

# David Suzuki

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**David Takayoshi Suzuki** CC OBC (born March 24, 1936), is a Canadian science broadcaster and environmental activist. Since the mid-1970s, Suzuki has been known for his TV and radio series and books about nature and the environment. He is best known as host of the popular and long-running CBC Television science magazine, *The Nature of Things*, seen in syndication in over 40 nations. He is also well known for criticizing governments for their lack of action to protect the environment.

A long time activist to reverse global climate change, Suzuki co-founded the David Suzuki Foundation in 1990, to work "to find ways for society to live in balance with the natural world that sustains us." The Foundation's priorities are: oceans and sustainable fishing, climate change and clean energy, sustainability, and David Suzuki's Nature Challenge. He also served as a director of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association from 1982-1987.

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## Early life

Suzuki had a twin sister named Marcia, as well as two other siblings, Geraldine (now known as Aiko) and Dawn. They were born to Setsu Nakamura and Kaoru Carr Suzuki in Vancouver, Canada. Suzuki's maternal and paternal grandparents had immigrated to Canada at the beginning of the 20th century.

A third-generation Japanese-Canadian ("Canadian Sansei"), Suzuki and his family suffered internment in

### David Takayoshi Suzuki

**CC OBC LLD (UoPEI, *hc*) DSc (UoW, *hc*) DSc (AU, *hc*) LLD (TU, *hc*) LLD (UoC, *hc*) DHL (GSU, *hc*) DSc (LU, *hc*) DSc (MU, *hc*) LLD (QU, *hc*) DSc (CU, *hc*) DSc (AC, *hc*) DSc (GU, *hc*) DDL (OU, *hc*) DSc (WC, *hc*) DES (UC, *hc*) DDL (SFU, *hc*) DSc (YU, *hc*) DSc (UQAM, *hc*) DSc (FU, *hc*) DC, *hc*) DSc (RU, *hc*) DSc (UoM, *hc*) DSc (UoWO, *hc*)**



Suzuki in 2007

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>Born</b>        | March 24, 1936<br>Vancouver, British Columbia |
| <b>Citizenship</b> | Canadian                                      |
| <b>Nationality</b> | Canadian                                      |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>   | Asian   |

British Columbia during the Second World War from when he was six (1942) until after the war ended. In June 1942, the government sold the Suzuki family's dry-cleaning business, then interned Suzuki, his mother, and two sisters in a camp at Slocan in the British Columbia Interior.<sup>[1]</sup> His father had been sent to a labour camp in Solsqua two months earlier. Suzuki's sister, Dawn, was born in the internment camp.

After the war, Suzuki's family, like other Japanese Canadian families, was forced to move east of the Rockies. The Suzukis moved to Islington, Leamington, and London, Ontario. David Suzuki, in interviews, has many times credited his father for having interested and sensitized him to nature.

Suzuki attended Mill Street Elementary School and Grade 9 at Leamington Secondary School before moving to London, where he attended London Central Secondary School, eventually winning the election to become Students' Council President in his last year there by more votes than all of the other candidates combined.

## Academic career

Suzuki received his BA from Amherst College in Massachusetts in 1958, and his Ph.D in zoology from the University of Chicago in 1961.

Early in his research career he studied genetics, using the popular model organism *Drosophila melanogaster* (fruit flies). To be able to use his initials in naming any new genes he found, he studied *Drosophila* temperature-sensitive phenotypes (DTS). (As he jokingly noted at a lecture at Johns Hopkins University, the only alternative was "damn tough skin".) He was a professor in the genetics department (stated in his book *Genethics: The Ethics of Engineering Life*, 1988) at the University of British Columbia for almost forty years (from 1963 until his retirement in 2001), and has since been professor emeritus at a university research institute.<sup>[2]</sup>

For his work popularizing science and environmental issues, he has been presented with 22 honorary degrees.

## Broadcasting career

Suzuki began in television in 1970 with the weekly show *Suzuki on Science*, a children's show. In 1974, he founded the radio programme *Quirks and Quarks* which he also hosted on CBC Radio One from 1975 to 1979. Throughout the 1970s, he also hosted *Science Magazine*, a weekly programme geared towards an adult audience.

Since 1979, Suzuki has hosted *The Nature of Things*, a CBC television series that has aired in nearly fifty countries worldwide.<sup>[3]</sup> In this program, Suzuki's aim is to stimulate interest in the natural world, to point out threats to human well-being and wildlife habitat, and to present alternatives for achieving a more sustainable society. Suzuki has been a prominent proponent of renewable energy sources and the soft energy path.

Suzuki was the host of the critically acclaimed 1993 PBS series *The Secret of Life*.<sup>[4]</sup> His 1985 hit series, *A Planet for the Taking*, averaged more than 1.8 million viewers per



Suzuki in 2006.

episode and earned him a United Nations Environment Programme Medal. His perspective in this series is summed up in his statement: "We have both a sense of the importance of the wilderness and space in our culture and an attitude that it is limitless and therefore we needn't worry." He concludes with a call for a major "perceptual shift" in our relationship with nature and the wild.

Suzuki's *The Sacred Balance*, a book first published in 1997 and later made into a five hour mini-series on Canadian public television, was broadcast in 2002.<sup>[5]</sup> <sup>[6]</sup> Suzuki is now taking part in an advertisement campaign with the tagline "You have the power", promoting energy conservation through various household alternatives, such as the use of compact fluorescent lightbulbs.

For the Discovery Channel Suzuki also produced "Yellowstone to Yukon: The Wildlands Project" in 1997. The conservation-biology based documentary focused on Dave Foreman's Wildlands Project, which considers how to create corridors between and buffer-zones around large wilderness reserves as a means to preserve biological diversity. This project Foreman developed after leaving Earth First! (which he co-founded) in 1989. The conservation biologists Michael Soulé and Reed Noss were also directly involved.

## Climate change activism

In recent years, Suzuki has been a forceful spokesperson on the subject of global climate change. His comments have not always been without controversy. In February 2008, Suzuki urged McGill University students to speak out against politicians who fail to act on climate change and find a way to jail political leaders for ignoring science. Suzuki told the students: "What I would challenge you to do is to put a lot of effort into trying to see whether there's a legal way of throwing our so-called leaders into jail because what they're doing is a criminal act." <sup>[7]</sup><sup>[8]</sup>

On February 15, 2007, Suzuki was interviewed on Toronto radio station AM 640 by morning show host John Oakley. Suzuki asserted that Canada should be branded amongst the "international outlaws" for renegeing on Kyoto agreements, and dismissed as "a lot of baloney" Oakley's suggestion that some scientists feel intimidated from questioning global warming hypotheses.

Suzuki said that scientists who deny climate change are "shills" for big corporations. He contrasted his own foundation, saying that "corporations have not been interested in funding us" and that their financial backing comes "from ordinary Canadians".<sup>[9]</sup>

Suzuki is unequivocal that climate change is a very real and pressing problem and that there is now an "overwhelming majority of scientists" who are in agreement that human activity is responsible. The David Suzuki Foundation website has a clear statement of this:

The debate is over about whether or not climate change is real. Irrefutable evidence from around the world - including extreme weather events, record temperatures, retreating glaciers, and rising sea levels - all point to the fact climate change is happening now and at rates much faster than previously thought.<sup>[10]</sup>

The consensus includes the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, consisting of over 2,000



At the 2007 Global Day of Action event in Vancouver, B.C.. The sign in the background refers to the Greater Vancouver Gateway Program.

scientists from 100 countries. The findings of the panel have been approved by the National Academies of Science of each of the G8 countries, along with those of China, India and Brazil.<sup>[10]</sup>

Suzuki says that despite this growing consensus, many in the public and the media seemed doubtful about the science for many years. The reason for the confusion about climate change, in Suzuki's view, was due to a well-organized campaign of disinformation about the science involved. "A very small band of critics" denies that climate change exists and that humans are the cause. These climate change "skeptics" or "deniers," Suzuki claims, tend not to be climate scientists and do not publish in peer-reviewed scientific journals but rather target the media, the general public, and policy makers. Their goal: "delaying action on climate change." According to Suzuki, the skeptics have received significant funding from coal and oil companies, including ExxonMobil. Suzuki says that they are linked to "industry-funded lobby groups to - in the words of one leaked memo — 'reposition global warming as theory (not fact).'"<sup>[10]</sup>

The David Suzuki Foundation has implemented a carbon neutral program in its offices. The Foundation states that this is part of its "ongoing commitment to sustainability." The program is designed to show that "taking responsibility for one's greenhouse gas emissions is straightforward and inexpensive." It uses a guide by the World Resources Institute to calculate greenhouse gas emissions. Because of problems with tree planting projects, the Foundation purchases carbon offsets from energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.<sup>[11]</sup> Suzuki himself laments that in traveling constantly to spread his message of climate responsibility, he's "over his [carbon] limit by hundreds of tonnes." He has stopped vacationing overseas and taken to "clustering" his speaking engagements together to reduce his carbon footprint. He would prefer, he says, to appear solely by video conference.<sup>[12]</sup>

In 2007, Suzuki made a cross-country tour in a diesel bus, speaking to Canadians about climate change and urging compliance with the Kyoto Accord. Gold Standard carbon offsets were purchased by the David Suzuki Foundation for all bus travel and tour activities.<sup>[13]</sup> The Foundation's "David Suzuki's Nature Challenge"<sup>[14]</sup> and "David Suzuki's Nature Challenge for Kids"<sup>[15]</sup> suggest simple steps people can take to protect nature and improve their quality of life. Suzuki's spokesman said he used the diesel bus because using biodiesel would have voided the bus' warranty.<sup>[16]</sup>

David Suzuki has given talks to the NDP, Liberal, and Green Parties of Canada, but does not belong to any political party. The David Suzuki Foundation is non-partisan, in accordance with the rules governing non-profit charities in Canada.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Publications

Suzuki is the author of forty-three books (fifteen for children), including *David Suzuki: The Autobiography*, *Tree: A Life Story*, *Sacred Balance*, *Genethics*, *Wisdom of the Elders*, *Inventing the Future*, and the best-selling *Looking At* series of children's science books.

## Awards and honours

Suzuki is the recipient of Canada's most prestigious award, the Order of Canada Officer (1976) upgraded to Companion status in (2006)<sup>[18]</sup>, the Order of British Columbia (1995)<sup>[19]</sup>, UNESCO's Kalinga Prize for science (1986)<sup>[20]</sup> and a long list of Canadian and international honours.



Suzuki signing a copy of his works.

In 2004, David Suzuki was nominated as one of the top ten "Greatest Canadians" by viewers of the CBC. In the final vote he finished fifth and therefore ranked as the greatest living Canadian.<sup>[21]</sup> Suzuki said that his own vote was for Tommy Douglas who was the eventual winner.

In 2006, David Suzuki was the recipient of the Bradford Washburn Award presented at the Museum of Science in Boston, Massachusetts.<sup>[22]</sup>

## Honorary degrees

David Suzuki has received 22 honorary degrees from universities in Canada, the United States and Australia:

- University of Prince Edward Island in Charlottetown (LL.D) in 1974.
- University of Windsor in Windsor, Ontario (D.Sc) in 1979.
- Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia (D.Sc) in 1979.
- Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario (LL.D) in 1981.
- University of Calgary in Calgary, Alberta (LL.D) in 1986.
- Governors State University in University Park, Illinois (DHL) in 1986.
- Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario (D.Sc) in 1986.
- McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario (D.Sc) in 1987.
- Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario (LL.D) in 1987.
- Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario (D.Sc) in 1987.
- Amherst College in Amherst, Massachusetts, USA (D.Sc) in 1988.
- Griffith University in Queensland, Australia (D.Sc) in 1997.
- Open University, Canada DDL in 1998.
- Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, U.S. (D.Sc) in 1999
- Unity College in Unity, Maine, U.S. (Doctor of Environmental Science) in 2000.
- Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia DDL in 2001.
- York University in Toronto, Ontario (D.Sc) in 2005.
- UQAM in Montreal, Quebec (D.Sc) in 2005.
- Flinders University in Adelaide, South Australia (D.Sc) in 2006.
- Ryerson University in Toronto, Ontario (Doctor of Communication) in 2007.
- University of Montreal in Montreal, Quebec (D.Sc) in 2007.
- University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario (D.Sc) in 2007.

## Family

Suzuki was married to Setsuko Joane Sunahara from 1958 to 1965, with three children (Tamiko, Laura, and Troy). He married Tara Elizabeth Cullis in 1972. They have two daughters: Sarika and Severn Cullis-Suzuki. Severn, born in 1979, has also done environmental work, including speaking at environmental conferences.

David Suzuki's Japanese name is Takayoshi Suzuki (鈴木 孝義 *Suzuki Takayoshi*<sup>?</sup>) but he is always known by his English name to the public, even in Japanese scientific and popular literature (using Romaji). Suzuki lives in the Kitsilano area of Vancouver.<sup>[23]</sup>

## See also

- Conservation biology
- Environmentalism
- Soft energy path

## Notes

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3. ^ CBC website on Nature of Things
4. ^ Review of *The Secret of Life* 25 September 1993 New York Times, accessed 21 July 2008
5. ^ Broadcast schedule of The Sacred Balance
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7. ^ Babbage, Sarah (2008-02-04). "Jail politicians who ignore science: Suzuki", McGill Daily. Retrieved on 2008-02-10.
8. ^ Offman, Craig (2008-02-07). "Jail politicians who ignore climate science: Suzuki", National Post. Retrieved on 2008-02-07.
9. ^ John Oakley's interview with David Suzuki
10. ^ *a b c* "Science: The Skeptics". *Solving Global Warming*. The David Suzuki Foundation. Retrieved on 2007-09-08.
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12. ^ Cernetig, Miro. "Suzuki gets the irony as popularity increases", *Vancouver Sun*, CanWest Global. Retrieved on 2008-01-09.
13. ^ Outhit, Jeff, (May 10, 2007. It's not easy going green - but more are hearing the call. The Record.com. Retrieved on: September 23, 2007.
14. ^ Nature Challenge. David Suzuki Foundation. Retrieved on: September 8, 2007.
15. ^ Nature Challenge for Kids. David Suzuki Foundation. Retrieved on: September 8, 2007.
16. ^ The Hill Times, Dec. 17, 2007
17. ^ Foundation Facts. David Suzuki Foundation. Retrieved on: September 25, 2007.
18. ^ Received Order of Canada
19. ^ Received Order of British Columbia
20. ^ Received UNESCO prize
21. ^ Finish fifth in The Greatest Canadians
22. ^ The Unlikely Activist
23. ^ Miro Cernetig. "Just Wait, Says Sierra Club, You Too May Be Under Water." *The Vancouver Sun*. 4 May 2006.

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- David Suzuki. *Metamorphosis*. Toronto: Stoddart, 1991. ISBN 0773755098

## External links

- Order of Canada Citation
- On the Tories Clean Air act from CBC The Hour
- From Naked Ape to Superspecies Series of MP3s from CBC
- Suzuki's curriculum vitae
- The David Suzuki Foundation, with the mission of popularization of science and environment
- *Nature of Things* official website

- Greatest Canadian bio
- David Suzuki at Saxton Speakers Bureau
- David Suzuki's scientific publications from PubMed
- Video Interview with David T. Suzuki
- SBS interview of David Suzuki October, 2006, accessed July 21, 2008
- David Suzuki talks about the year's record temperatures, CBC News: The Hour, December 6, 2005. Retrieved December 28, 2005.
- CBC Digital Archives: David Suzuki: Scientist, Activist, Broadcaster
- The Sacred Balance: a four part television series
- The Biotech Context (March 2006) - video and audio files of a speech given at the University of British Columbia
- This Man Can't Save You interview with David Suzuki in *ascent magazine*
- David Suzuki at the Internet Movie Database
- David Suzuki Interview at The Progressive Magazine, Download MP3 or listen from 2007
- Miro Cernetig. "David Suzuki profile." *The Vancouver Sun*
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