

I would steal The Garden Of Earthly Delights by Hieronymus Bosch from the Prado Museum in Madrid.

The song that means most to you...

Sparrows Can't Sing by Barbara Windsor. It was the first record I bought, and it reminds me of carefree times with Rosemary before children came along.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...

I'd take in the dawn at the North Pole with Rosemary, then have a slap-up breakfast on the shores of Lake Huron, one of North America's Great Lakes. We'd relive a trek we did on the West Coast of Scotland in our younger years, then climb Ben Lawers mountain; I'd have a nip of Springbank whisky to keep me going. A magic carpet would then take us and our children – Rufus, Henrietta, Brigid, Eoghain, Hannah – and our nine grandchildren aged from eight to 24 to an exotic beach in Malaysia. We'd all go snorkel-

ling and look at wonderful marine life, then eat oysters for lunch. After skiing at Plagne Montalbert in France, with a break for my favourite andouillettes – tripe sausages – we'd take all the kids to Fortnum & Mason in London for cream tea and Knickerbocker Glories. I'd end up in Italy's Apuane Mountains drinking red wine and watching the sunset.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Spending New Year's Eve with my young family at Ayers Rock in Australia in 1978. It was hot, the light on the rock was incredible, and the family was together. A wonderful moment.

The saddest time that shook your world... My granny dying. It was as if the sun had gone out.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To be Father Christmas at Hamleys. Every child seems to think I'm Santa, so it would be good to actually do it one year.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Never give up.

The order of service at your funeral... I'm too busy living to think about it. But when it happens I hope it'll be sunny and they'll play Henry Burton's hymn There's A Light Upon The Mountains.

The way you want to be remembered... As a loving dad and grandad and a happy botanist who fought for conservation.

The Plug... Look at these two websites as proof that I'm still working hard! www.bna-naturalists.org, and www.conservationfoundation.co.uk. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PS...

Nicole Scherzinger leads the cast of Cats at the London Palladium,

previewing from next Saturday. Naomi Watts and Bill Murray

star in the heart-warming St Vincent, in cinemas from Friday.

And Take That's aptly named new album, III, is out Monday



PHOTOGRAPHS: ALLSTAR, PA, ALAMY, REX

NEXT WEEK

- Clive Owen takes us behind the scenes on his US drama The Knick
- Tom Kerridge's alternative Christmas dinner
- Presents for princes and paupers from the royal shops
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings

