

## ELLA AL-SHAMAH

Explorer, Palaeoanthropologist, Evolutionary Biologist And Stand-Up Comic  
Agent: [Sophie Laurimore](#)



Ella is a National Geographic Explorer, palaeoanthropologist, evolutionary biologist...and stand-up comic. Her debut book *The Handshake* (2021) is a Times and Sunday Times Book of the Year. Holding a BSc in Genetics from University College London, an MSc in Taxonomy and Biodiversity from Imperial College London/Natural History Museum and currently undertaking a PhD in Neanderthal rates of evolution at University College London. Ella is an expert in her field, specialising in Neanderthals and caves. She can be often found on expeditions in hostile, disputed and unstable territories.

Ella almost exclusively works in places it is hard to get insurance, such as Iraq, Yemen, Nagorno-Karabakh and places she can't publicly admit to. From heading up exploratory expeditions to joining cave excavations, the conditions can be unusual, from avoiding landmines to wearing a burqa for security reasons. She believes that this is a risk worth taking because huge parts of the planet's scientific potential are being ignored due to instability. She argues that realistically, these places will become the frontline of science and exploration. She also believes that development is not just about aid, it is also about science and empowering locals.

Ella also performs as a stand-up comedian, using comedy not only as a coping strategy but as a tool to make science more accessible. She performs internationally from the Bloomsbury Theatre to the National Geographic main stage in DC and has taken 4 stand-up shows to the Edinburgh Fringe. She was a 2019 TED main stage speaker where her TED talk has been viewed more than 2 million times. She was also a TEDxNashville speaker and is a Keynote speaker at various international and corporate events.

In 2018 Ella was the presenter and associate producer for BBC Two's science series, *Neanderthals: Meet Your Ancestors*, as well as *Horizon: Body Clock - What Makes Your Body Tick*. She then went on to present a National Geographic show on Viking Warrior Women where during filming she discovered what might be the first evidence of a battle injury on a female Viking warrior. This discovery was widely reported on by the international press.

In 2020 she also presented on programmes such as: *Jungle Mystery: Lost Kingdoms of the Amazon* (Channel 4) and *Waterhole: Africa's Animal Oasis* (BBC2).

Ella has recently presented two documentaries for Channel 4, *Tutankhamun: Secrets of the Tomb* (Channel 4) which looks at the scientific truth behind the legend and curse and *What Killed The Whale* (Channel 4) where Ella investigates a 40-foot sei whale washed up near Edinburgh by joining a specialist autopsy. The ambitious seven-year series *Our Changing Planet* (BBC), saw Ella present the new seven-year series documenting six of the planet's most threatened ecosystems.

Last year Ella had her first radio show with her brother journalist Abubakr Al-Shamahi for BBC World Service. The 5 part-series commemorates and reflects on the 10-year anniversary of the Arab Spring. She has also previously contributed to radio programmes such as BBC Radio 4's *Midweek* and BBC World Service's *Outlook*. She has recently recorded a podcast for *A Good Read* (BBC Radio 4), alongside Dr Alex George.

Ella has also been featured twice in National Geographic Magazine and was a co-guest Editor for the first UK edition of National Geographic Magazine. She has also been extensively featured in publications like *The Times*, *The Telegraph* and *The Sun*.

Her book *The Handshake: A Gripping History* (Profile Books) is about the history and anthropology of the handshake and came out in March 2021.

For comedy enquiries please contact Christian Knowles at Blue Book Artist Management

## CREDITS

### TV

*The Secrets of Tutankhamun's Tomb*, 2022 (Channel 4)

*What Killed The Whale*, 2022 (Channel 4)

*Our Changing Planet*, 2022 (BBC One)

*Waterhole: Africa's Animal Oasis*, 2020 (BBC Two)

*Jungle Mystery: Lost Kingdoms of the Amazon*, 2020 (Channel 4)

*Viking Warrior Women*, 2019 (National Geographic)

*Neanderthals: Meet Your Ancestors*, 2018 (BBC Two and PBS)

*Horizon: Body Clock - What Makes Us Tick?*, 2018 (BBC Two)

### Live

*Ella Al-Shamahi & Susie Steed: Gold Diggers*, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, 2019

TED Talk: *The Fascinating (and dangerous) Places that Scientist Aren't Exploring*, TED, 2019

### Books

*The Handshake, A Gripping History*, 2021 (Profile Books)

*The Story of Dinosaurs*, due 2021 (BBC Books)

**Audio**

*The Compass: My Arab Spring, 2021* (BBC World Service)