

Eric Ashby (1918 – 2003)

Eric shared his love of the New Forest with the world through his wildlife films.

He believed that wild animals should be filmed behaving naturally, and his high standards of still photography and film-making in the wild became his hallmark. Eric worked on many wildlife programmes for the BBC natural history unit.

He was an extraordinarily patient man, visiting a site on 90 occasions to record just one minute of film about a badger. He was the first to capture the behaviour of badgers in daylight and also developed soundproof camera boxes that allowed him to get close to deer without the animals taking fright.

In the early 1960s, his films brought delight and wonder to viewers of the BBC's popular series *Look*, which was presented by Sir Peter Scott. So impressed was Scott by Eric's remarkably intimate close-ups of wild forest animals that he dubbed him the Silent Watcher.

It took four years of work for him to shoot enough sequences for his first 45-minute film, ***The Unknown Forest***, which was shown by the BBC. A unique portrait of real animal lives, it was warmly received by viewers, who were able to see how badgers, deer and foxes in the New Forest behaved. Two years later he filmed ***The Major***, the life story of a village oak tree and the first wildlife film to be shot in colour.

Other films followed, among them ***A Hare's Life***, ***A Forest Diary*** and ***The Private Life Of The Fox***. He produced work for ***The Year of the Deer*** and ***At Home With Badgers***. There was also a biographical piece, ***The Silent Watcher***.

An ardent conservationist, he founded the first local Badger Group in 1969 and was outspoken in his views against hunting. His secluded home in Linwood became a haven for some 30 wild foxes from rescue centres. Visitors from around the world came to see how Eric and his wife Eileen cared for them. They raised a cub called Tiger and told his story in a book ***My Life With Foxes*** (2000).

Chris Packham says of Eric: *"Eric and his wife Eileen were a great source of encouragement to me when I was younger and a little more fragile. A lovely man. And every time I campaign against the horror that is fox hunting I think of him and hope I do his memory justice."*

Eileen Ashby has made a huge archive of Eric's work available to support **No More Dodos**. They are being sold on a stall by Frankie James, a long term friend of Eric and Eileen who will be able to answer questions about this very special man.