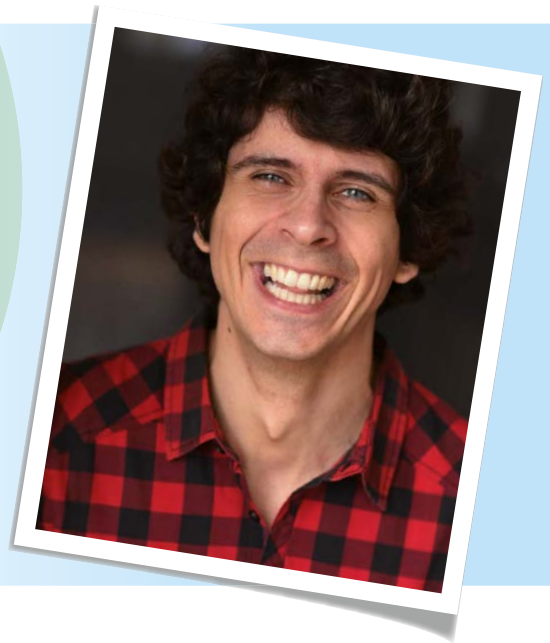


The PS interview

Leigh Hoath asks TV presenter Andy Day about his encounters with dinosaurs, baby animals and how he problem-solves with science



I didn't know there were so many different species of dinosaur. It was only through my own children becoming (rather overly) obsessed with watching *Andy's Dinosaur Adventures* on the BBC's *CBeebies* channel that I realised how much learning takes place through television. Imagine a sunny day in the garden: my son comes hurtling round the corner shouting 'Help! I'm being chased by an *Allosaurus!*', closely followed by his twin sister yelling equally loudly 'No! It's a *Velociraptor!*' They were two-and-a-half years old and it struck me how much they were absorbing and learning without realising it.

Children's TV seems to have developed hugely since I watched it as a child: there are many programmes with a strong educational focus. So I decided it would be worth exploring the opportunities to engage children in the foundation stage and key stage 1 (ages 3–7) through the science in these programmes.

In his programmes, Andy Day is an avid scientist who has 'worked' in the Natural History Museum and used its grandfather clock as a means of travelling back in time to solve many a crisis that ruins part of his wonderful display. He has explored many prehistoric contexts and found himself in battles between different animals and often challenged in returning to the clock. As well as going back in time he has also had many *Wild Adventures* with

Kip, who flies him around the world to understand more about how a certain animal is adapted to its environment. More recently, Andy has entered the world of *Baby Animals*, looking at different skills they gain as they grow.

Whatever the context, one thing is evident: there is a lot of science in all the programmes. Whether this is considering the feeding patterns between carnivores and herbivores, using forces to return Andy to the clock, or how animals are adapted to their environments, the links

Interview with Andy

How did you end up in a role where you are presenting programmes with such a strong natural history focus? Do you have a science background?

My amazing commissioner at the time, Michael Carrington, knew I wanted to do my own show. I had pitched different ideas quite frequently, so I guess I was fresh in his head when the BBC Natural History Unit pitched the idea of *Wild Adventures* (which then carried on to become *Dinosaur Adventures* and *Prehistoric Adventures* of course). Originally it was going to be a cartoon character called Max going on these adventures, but Michael said that if it was made as a live action series with me in it then he would commission it. I got the email while away travelling, which was very apt I thought! I was over the moon to be asked to do a pilot. I love adventure

are easily established.

A friend's daughter (age 4) was very enthusiastic about the programmes and, when asked what questions she would like to ask Andy, she came up with: 'Why does *Triceratops* have horns?' and 'Why do some dinosaurs walk on four legs while some walk on two like *T. rex*?' There is a strong focus on starting with children's questions; using a short television programme might just generate more than you thought possible.

and I love natural history but I'm afraid I do not have a science background - just a love and appreciation of it.

When the episodes are put together is there a conscious emphasis on enhancing learning around the species involved?

Absolutely! This programme is made by the Natural History Unit and its makers are made up of zoologists, natural history filmmakers and just very creative filmmakers who know how to execute a good adventure. The best way to learn in my eyes is through having fun. This is the most successful way of educating our children and, in fact, adults too. That is why having a story that they can engage with is so important; in my eyes, just facts doesn't 'cut it' with everyone even if they are interesting facts. Even the BBC *Planet Earth* series is edited and filmed in a dramatic story-driven way: it is what we humans like to see.

Key words: ■ Science in the media

What has been your favourite series to make to date and why?

For me, it has been *Prehistoric Adventures*. Because it was the third series, we knew exactly what we were doing from the other programmes. It involves not just dinosaurs but a range of interesting prehistoric animals and amazing facts and also touches on lots on evolution in a child-friendly way, as well as how creatures have changed over the years. I got to be a caveman version of myself, which I loved! [Leigh: *I know that episode and I could never quite work out whether it was really you or not!*]

Would you like to see your programmes used as means of developing children's knowledge and understanding in the classroom? Do you think there is a value/link between what children watch at home and what they do in school?

Yes, in fact I have

could have been the biggest one ever, so I would like to be that one, as I'm used to being tall!

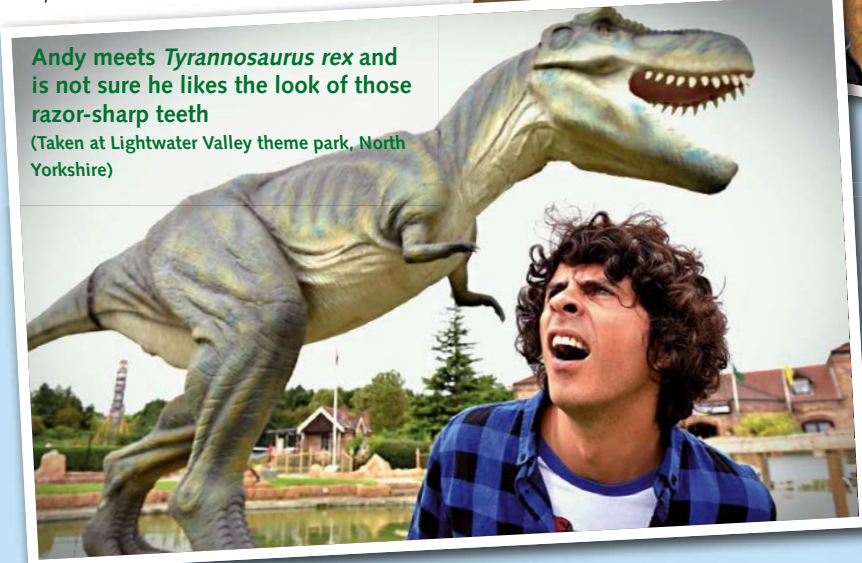
You often have to solve many problems when it comes to getting back to the museum, which solution has been your favourite?

In the *Baby Animals* series, which adaptation or skill impressed you the most?

There are so many, but I found the mandarin chicks having to jump out of their nest from a great height to follow their mums, risking their lives after just being born, is quite an incredible thing. I find it fascinating what *all* animals, including us humans, do to survive.



Triceratops confronts Andy – those horns could do some damage!
(Taken at Lightwater Valley theme park, North Yorkshire)



Andy meets Tyrannosaurus rex and is not sure he likes the look of those razor-sharp teeth
(Taken at Lightwater Valley theme park, North Yorkshire)

If you could learn more about any part of science what would it be?

Space would be a big and interesting one to tackle in the knowledge department. I would like to know more about the wonders of space.

This issue's theme is 'Famous Scientists' and I think it is really interesting that, despite not having a background in science, Andy's enthusiasm for it has driven him forward to present a number of series that focus on science – probably not dissimilar to many science coordinators in school!

I would like to thank Andy for giving his time to complete this interview and for being such a great enthusiast for children learning from an early age. I know I cannot wait to see where his next adventures take him!

spoken in many schools and the teachers tell me that they do show the programmes quite often to teach the children about natural history. Even the raps about dinosaurs and prehistoric creatures have become quite popular in school classrooms; children learn facts from them and get used to learning the names. It is amazing to hear this as both I and the guys at the Natural History Unit are very passionate about engaging children with learning these things.

If you could choose to be any dinosaur which would it be and why?

I would be the *Titanosaurus* that was recently discovered. Scientists believe it

I enjoyed having to replace a sand dollar. That was the episode where I flew on the back of an *Oritheceirus!* What better way to solve a problem!

What can you tell my friend's daughter about Triceratops and T. rex?

Triceratops is a herbivore; it had three great horns on its head that it would have used to protect itself from dinosaurs like *T. rex*. Its name in Greek means 'three-horned face'.

T. rex had razor-sharp teeth; its name means 'tyrant lizard' and it grew to about 6 metres tall. It was a very dangerous meat-eating dinosaur that lived 65 million years ago.

Andy Day is a television presenter and **Leigh Hoath** is Editor of *Primary Science*.