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Press Materials: <http://pbs.org/pressroom> or <http://thirteen.org/pressroom>

Nature: Attenborough and the Sea Dragon

Premieres Wednesday, January 9 at 8 p.m. (check local listings)
Streams Thursday, January 10 at pbs.org/nature and on PBS apps

Synopsis:

A remarkable chance discovery is about to reveal secrets that have laid hidden for 200 million years. A “dragon” that ruled the ocean at the time of the dinosaurs was found in the eroding cliffs on the southeast coast of England called the Jurassic Coast. It’s an *Ichthyosaur*, a fish lizard. This fearsome predator had the very best characteristics of reptiles and mammals in one formidable package. It could regulate its own body temperature, had astonishingly acute eyesight, and an impressive set of blade-like teeth and powerful, gripping jaws to hunt and swallow its prey whole. As the forensic investigation unfolds, fossil hunter Chris Moore and his team stumble into the 200-million-year-old murder mystery of this extraordinary creature’s fate. Sir David Attenborough hosts this detective story, from the challenging on-site extraction of the fossils to the 3D reconstruction of the creature. He looks at evidence from animals across the world to try and piece together how this super predator lived and died.

Long TV Listing:

Join Sir David Attenborough as he pieces together the remarkable discovery of the *Ichthyosaur*, a fearsome fish lizard that lived during the age of dinosaurs, from the

challenging extraction of the fossils to the 3D reconstruction of the sea creature.

Short TV Listing:

Join Sir David Attenborough to learn about a sea creature that lived during the age of dinosaurs.

Running Time: 60 minutes

Featured Creatures:

- *Ichthyosaur*
- Ammonite
- Dolphin
- Shark (various)
- *Temnodontosaur*
- Crocodile
- Leatherback turtle

Noteworthy Facts:

- *Ichthyosaurs* dominated the seas for more than 150 million years and died out around 90 million years ago.
- The first complete skeleton of an *ichthyosaur* was discovered in Dorset, England, in 1811 by Mary Anning, a self-taught fossil hunter. When a photo of it was published in 1814, people believed it to be a fish lizard or a sea dragon. Since that time, many fossil fragments of *ichthyosaurs* have been discovered on the Jurassic coast, but complete skeletons are very rare.
- It's extremely rare to find a new species of *ichthyosaur* – only nine have been discovered in the last 200 years.
- The *Temnodontosaurus* was one of the largest of the *ichthyosaurs*. This predator grew up to 33 feet long and had the largest eyes known of any animal. It also had rows of sharp teeth and crocodile-like jaws that would have allowed it to rip apart almost anything – including smaller *ichthyosaurs*.
- Dolphins and *ichthyosaurs* have several characteristics in common, indicating that they may have both evolved from ancestors that once lived on land. Both steady themselves as they turn through the water using their front paddles and dorsal fins. However, *ichthyosaurs* also have back paddles, while dolphins have flattened horizontal tails that drive themselves forward by beating up and down. *Ichthyosaur* tails were flattened vertically, like those of sharks.

Buzzworthy Moments:

- The discovery of a new species of *ichthyosaur* begins in Dorset on the south coast of England – one of the most important geological sites in the world. Archaeologist Chris Moore and his excavation team carefully dig by hand along the side of a cliff to minimize damage to the fossils. Rough seas and heavy downpours turn the excavation into a perilous process.
- Once the fossil is uncovered, several signs point to it being a new species of *ichthyosaur*, including the large size of the paddle and the arrangement of the bones. Bigger than most *ichthyosaurs* discovered in the area, it's estimated to have been up to 15 feet long.
- The team also finds signs of fossilized skin – a very rare occurrence. Fiann Smithwick, an expert on fossilized skin, determines that this *ichthyosaur* conformed to a type of color pattern known as “counter shading,” which allowed it to be camouflaged in the open seas as well as protected against ultraviolet light. This is the first time that evidence of a counter-shaded pattern in an *ichthyosaur* has been discovered.
- After weeks of work, Moore and the team expose the backbones and ribs of the fossil and make a startling discovery. Breakages through the rib cage and a missing head suggest that it was attacked and killed by a much bigger animal, most likely a *temnodontosaurus*. A vivid computer animation reimagines this epic battle at sea – and what happened to our fallen *ichthyosaur*.

Series Overview:

Nature is a voice for the natural world, bringing the wonders of wildlife and stories of conservation to millions of American viewers. **Nature** has won more than 700 honors from the television industry, the international wildlife film communities and environmental organizations, including 18 Emmys and three Peabody Awards.

Production Credits:

Nature is a production of THIRTEEN PRODUCTIONS LLC for WNET and PBS. For **Nature**: Fred Kaufman is Executive Producer. Bill Murphy is Series Producer and Janet Hess is Series Editor. **Attenborough and the Sea Dragon** is a BBC Studios production for PBS and BBC with THIRTEEN PRODUCTIONS LLC. The documentary is produced and directed by Sally Thomson. Michael Gunton is Executive Producer. Edited by Mike Denny. Cinematography by Robin Cox. Original Music by Alex Stoloff. Presented by David Attenborough.

Underwriters:

Support for this **Nature** program was made possible in part by the Arnhold Family in memory of Clarisse Arnhold, Sue and Edgar Wachenheim III, the Kate W. Cassidy Foundation, the Lillian Goldman Charitable Trust, Kathy Chiao and Ken Hao, the Anderson Family Fund, the Filomen M. D'Agostino Foundation, Rosalind P. Walter, the Halmi Family in memory of Robert Halmi, Sr., Sandra Atlas Bass, the Sun Hill Family Foundation, by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and by the nation's public television stations.

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About WNET

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