

GAGS VITAL AS TV HOST LIFTS THE LID ON WEIRD SCIENCE



LESSONS IN FUN: Dara and, left, with Hugh Dennis and other stars on *Mock the Week*

Dara is 'naïve' a giraffe

THE MIKE WARD INTERVIEW



DARA Ó Briain and I are talking about giraffes. Did I know they can get by on just five minutes' sleep?

"At one point the experts didn't think they slept at all," Dara informs me. "They'd never seen it."

"Apparently a giraffe just rests its head up in the trees somewhere, grabs a quick kip, then returns to being vigilant to avoid being eaten..."

Fascinating stuff. Almost as fascinating as the fact that the human intestine is 7.5 metres long, or that our brains are 60% fat.

"Yes, brain fat is a lining for all the cables of neurones," Dara explains, as if this'll make any sense to me.

"I know this because a friend of mine had a disease where it was eroded away. She had to relearn everything, even her children's faces."

Now in case you're wondering where all this information is coming from, and why it's got us hopping from one seemingly random topic to another, it's courtesy of a new book Dara has written.

It's not called *Weird Stuff To Come Out With At The Pub When The Conversation Dries Up* (although it could just as easily

be), but *Secret Science: The Amazing World Beyond Your Eyes*, aimed at inquisitive kids in the seven to 12 age group.

Comedians aren't traditionally known, of course, for writing science books (Biological Anthropology With Bobby Davro never even found a publisher, sadly) but for Dara it makes perfect sense.

Not only did he study mathematical physics at University College, Dublin, but he's known to millions for hosting shows such as *Science Club*, *School Of Hard Suns* and *Stargazing Live*, the latter with Prof Brian Cox.

Accused

"Pitching a kids' science book at the right level is a challenge," admits Dara, who makes complex topics palatable for them with gags and cartoons.

"Some might feel it's above them, some below. The fact is there's no such thing as the standardised child."

And nor, it seems, is there a standardised *Stargazing Live* fan.

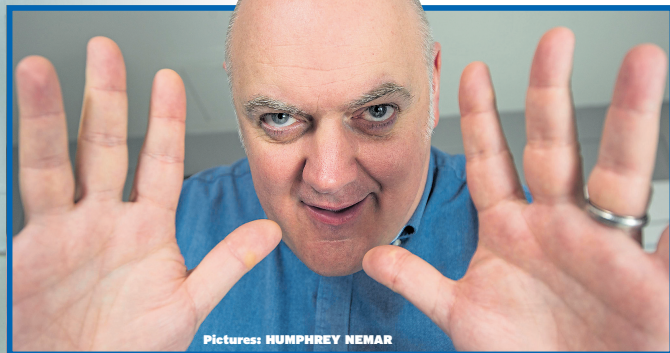
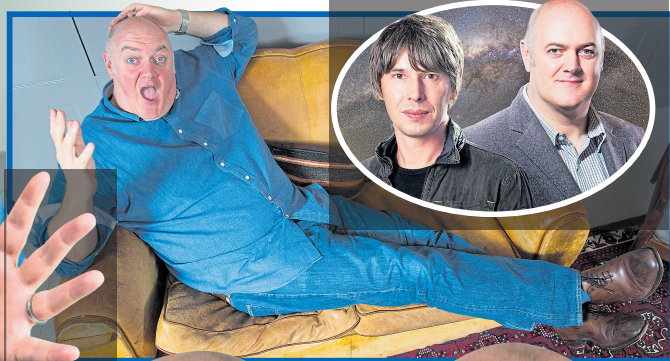
"We'll get viewers to that show who'll go, 'You've dumbed it down,' then others insisting it's too nerdy," he says.

But what's funniest is when they complain about me interrupting Brian. "It's live TV, remember, so I have to keep

FACING THE FACTS:

The many expressions of Dara and, top right, with Prof Brian Cox

SECRET SCIENCE: The Amazing World Beyond Your Eyes is published by Scholastic at £12.99. *Voice Of Reason* tour details are at www.daraobriain.com. *Mock The Week* airs tonight at 10pm on BBC Two.



Pictures: HUMPHREY NEMAR

moving things on, but they actually think I'm butting in because I'm jealous of him! They genuinely get angry. It's hilarious.

"We keep threatening to do a dumbed-down version one night, just for the craic. Brian'll say something daft like, 'Yeah, brilliant! Stars!' and I'll go, 'Jeez, what's Captain Nerd saying now?'"

Luckily, Dara has a pretty thick skin when it comes to viewer complaints. That's thanks to 13 years hosting BBC Two's topical panel game *Mock The Week*, a show that's forever being accused of political bias – both by the right and by the left.

"Honestly Mike, the idea that the BBC is coherent enough to bring us in, sit us

down and calibrate us, left or right, is madness, absolute madness. And yet we get these complaints all the time.

"Corbyn fans will go, 'I can't believe you'd attack him,' and I'll go, 'We literally just did five minutes on Boris Johnson, then another three about Sajid Javid, yet here's a small bit about Corbyn in the middle that you're saying was beyond the pale!'"

"People even come up to me, going, 'Ah, Dara, I'm disappointed in you'. And I think, 'I'm disappointed in you?' You are not my mother! You don't get to be disappointed in me!"

Ultimately, performing live (he's currently on his massive *Voice Of Reason* tour) will always be Dara's first love. "It's

the one thing I have control over." It's also where, rather than whingers, he'll meet people who love him to bits – albeit sometimes in rather unsettling ways.

"One night in Birmingham," he recalls, "when we were out for a drink, we spotted this guy in the back of a taxi actually punching another guy."

"We thought, 'We can't have this!' So we walked over and said, 'Hey! Let it go! Stop!'"

"And this fella turned around, told the guy I was with to f--- off – then saw me and went, 'Oh, my God! It's the bloke from *Mock The Week!*'"

"Then he stopped punching this guy, got out of the cab and asked me for a selfie!"