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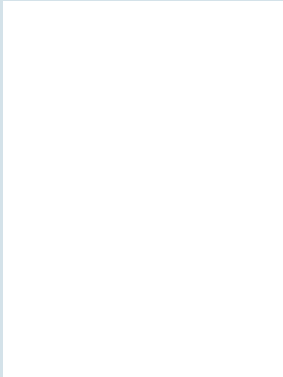
WILD THOUGHTS

The untimely death of Steve Irwin, the real-life Crocodile Dundee who was killed by a stingray while filming *Ocean's Deadliest* off the coast of Australia, has prompted an outpouring of grief. He was a global phenomenon.

But I'm afraid I was never a fan. I cringed every time I saw him manhandling, provoking and bullying the animals he used to make himself a star, pushing them to the limit to make cheap, kiss-me-quick television. His apparent determination to prove that all animals are baddies and out to get us meant that virtually every creature he brandished in front of the camera was in distress. Did you ever notice how it was always Irwin doing the chasing? The animals were trying to get away.

I've rubbed shoulders with great white sharks, slept with a puff adder, tripped over an alligator and had goodness knows how many other close encounters with supposedly dangerous animals over the years. But I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times I've actually been bumped, bitten or stung. Most 'dangerous animals' are dangerous only if you push their natural boundaries. If it's true that Irwin wasn't being confrontational with the normally docile stingray, then it was incredibly bad luck. But the message for anyone tempted to imitate his animal antics is loud and clear: it is just a matter of time before you will be hurt.

Some people argue that Irwin-style television is the only way to reach a huge human population with virtually zero interest in wildlife. But I believe it encourages entirely the wrong attitude towards wildlife – manipulative, domineering and interfering. I'm sure Irwin himself was well-meaning, but I question the kind of interest his misguided programming inspired. Everyone responsible for this so-called natural history television – in front of the camera and behind – must share the blame. Surely, some of them have stopped, just for a moment, and thought, "This is wrong"?



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