

Date:

Author/Interview subject: Nicola Davies (ND)

Interviewed by: Janice Forsyth (JF)

Other speakers: Audience (Aud), Boy (Lewis) and Girl (Cristina)

JF: Hello there, I'm Janice Forsyth. A huge, warm welcome to Authors Live, wherever you're watching: you're so welcome. We're so delighted to have your company. I'm not here on my own; I've got some delightful people with me from two Scottish primary schools – from Low Port Primary in West Lothian and St Peter's Primary School in Edinburgh. Don't take my word for it about how lovely they are; have a look. And why don't you make friends: why don't you all wave! I'm not talking nonsense – look how delightful they are. And they're going to have some great questions. I'm sure you will too, later.

We're all incredibly excited about today's event. We're joined by a fantastic writer, zoologist and author, Nicola Davis. And Nicola actually started her career in the BBC for the BBC's Natural History department, which is famous right across the world, and then she spent some time as a presenter of CBBC's *The Really Wild Show*. And now, as I'm sure you know, she writes truly wonderful books about the natural world. We're going to be hearing about those and learning lots of fascinating facts along the way.

Now, I know that you will be inspired by Nicola, won't you? Yes, you will; yes, you will. And so you'll come up with all sorts of lovely questions, really intriguing questions. Let's come up with some questions that Nicola might never have been asked before. Do you think you can do that? If you can come up with them, I'll do my best to ask as many of those as possible of Nicola a little bit later on; and the way to do that is – because if you shout them to me, frankly, out there, I won't hear you, will I? But we've got Twitter, so if you use the hash tag BBC Authors Live, if you have a class or school Twitter account, I will try to pass those questions on to Nicola.

I'll stop talking now, because you want to hear the really interesting person, don't you? Yes, you do. Please give a massive big Authors Live welcome to Nicola Davis.

[Applause]

ND: Hello, good morning. Lovely to see all these faces and all those faces out there. Now, as you know, I write about animals; so I have got the best subject in the world to write about. But before I start this morning, I just want to check that I have got some animal lovers in the room with me. So can you put your hand up if you like animals; do you like...put your hand up if you like animals, out there? Fantastic. As soon as I see that, I know we're going to get along just fine. So, obviously, I've got a lot of animals to choose from. So I'm going to have to limit myself to a few things this morning. So I'm going to talk about three things. First of all I'm going to talk about something really disgusting; then I'm going to talk about something really big; and then I'm going to talk about something quite dangerous. So shall we start with disgusting?

Aud: Yeah!

ND: Are you ready to be disgusted?

Aud: Yeah.

ND: Okay. So this is quite disgusting.

Aud: Eurgh.

ND: That is quite disgusting, isn't it? Beautiful: yes, it is beautiful. It looks jolly realistic, doesn't it?

Boy: Yeah.

ND: Do you want to get a bit closer?

Girl: No.

ND: Do you want to put your nose next to it?

Girl: Yeah.

ND: It's not real. It's obviously a poo. Now, if you are a person who studies animals, you have to get up close and personal with poo a lot. I have studied lots of different kinds of poo in the course of my career as a zoologist. And the reason is that poo is very important in the lives of animals; not just because they get rid of their waste by doing it, but because some animals use it as a means of communication. Right, now, anybody here got a dog? Anybody here got a pet dog? Right; now, when you take your pet dog out for a walk and it finds a poo of another dog, what does it do? It doesn't go, ugh, that's horrible! It goes, mmm,

mmm. And you're on the end of the lead like this, trying to pull the dog away, and the dog just wants to look at that poo and smell it. Now, what your dog is doing is it's reading a noticeboard. Because there's lots of information in that poo. So your dog is going [sniff] okay, ah, so that was done by the Alsatian that lives at number 10 [sniff] about an hour ago [sniff] and he's changed the kind of dog food that he eats [sniff] – oh! And he's in a really, really bad mood. He's very grumpy and aggressive today, so I might as well keep away from him. Or your dog might be going [sniff] hmm, that's done by that cute little poodle that lives next door. Oh, and she's coming into season; I must make sure I look out for her.

So your dog is getting lots and lots of information from that poo. And dogs are not alone in getting information from poo. Many animals use it to communicate, and use it mark their territories. I'm just going to put this down. Have you all heard of an animal called a giant otter? Have you heard of giant otters? Well, you know what otters are; you've got lots of otters up here in Scotland, you lucky things. But in the rivers of South America, there's a kind of otter called a giant otter, which is at least twice as big as the European one we have over here. And they live in big family groups. And they don't really want other otters coming to their stretch of the river to eat the fish that they think of as theirs. Now, they can't mark the water, can they? They can't put a scent mark in the water, because if you put a scent mark in the water in the river here, it's halfway to the sea in an hour's time.

So what they do is, they climb out of the water onto the bank of the river, and they have a kind of poo party. So all the family, the mums and the dads and the aunties and the grannies and the cousins and all the little cubs, all get out of the water and they stomp about on the bank of the river like this, and they squish the plants down flat, and then they all have a poo. Everybody has a poo; and then they stomp about on the poo again, to squish it right in among the flattened plants and the mud. And that does two things; first of all it leaves a visual signal, because that flattened area of plants is really easy to see. But also, it creates a really good pongy signal. So any otter from another family that pokes its head above the water in their stretch of the river will see that flattened plants, that area that they've stomped about on, and they will also smell the poo that all those otters have squished into the ground.

Now, it's important that all the family take part in this, to make a very, very big smell. If just the mum and dad did it, it wouldn't leave such a big signal. Any otter that smells that smell knows that there are lots of other otters that occupy this stretch of river, and so there's no point in trying to come and take over. So

animals use poo to communicate. Actually, there is one disgusting thing I could tell you about pandas. Do you want to hear a disgusting thing about pandas?

Boy: Yes.

ND: I think it's important that people know that pandas are not just cute; that they do things that are a bit disgusting. Pandas mark their territories with wee, which I know is a whole other subject; but they do, they mark their territories with wee. And they do it by standing on their hands. Do you know about this? Okay. So they wee on trees. Now, if you wee down there on a tree, low down on a tree, lots of animals might wee down there; but if you stand on your hands, stick your bottom in the air, and wee right up here on the tree, that's in a place where not many other animals are going to leave that signal. So passing pandas will smell that and know that there is a panda in this territory. You're all looking at me now like, why did you tell us that? That's wrecked my idea of pandas. I'm sorry if that's destroyed your vision of pandas as being so cute and cuddly.

Animals use poo, but scientists also use poo. I said that I'd had to study various sorts of animal poo in my career as a zoologist. My very, very first job was collecting goose poo on a Scottish marsh. I worked on the Solway Firth to study barnacle geese, and I had to run off to my boss with little polythene bags – I wasn't collecting his poo, don't worry – and I had to collect goose poo. And what we were trying to do, we were trying to find out how many geese could live on this nature reserve. Now, to do that, we needed to know how much food for the geese was on the nature reserve, and how they digested it. So we collected the grass that they ate, and we collected the poo that they pooped out. And at the end of the day, we collected up all the poos that we'd gathered during the day, and we put them on a baking sheet, and in the farmhouse where we were staying there were two ovens. There was a top oven where we cooked our dinner – you know, shepherd's pie, whatever it was – and a bottom oven where we cooked the goose poo; dried out the goose poo.

I have to tell you that cooking goose poo smells quite nice. It's really not unpleasant at all. Now, you really are looking at me funny now – okay! The second sort of poo that I studied was bat poo. Now, I don't know if you know, but there are more than 15 different species of bat that live in this country. They're all quite small, and they all eat insects; but they eat different sorts of insects. Now, when a bat comes out of its roost at night, it zooms off into the darkness at 25, 30, maybe even 40 miles an hour. You haven't a hope of following it and seeing what it does. So if you want to find out exactly what it eats and exactly where it eats it, which is important information if you want to make sure that that animal is cared for, and isn't going to go extinct, you need to know what those

insects are. And the way to do it is that after the bat leaves its roost at night, you go up into the roost with a big piece of polythene and you put it down on the floor – this is what I did for my PhD – and then you go away and you come back the next night and you collect that piece of polythene, which will be covered in little bat poos.

Now, the nice thing about bat poos is that they aren't too stinky. They don't really smell horrible. And when you look at them underneath a microscope, a sort of magic happens; because they aren't, kind of, brown and yucky and stinky and ugh. When you look at them underneath a microscope, what you see is something like little bits of coloured paper and coloured cellophane all chopped up; because what the poo consists of is the outside bits of insects. The lovely wings, their eye capsules, their antennae, their little feet. And you can pick those out and match them to whole insects, and work out exactly what it is that the bat has been eating. And it's fascinating; it's like doing a sort of puzzle.

And it's not just little animals that you can find out about through their poo. Many years ago, I was studying blue whales. I was involved in a study of blue whales in the Indian Ocean; and also sperm whales. I got very expert at scooping various sorts of poo out of oceans across the world. But at that time, I was working in the Indian Ocean, and it was believed that blue whales didn't eat when they were in warm oceans; and one day we came across a group of blue whales. Now, that's very unusual, because blue whales are the original Johnny No-mates; you usually see them hanging about in ones, or at most, in twos. But in an area perhaps as big as one floor of this building, there were ten, maybe fifteen blue whales. And they were all diving. Now, when a whale dives, obviously its head – say that's its head – goes down, and its tail comes up out of the water, and it slides down very, very gracefully. And we were watching the whales doing this, taking photographs of their tails, because if you take the photograph of a whale's tail, you can identify that particular whale, from the little scratches and patterns and shapes on the tail.

So we were taking these photographs, and we noticed, as the whales were going down in the water – and there were bodies – their long bodies were being squeezed like tubes of toothpaste – huge great pink poos like giant dollops of strawberry ice cream were being squeezed out of these whales. So they were clearly eating something. So we turned on our depth sounder, and we could see roundabout 100, 150 metres underneath the surface, there was a mass of something – fish, shrimps, krill – you know, we didn't know. And there was no way to go down there and look. But that's what the whales were going down to feed on. So we needed to get a sample of that poo. Now, the trouble with blue

whale poo is that it sinks really quickly, so you need to be dead fast when you see it in the water. So we then leant over the side of the boat with big nets, and we were trying to catch this poo, and it was really, really heavy, and we were doing this, and doing this, and sometimes we'd be a bit over-enthusiastic and, you know, jerk the net up, and then there'd be poo everywhere; the whole boat was covered in pink poo. In fact, I had a T-shirt for 25 years that was stained pink with blue whale poo. But we took samples of that poo, put them in little test tubes, labelled them up, took them back to the lab on land, looked at them under the microscope, and identified the exact species of shrimp that those blue whales had been feeding on. And so we were able to disprove the fact that blue whales don't eat when they're in warm water.

Now obviously, blue whales brings me to my next subject. Because, as you know, blue whales are big. Now, I knew with my head that blue whales were very big. But on the day that I stood on the front of that boat – a very little boat, probably about 35, 40 feet long – and I was standing there with my camera ready to take a photograph of a blue whale's tail; and the blue whale I was going to photograph was right in front of the boat. And we were moving under sail, so we could be nice and quiet, and not disturb the whales; and as I was about to take the photograph, the wind died – bloop – and the sails went bloop, and we weren't moving forward. So the person on the helm, driving the boat, started the engine. Now, that was really not a very good idea, because of course, the blue whale in the water here had an engine starting right next to its head. So instead of its tail sliding gently through the surface of the water, it smashed its tail down on the water in front of us, and I felt, I felt the tail go past my nose, like that. And the whole of the boat tipped up, and all our samples of blue whale poo went all over the place again. I think we got it in the curry; I got it in my bunk; we got it everywhere. But that is the day that I really knew how big blue whales are.

Now, just to give you an idea of how enormous these creatures are – I'm sure you know the statistics. Blue whales are very nearly 30 metres long; something like 28, 29 metres. Now, I just want you to look up at the ceiling above you. That ceiling is 10 metres above us – okay? So a blue whale is very nearly three times the length from here to there. So if a blue whale was diving down to where we are now, its nose would be here, and most of its body would be sticking up into the air beyond that ceiling. Its heart would be somewhere suspended over your head. Its heart is the size of a smart car. Boom! Boom! Boom! Beats very, very, very slowly. Just imagine that. Some of its blood vessels are big enough for a two-year-old child to swim down.

Now, on that day when the blue whale very nearly sunk our boat – I mean, if that...you know, another ten centimetres and it would have snapped the front off our boat, and we'd have sunk like a stone – and, you know, there aren't very many lifeboats in the middle of the Indian Ocean. And you could say that a blue whale is a dangerous animal. It's not really a dangerous animal; it's not going to attack you, but you have to be very careful around a big animal like that. You know: don't start an engine next to its head. Don't be in the water next to it when it might suddenly turn round and bop you with one of its flippers. The blue whale wouldn't have meant to hurt us, but it might have done a great deal of damage to us. You have to be careful around animals. They are just doing their thing, and it's up to us to make sure that we keep safe.

There are, of course, some animals that will actively hunt and kill human beings. Now, this is the skull of a tiger. And I just want you to look at it for a minute, because I think even more than seeing the whole, live animal – because when you see a live tiger, it's all furry and gorgeous and stripy and beautiful, and, you know, you could go, ah, it's really cute, and forget...and forget that everything about a tiger, everything about a lion – lion skulls are very, very similar to this – is about killing. Just look at those teeth. And here, at the side, huge muscles wrap around the outside of the skull and underneath the cheekbones here to close those jaws; to give that big cat the most terrifically powerful bite. Now, up against that, you really don't have a chance. Added to that, these two biggest of big cats, lions and tigers, have fantastic senses. They have a wonderful sense of smell; they have terrific eyesight. They have the ability to move extremely quietly, so that they can be right up next to you before you even know that they're there.

So these are obviously very, very dangerous animals. Now, I don't know about you: I love big cats; I love lions and tigers. But I'm not sure how I would feel about them if I had them living in my back garden. And of course, the people who live in the countries where these big, dangerous animals come from – that's the problem that they have. And it is a problem. Both tigers and lions are man-eaters, and in some places, they get so used to seeing people and being around people, that they lose their fear and start to think of us as being prey – just another animal that they can eat. And that's fair enough, isn't it, really? You can't blame them for thinking that. But obviously, if you lived in a country like some of the countries in East Africa, where lions come from, if a member of your family had been killed and eaten by a lion, how would you feel about lions? You wouldn't feel good about them, would you? And that's exactly what's happening in parts of East Africa, and parts of India with tigers. What's happening is that because people are being hunted and killed by these big cats, they really, really hate them. They poison them, they shoot them, they kill them wherever they can.

And in East Africa particularly, that's really, really bad news: bad news for lions because their populations are dropping, and bad news for people too, because tourists come from around the world to see East African lions.

So if you can find a solution to this problem that keeps people safe from lions, then the lions will be safe from people. Because when people feel safe from lions, they start to think about them differently; they start to be proud of these big cats that they share their environment with. And that is the story that I wanted to tell, because there are scientists in Africa and in India who are working with local people and using their expertise from years and years of studying big cat behaviour to help people keep safe from lions. And where people are safe from lions, then the lions are safe for the future; their population is safe for the future. And I wanted to tell that story, but I wanted to tell it from the point of view of a child living in that environment. And I found a real story that I could base that on. While I was researching a book called *Deadly*, which is all about animals that kill people, and I was finding out about lions and tigers, and how they sometimes hunt humans, I found a photograph of a little boy. And it was a little boy who lives in Tanzania.

Now, I actually wanted to set my story in Mozambique, but it's the same neck of the woods: Tanzania is just north of Mozambique, a country in East Africa. And in the photograph, this little boy is standing like this. He's about your age, and he's looking very serious into the camera, and he's got scuffs on his knees, and he's a muscly little kid, and you can just tell by looking at him, he is the sort of person who drives his poor mother to complete distraction. You know, he's always down the river fishing, climbing up a tree, up to all sorts. And he's got a fishing pole over his right shoulder, but his left arm is just a stump. And the story of that little boy, whose name is Hassan – he's not a little boy now; he's a young man – but when Hassan was five years old he was attacked by a lion. He was attacked by a young lion, fully grown, so with this sort of kit and muscles and claws and all the rest of it, but inexperienced at using it. So instead of grabbing him by the throat and killing him quickly by puncturing his windpipe with those great big teeth, it grabbed him by the arm, dragged him off into the bushes. It dragged him by his left arm, actually; and he realised his right arm was free. So what he did was – five years old, now, remember – he punched the lion in the face really hard as he could – and the lion eventually went, oh, I don't like it when my dinner hits me, and dropped him, and ran off. But unfortunately, by that stage, his arm was so badly damaged that he lost it.

Now, I saw the photograph of him that was taken a few years later, when he was about your age, and I learnt the story about how he had lost his arm, and I

immediately knew that was the child who I wanted to base my story on. So that's why I wrote this book. And I'm going to read it, read a little bit to you. I just want to draw your attention to the title: *The Lion Who Stole My Arm* – okay? It does what it says on the packet, so be prepared. So the little boy in this story is called Pedru, and he's just about to check some traps that he's set for guinea fowl outside his village. And remember he's living in the African bush; he's not living in a town; he's not living somewhere with roads and supermarkets. And this is what happens.

Something had got to the traps before Pedru. Freshly scattered guinea fowl feathers dotted the clearing. Whatever had eaten the birds could still be close by, so Pedru scanned the ground; and there, framed by a criss-cross of bird feet, was a paw print: oval toes like petals around a central pad, and no claw marks – big cat. Leopard, Pedru told himself. Let it be a leopard that would take the birds from the traps and slip away and not give him any trouble: please let it not be a lion that might be waiting for a bigger meal. The hair on Pedru's neck stood on end; his heart pounded. He knew he must run away right now. He streaked for the grass and the bushes, ignoring the thorns that tore at his skin, sweating and panting. He reached the path with the sound of voices up ahead and the smell of fires; leant on his knees to get his breath back, relieved to feel safe. And then, thwack! Pedru's legs were punched from underneath him. His body hit the ground, and the air was knocked out of his lungs. For a moment, he didn't hear or see anything. And then, when his eyes and ears worked again, he found he was being dragged along on his back by his outstretched right arm. He twisted round to see what was holding him – and looked straight into the face of a lion. He went numb. Time slowed down. Sound drained from the world, leaving a bowl of silence with Pedru and the lion at the bottom of it. Pedru stared at the lion. It was so close that even in the fading light he could see the spotted lines on its snout, the scraggy tufts of mane on its neck. He could smell its breath, hot and meaty, and feel where its teeth had pierced his arm and crushed the bone, although he was too afraid to feel any pain.

The lion was dragging him into the long grass. As soon as it feels safe, hidden in the bush, Pedru said to himself, it is going to eat me. He stopped being numb and suddenly felt very angry. This lion was not going to put an end to him. His fishing pole, with a fish he had caught still tied to it, was gripped in his left hand. He swung it with all his strength, and he hit the lion hard on the head. He felt the blow strike, and when he looked at the lion again, it had a cut between its ears. So Pedru hit it again, and for a moment it looked right at him, its golden eyes hot like the sun. And then it snarled, and it ran away. And that's when Pedru saw that it had taken his arm.

So this story is about what Pedru does with his anger. And without wanting to give too much away, I just want to say that if somebody like Pedru, who suffered that attack from a lion, can learn to live with a dangerous animal like a lion in his back yard, then I think all of us can learn to live with the species that share our planet. We are the ones who have a choice. Lions and tigers and blue whales don't have a choice; the choice is in our hands. Thank you very much for listening.

JF: Wow! Absolutely fascinating. I think we should have a huge round of applause for Nicola. [Applause] Wow! Just amazing. That's a story we're not going to forget soon, isn't it? Incredible, absolutely; and we're not going to forget that skull, either.

ND: I don't want to take this skull back to the museum, I think it's so beautiful; it's just an amazing thing.

JF: Well, we have some more live creatures who are going to join us...

ND: Excellent!

JF: ...on the sofa, Nicola, for some questions. So let me invite up from the front row – we've got Lewis and Cristina. Come on up, and you can ask Nicola your questions. Come and sit beside me. Lovely to see you.

ND: Do you want to have a tiger skull on your lap?

Cristina: Yes please.

JF: Yes please: there's a question we've not been asked before.

ND: Okay, so hold it like that – got it?

JF: Wow!

ND: It's cool, isn't it?

Cristina: Yeah.

JF: How does it feel?

Cristina: It feels weird.

JF: Amazing. Right; can you hold it, and ask your question at the same time for Nicola?

Cristina: What is your favourite part about being a zoologist?

ND: My favourite part about being a zoologist; that's a really great question, and you know, nobody has ever asked me that before. Well done. My favourite part about being a zoologist: well, there are three favourite parts. One is seeing things I've never seen before: like two weeks ago I was in Indonesia learning to dive, watching turtles sleeping on ledges in coral reefs. That was absolutely wonderful. But I have animals in my back garden; I have greater spotted woodpeckers that visit my peanut feeders, and I love those, too. And then my other favourite part is sharing that with my readers. I really, really love that: particularly young readers like you, because you share my enthusiasm for the natural world, so it's great to meet kindred spirits.

JF: Oh, great answer – and great question. And do you fancy maybe being a zoologist?

Cristina: Yeah.

JF: Yeah? Like animals?

Cristina: Yes.

JF: Well, obviously. Right, keeping a hold of him just now: hi there, Lewis, what's your question for Nicola?

Lewis: How does writing stories make you feel?

ND: Oh wow! Another really fantastic question. Okay: at its best it makes me feel transported, and I am absolutely in the story that I'm writing. I'm totally in those words and the images that I'm creating with my words. When it's not going well, it just makes me feel really grumpy, and I slam doors and put loads of washing on, and kick things, and generally get quite horrible. But actually, the really lovely part of story-making is when I share a story – when I'm reading it to an audience, and that moment when the audience is completely still and completely quiet, and completely on the edge of their seat. That is absolutely the best, because when I was young I was a passionate reader, and I loved reading stories. I lived between the pages of books. So to experience creating that feeling for other people is the best.

JF: Ah, another great answer. Lewis, do you enjoy reading?

Lewis: Yes.

JF: Yeah. That was the right answer, Lewis! Thank you both very much indeed. I think you might need to give this back to Nicola.

ND: I'll just take that skull back. Lovely, thank you.

JF: Thank you very much: a round of applause for our brilliant questions. Lewis and Cristina, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much indeed.

Well, the questions have been coming in thick and fast...

ND: Excellent.

JF: ...on Twitter. Thank you very much for them. So let me see what I have here first. From Kinnaird Primary School in Falkirk, Nicola – so this is interesting, because you've been talking about your passion for zoology; but they're asking, what did you want to be when you were younger?

ND: I think I wanted to be a wolf. I think I hoped that I would turn into a wolf and run off into the woods. I didn't really...I've never really had a plan B. And lots of different things. But that passion for animals has been, you know, the thread that's gone through my whole life, really, even though I've had moments when I thought I wanted to be a painter – that's the other thing I really wanted to be, was a painter. And not a painter and decorator.

JF: No, although that would be useful.

ND: Oh, that would have been quite useful, yeah, consider...I think I've probably done more painting and decorating than I've done painting in my life, actually.

JF: And do you...I mean, was there a little moment you can remember, as a very young child, where the, sort of, light bulb went on and you thought, yes, animals; I love animals?

ND: I think it happened so early, I don't remember the moment; I just remember lying on my tummy and watching ants in the garden, and I think my earliest memory is watching a bumble bee coming into a tulip. And in my memory, I'm the same height as the tulip, so...

JF: Wow.

ND: ...I mean, I know I'm not very much bigger than a tulip now, but, you know, when I really was the same height as a tulip; so I was very young. And I can just remember the delight of that; the sheer pleasure of watching this creature in this beautiful flower. And I think that delight in the natural world is...it's been the light bulb inside my life.

JF: Yeah. And it's still on, clearly...

ND: Yeah.

JF: ...as bright as ever. Thank you very much, Kinnaird Primary. And this one comes from Burravoe School, which is in Shetland...

ND: Oh, Shetland! I love Shetland!

JF: ...Yell, in Shetland. Wow, amazing, amazing place to be. Now, this is an interesting one: I wonder if some people in the classroom are perhaps wanting to follow you in your career? How long did you study to be a zoologist?

ND: Okay, this may not be good news, all right? Three science A-levels: so physics, chemistry and biology. And actually, if you can do maths, that's really, really helpful to be a biologist. But, you know, there are other ways of being involved with wildlife that don't require that academic path. You know, you can be a field assistant, you can be somebody – for instance, you know, if you fancy going and studying penguins, and you want to go down to the Antarctic, British Antarctic Survey are always looking for electricians, carpenters, medics, all those sorts of things. There are many routes to achieving your aim of being involved with animals in the natural world.

JF: Yeah, interesting. Thank you very much for that question. Right, what else do we have here? At Kinnaird, again – oh well, I suppose, in a sense, you've answered that: what inspired you to study animals? It's maybe always been there; but maybe to study is something slightly different.

ND: To study: and study is something different, actually. I did, for a while, want to be an artist, wanted to be a painter, and I think what changed for me is that I began to really enjoy knowing stuff about animals, and actually – you know, I was talking about the pleasure of seeing things in the wild – and the pleasure of seeing things, kind of, meshed with the pleasure of knowing things, and I just really like learning stuff. It's a deep satisfaction to me. And I am totally delighted by the fact that I will never know enough; that there is always more and more and more to learn. You know, something about being on a tropical reef two weeks ago: I know nothing about reefs, so that's a whole new habitat, a whole new set of animals. You know, I don't know anything about fish identification, but this time next year I'm going to know a lot more than I know no.

JF: And I've already learnt a lot already this morning from Nicola about animal poo. I mean, did you know all of that, about animal poo? I had no idea! A whole world has opened up to me – possibly, of stinky animal poo. Right, now we're moving on to another question: what inspired you to write books? So, multifaceted career you've got.

ND: Okay, well, as I say, I was a really passionate reader as a child. I was quite a solitary kid, and books were my companions; books were my friends. I lived inside my imagination. I absolutely loved *Lord of the Rings*. I loved Alan Garner's books; but I also read books like *My Family and Other Animals*, which was written by a man called Gerald Durrell, who started the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust. And it's the story of his life as a child on a Greek island, where basically, he was allowed to not go to school, and run around and catch animals – perfect: that would have been my perfect childhood, really. So it's reading things like that; being a reader is what made me into a writer.

JF: Yeah. Do you all enjoy reading?

Aud: Yes.

JF: Yeah: huge enthusiasm there, Nicola. This is a...and you out there, do you enjoy reading and writing? Yes! Heard you loud and clear.

ND: Do you know, I often get asked by people who are interested in writing, what are the tips for becoming a writer; and actually, the first one is read.

JF: Yeah.

ND: Because everything you read is training your brain to understand the power of words; and having power over words is a super power, it really is.

JF: Well, you've certainly got them. Also, I should just tell you, as well as everything else, I'll give you a fact: if you are interested in the natural world, and I know that you are, something you might want to explore that's starting soon on the twenty-seventh March it begins, BBC Scotland Learning will be working in partnership with the RSPB, Wildlife Trust, and Rutland Waters, to share lots of fantastic learning resources, so I'm sure the teachers will be interested in this, encouraging schools to explore nature and wildlife. So if you look at BBC ScotLearn on Twitter, you'll find out all of the information.

You're not going to believe it: we've run out of time, Nicola!

ND: No!

JF: How do you feel about that, everyone? How about a big Ahh!

Aud: Ahhh.

JF: Oh, so lovely. I can't quite believe it. How much have you enjoyed it?

Aud: A lot.

JF: Yes, a lot; a lot. I think we should have a huge round of applause for Nicola Davies.

[Applause]

ND: Thank you, thank you. Thank you.

JF: We have learnt so, so much. And in fact, we might want to – especially you guys, who are here today – you might want to go back, once you're back at school, and watch this programme again. Would you like to do that?

Aud: Yes.

JF: You can do that through the magic of the internet. You can watch it again on line very, very soon, by going to [www.scottishbooktrust.com/authors](http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/authors) live, and in fact, you can watch all of the other events that we've done, and we've done loads with all sorts of really interesting writers. And while you're on that site, you can sign up to watch all the ones that are going to come in the future: that's a good bargain, isn't it?

Aud: Yes.

JF: Yes, indeed. We will be back very soon with more Authors Live. I hope to see you then; but from me, Janice, from our wonderful audience, and most important of all, the fantastic Nicola Davies, thank you.

ND: Thank you.

JF: Thanks for watching, and 'bye 'bye...

ND: 'Bye 'bye.

JF: ...and another round of applause for Nicola.

[Applause]

JF: Thank you.

ND: Thank you so much.