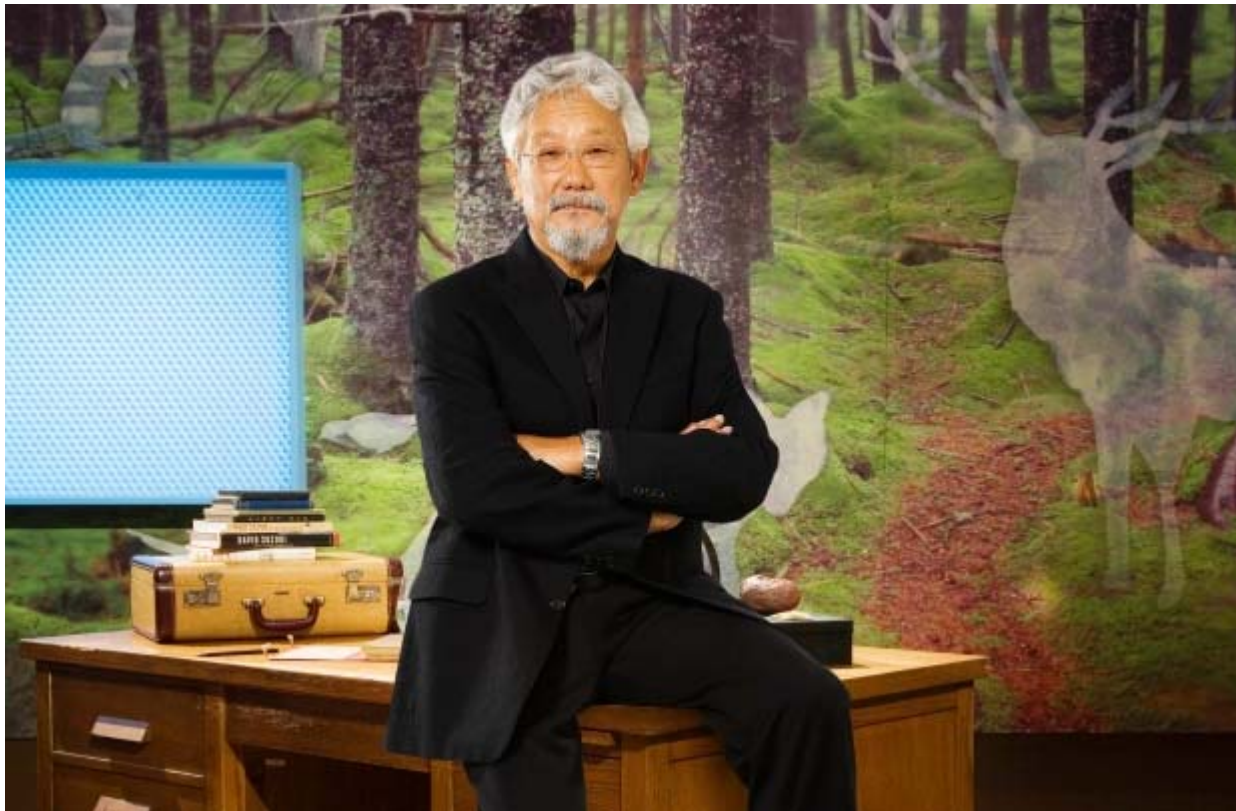


Back to school iTunes: Celebrating the Nature of Things

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BY CHRIS LACKNER, POSTMEDIA NEWS SEPTEMBER 12, 2011



David Suzuki says governments, corporations and people need to think about ecological 'rules we should live by' before they make decisions. 'But instead, we elevate the economy above everything else.'

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Embarking on the 51st season of The Nature of Things, David Suzuki is still preaching to the unconverted. Not just because the celebrated environmentalist has a national platform to do so, but because "there has never been a time when the series has been more important."

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Suzuki is proud of the CBC show's legacy of educating Canadians about science and environmental issues. In a recent phone interview before catching a flight to attend former NDP leader Jack Layton's funeral — "He and Olivia (Chow) were green, long before green meant anything," he offered in praise — the 75-year-old points out that Canada stands in stark contrast to the U.S., where a serious, prime-time environmental show has never aired on one of the major networks.

Suzuki points to the deep level of skepticism in the United States about climate change, as opposed to Canada, where an "overwhelming majority of people know that's something is going on." And he'd like to think *The Nature of Things* has played a role in shaping that perspective.

Suzuki said governments, corporations and people need to think about ecological "rules we should live by" before they make decisions. "But instead, we elevate the economy above everything else, so the prime minister has said repeatedly, for the last five years, that we can't afford to do anything about climate change because it will destroy the economy ... We elevate the economy above the very systems that keep us alive.

"And what's remarkable to me is that the prime minister has asthma, and I would have thought anyone with asthma would understand that the (things) that trigger an asthmatic episode have to do with the fact that we are treating the air like it's a garbage can.

"It's not the atmosphere OR the economy, it's not jobs OR spotted owls," he added. "The reality is that our home is a thin layer of air, water and soil around that planet. That's a biosphere, it's what keeps us alive. Ecologists try to tell us how we can do that sustainably ... (but) we don't do it that way, and that's getting us in a great deal of trouble."

On the new season of *The Nature of Things*, which premieres Oct. 13, Suzuki continues to explore the role of science in our lives — but two episodes have him particularly excited. And what's not surprising is that both are linked to green living.

In one episode, another segment of *The Suzuki Diaries*, Suzuki travels with his daughter Sarika to explore the health and sustainability of Canada's big cities, including Toronto, Montreal, Edmonton, Vancouver and Windsor. At the heart of their quest is discovering initiatives in our cities that are increasing their long-term vitality.

Suzuki calls the road-trip experience "mind-boggling and uplifting" because people around Canada are getting over the mindset of "it can't be done" or "it's too expensive" — what he deems the standard, knee-jerk reactions to new technologies or green initiatives.

"The cities are the habitats where Canadians live, and the worst thing in the world would be to break up cities and tell everybody to go out on the land and make a living. That would be horrendous," he said. "But cities can be much, much more efficient. They have grown up helter-skelter, and now we realize there is a huge turnover ... As buildings get demolished and we build them, there are all kinds of advanced ways to rebuild the city in a way that makes a lot of sense. And I believe it will not only make environmental sense, it will make social sense.

"We've got to build cities, not for cars, but for human beings. We have to build cities so we want to go

outside and walk along the streets, because that's where our friends (are), where our kids are playing, and that's where all the exciting things are going on.”

Suzuki is equally enthused about *Waking the Green Tiger*, an episode that looks at Mao's war against nature (1958 to 1976) — a government push to eradicate bugs, sparrows and rodents — and the rise of China's modern environmental movement.

“They have realized they have a real environmental problem. The air and the water are literally killing hundred of thousands of Chinese now ... You saw what China had to do for the Olympics. They virtually had to shut down most of the industries and the traffic just to clear that air. They are definitely embarked on a green direction. Nine out of 10 solar panels produced in the world are built in China.

“Unfortunately, they are hungry for energy that is fuelling (their) industrial growth. They have a very strong program to get wind turbines and solar panels in, (but) they are still building coal plants, they are still buying coal from around the world, they're buying oil from the tarsands,” he said.

As for the unconverted, Suzuki is unapologetic about what *The Nature of Things* tries to do each week, especially given what he sees as government and corporate attempts to muzzle, discredit and undermine the scientific community.

“We present our shows from a biocentric point of view, that nature is out there keeping us alive. We are immediately accused of being biased, when it's (just) a different perspective,” he said. “But people find that hard to buy into. We are accused of being anti-business, anti-progress ... Thank God viewers have watched us all these years and we are going into our 51st season. I think we have never been more ... relevant.”

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