Steve Backshall’s World tour: A Review
By Dr Rhys Jones, Cardiff University

Last night I headed down to the Royal Geographical Society London to see my friend Steve Backshall deliver his dynamic one-man show. The show was part of Steve’s world tour celebrating his successful career in wildlife documentary film making.

Founded in 1830, the Society is a world renowned institution and a prestigious venue to speak at. On entering the building I was at once reminded of the great men who had walked these stairs before me. The faces of famous adventurers, spanning several generations, adorned the walls in heavy wooden picture frames. These included a relatively fresh faced Sir David Attenborough in a photograph taken at the time of receiving his Founders Medal back in 1985.

Not long after taking my seat, the lights in the auditorium came down and we were propelled into Steve’s world via a huge cinematic screen. Blue crashing ocean waves, white Arctic aerial vistas and lush green forest canopies filled our senses and set the scene. Then, in an eruption of screams and applause, Steve appeared on the stage. He looked genuinely taken aback at his rapturous rock star reception.

Steve opened the evening by conducting a tour of our underwater world. A visual frenzy of breath-taking close encounters with some of the most formidable predators on the planet.

Watching Steve relive those moments on stage is fascinating and his enthusiasm infectious. He retains a childlike quality, an inquisitive wonder for the world about him, and yet over the years Steve has matured into a serious advocate for endangered species. This is especially true for his beloved sharks and rays. On tour he defended their reputation rigorously, presenting evidence to support the low incidence of fatal shark attack encounters; that you are more likely to die from a fall from bed or by being stuck by lightening than at the jaws of an ocean-going shark.

Almost as impressive as Steve was the knowledge base of his devoted fans. A request to try and correctly identify a shark species from an obscure photograph of its teeth was met by unanimous cry; ‘Cookie cutter, Goblin shark...Tiger shark’!

‘Yes, a hundred Deadly points to you!’ replies an excited Steve.

We can only assume that Steve insists on the audience completing an online training course prior to being allowed to see him live!
After an exhausting forty-five minutes of video, lecture and audience interaction, Steve waved a hand above his head, and left the stage to thunderous applause. Satisfied with a great night of entertainment, I had naturally assumed that the show had now drawn to a close. It was then that I noticed a sudden flurry of excitement which coincided with the emergence of Backshall books from their hiding places deep within parent’s coat pockets and carry bags. A swarm of young people, books in hand, disappeared through a stage door only to re-emerge triumphantly a few minutes later. It was now perfectly obvious that rather than taking a well-deserved break, that Steve was in fact engaged in a busy book signing session.

The chatter along the aisles betrayed an audience clearly expecting Steve to return, and he didn’t disappoint. After a twenty-minute absence he once again took to the stage to elated screams and applause. A second forty-five-minute performance saw Steve further reminiscing over past adventures in lost worlds and projected more heart stopping wildlife encounters on the big screen behind him. To the audience’s delight, he then generously showed a gag reel of the times things hadn’t gone quite to plan. As the old saying goes ‘never work with children or animals’, but in fairness, Steve seems to do just fine working with both!

He rounded off the evening by turning up the theatre lights and giving the audience another chance to ask him questions directly, to which they enthusiastically obliged. Amidst the applause and jubilant chatter of children Steve brought the show to an end and the audience responded by falling silent to hear his closing message. The joker aside, the wildlife Ambassador now took charge, ending the night on a very poignant note. A heartfelt address to the children in the audience, who he termed the future Goodalls, Fosseys and Attenboroughs. To realise that we are not the pinnacle of evolution, but merely sharing this small blue marble with all the other animals that live upon it, and that they have just as much right to be here as we do.

He called for a ban on shark finning, the wastefully harvesting of over 100 million sharks each year to produce shark fin soup. An industry that will drive sharks to extinction if we do not make a stand now. Finally, following his recent incredible encounter with a Blue whale during the broadcast of the BBC’s Big Blue Live, Steve called for the British Government to legislate greater protection for our marine environments by creating designating marine parks around the UK coastline.

Steve thanked the audience for attending and in return they showed their appreciation for him. He left the stage heading straight back to his signing table, followed like some modern day pied piper by the entire 450 strong audience. He spoke to everyone, he listened to everyone and made sure that everyone went home with a ‘selfie with Steve’ souvenir of their day. I was the very last person at the end of a stadium long queue, and what must have been an exhausting day. And yet on seeing me I was still greeted by an enthusiastic ‘Mate!!’, a big Backshall smile and a hug as huge as his reputation. Thank you Steve. We stand, we bow, we salute you!

If you haven’t yet caught Steve Backshall on his live world tour I would encourage you to do so on one of the remaining dates. You most certainly won’t be disappointed!

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