

# TV MAGAZINE

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## McCALL OF THE WILD

Davina McCall risks her life to explore how humans and animals survive in the world's most extreme habitats

Davina McCall: *Life At The Extreme* Monday 9pm ITV



# EXTREME WORLD

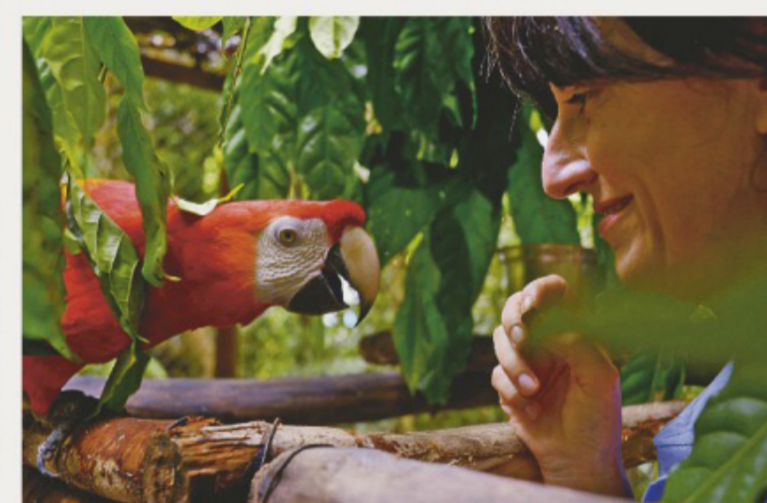
A terrifying encounter with a lion, wetting herself in the jungle and a hookworm living under her skin... Davina McCall reveals why her new series is the most daring thing she's ever done

**P**resenter Davina McCall is rolling up her trouser leg and showing *TV Magazine* a new, unwelcome addition to her family... "I've called him Percival," she says. "He's a hookworm. I did the worst thing: I Googled 'hookworm'. It's a thing with teeth and eyes! It's the worst-looking creature ever. That was when I named it - I thought: 'I have to put a name to the face.'" Percival hitched a ride home with Davina after she'd been filming in the Costa Rican jungle for her new ITV series, *Life At The Extreme*, which tests how animals and mankind - specifically human guinea pig Davina - react in the world's most extreme temperatures and locations, including the freezing Arctic, the scorching Namib Desert and 1,000ft under the sea. Percival is, mercifully, not wriggling around as we inspect him, but the white worm - which is about an inch-and-a-half long - is clearly visible underneath Davina's skin. "These little hookworm larvae burrow in through your feet," she explains. "I cut my foot in the jungle, wading through rivers, and in that kind of humidity, wounds can't heal. Eventually, my whole calf was really itching.

"After I got home, we had a bit of a party, people were getting tipsy, and someone said: 'There's an animal in there. Let's sweat it out.' We covered it in Vaseline to try to suffocate it and wrapped it in clingfilm. I don't know why I let some merry people try to gouge my leg out, but everyone was trying to get at it. My husband Matthew was going: 'I think I can see a head!' And I was like: 'Shut up, Matthew! Can you leave the room? This is serious stuff!' All this black pus was coming out. As soon as I went to hospital the next day, the nurse knew what it was. "Percival will die and just be broken down by my body. He's been evicted: 'Please leave Davina's house immediately.' That was the grossest thing that happened to me." The grossest, yes, but for the scariest there are plenty of contenders: the lioness that stalked her camp in the darkness of night in Namibia; the scorpions and rattlesnakes beneath her feet in the desert; the sedated Arctic polar bear she came so close to she could feel its breath on her face; and the massive sperm whale heading straight for her as she trod water in the Azores. "The lioness was very frightening," admits Davina, 48. "We were just lucky that she didn't feel threatened. She was huge, about 50 metres away, and just watching us. I woke up and



Davina insisted on racing a cheetah. Above: Roaming the Namib Desert



Clockwise from left: Davina meets tribes as she starts her journey in Namibia; visiting the Azores, she descends 1,000 metres down to the sea floor in a submarine; feeding a parrot in the Costa Rican rainforest; and meeting seals in Svalbard, Norway

our guide Henko had a gun pointing at her in case she charged. He whispered: 'We just have to wait.' Oh. My. God. "When it was my turn to keep watch later that night, I had never been so alert. I thought: 'People's lives are in my hands.' I was thrilled." Her encounter with the sperm whale is perhaps the most extraordinary to watch. Davina bobs up and down in the water, a tiny speck in the ocean, when suddenly what looks like a huge black oil tanker emerges into view and bears down on her. "It's just the biggest head, swimming towards you," she recalls. "I'm like: 'Okay, I don't really know where to go or what to do, so I should probably just stay here.' But it's coming straight for me. One of them literally swam under me. I didn't even think about its massive tail, but everyone watching from our boat was like: 'S\*\*t, s\*\*t, s\*\*t - the tail!' But then it ducked down and swam off. I got so close, I could hear its sonar clicking sound." Filming this show was clearly a world away from the glamour of a TV studio. "I have never looked so bad as I do in this series," laughs Davina. "I didn't once look in a mirror. On my penultimate night in Costa Rica, I was 50 metres up a tree, camping, when there was a torrential downpour. I attempted to use a shewee [a portable device allowing women to urinate discreetly while standing] and ended up half-wetting myself. The tent's leaking. I'm lying in a pool of water and I just started crying." So extreme is this series, Davina had to convince Matthew, 47, and their three kids - Holly, 14, Tilly, 12, and nine-year-old Chester - to give their blessing for her to sign up for it. "We had a family meeting about whether I was going to do it or not," she reveals. "It was four weeks away, which is more of a

commitment time-wise than I'd normally do, and the kids were frightened what this might do to me after the Sport Relief challenge [in 2014, when Davina collapsed with hypothermia after trying to run, cycle and swim 500 miles]. Chester and Tilly have never seen me coming out of the water [in Lake Windermere], but they know I was very tired and how much training it took. I said: 'It's not the same thing. I'll be very well looked after. Mummy won't be in any danger.' My nose was slightly growing as I was saying it. Then, every time I came back with a new story about it all, they'd be like: 'Oh my God, Mummy. Not No!'"

### IRON WOMAN

Davina deliberately avoided telling her kids too much about her deep-sea adventure in the Azores, in the mid-Atlantic ocean. "I had some hypnosis for going down in a submarine, but I didn't talk too much about that to them because I thought they'd be worried," she admits. "I've never suffered from claustrophobia, but there's the worry of having a freak-out beneath the sea. You can't go: 'Hang on a minute, I need to get out,' because it takes 45 minutes to get to the surface. You can't do anything in a hurry - you just have to be calm and patient. So I had three sessions with a hypnotist. He told me I'd enjoy it and, actually, I loved every second of it. "I've always had a passion for the ocean. One of the things promised to me before I agreed to do this show was swimming with whales - that was a lifelong dream - and I checked whether I could run with cheetahs. They said: 'There's some tame-ish cheetahs.' Tame-ish?!" Her new friend Percival aside, Davina escaped her globetrotting with no other cuts

### THE BIG INTERVIEW

or bruises. And she's already contemplating what her next endurance test should be. "I'm going to do some sort of physical challenge," she grins. "Tana Ramsay [TV chef Gordon's wife] has been trying to get me to do an Ironman triathlon, so something like that would be good, but I'll need to take three months off to train for it." She pauses. "Do you know what's really interesting? As I've got older and I've realised I'm not going to have any more children, I've sort of changed my mind-set to: 'What do I want to do?' I've seen a lot of people - friends of my parents - who stop working and are a bit lost. I love working. So I'm taking a leaf out of Gloria Hunniford's book, and saying: 'I'll have you for as long as you'll have me.'" "I don't know where I'll end up in five or 10 years, but I'd love to still be doing something. It's exciting. I'm in a place where I'm loving my work. I love my health and fitness [she's released two books and 12 DVDs] and really enjoy the TV programmes I'm doing. They make me laugh, they make me cry and I never know what's going to happen next. And I get to spend a bit of time at home. I just feel really happy." And not even Percival is able to wipe the smile off Davina's face... ♦ **Preview p37**

"I HAD HYPNOSIS TO GO DOWN IN THE SUBMARINE"

Words: Paul Simpson