

**Get Road Runner  
High Speed Online™** for as low as **\$19.95/mo.**

**TIME WARNER CABLE**  
THE POWER OF YOU™

CABLE HIGH SPEED ONLINE HOME PHONE

# The Buffalo News : Entertainment

Friday, September 28, 2007

[Home](#) > [Entertainment](#)

## Eden grad hosts TV's 'Animal Exploration'

By **Andrew Z. Galarneau**

Updated: 09/27/07 1:57 PM

### More Photos



Town of Boston native Jarod Miller has turned a childhood dream into a fruitful, busy television career.

As the Eden High School Class of 1996 settled into their seats for their graduation, ready to begin facing the challenges of finding their place in the world, one senior was missing. Jarod Miller was already gone.

Miller – already working in his chosen field – was too busy to attend. He was in New York City preparing for an appearance on the “Today” show. Zoologist Jim Fowler, of “Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom,” was presenting one of Miller’s ring-tailed lemurs, with Miller as an assistant.

A decade later, Miller and his animals are ready for their close-up. “Animal Exploration With Jarod Miller” premieres via syndication on 200 stations nationwide, with its first Western New York appearance coming at 7 a.m. Saturday on WUTV.

The Town of Boston native, 29, has realized a dream that has driven him since he was 4 years old and mesmerized by Marlon Perkins, the original television zoologist.

After years of helping television zookeepers such as Fowler and Jack Hanna present animals to the likes of Conan O’Brien, Rachael Ray and David Letterman – just to name a few – Miller started

getting his own spots. Then, with support from television production company Litton Entertainment, his own show, taking over the company's "Exploration" franchise.

"I followed my dreams, and worked on it, but got lucky too," Miller said by telephone from Los Angeles. "At times, I wanted to pinch myself, because I'm doing exactly what I wanted to do."

### **In the works**

Although he's still shooting the first season of his first show, Miller says he already has lined up a second show, expected to run on the Discovery Channel beginning in February.

Each episode of "Animal Exploration" revolves around an idea instead of a geographic location, Miller said. There will be 20 episodes, and the first is about animals that have "the need for speed," Miller said. It goes beyond the obvious ones, like the cheetah, the fastest land animal, and the peregrine falcon, the fastest animal on Earth, he said.

"Let's find some animals that might eat fast, and here's the reasons why. Let's find some animals that have to mate fast, and here's the reasons why." Another episode will center on animals that people find creepy, he said.

"This year, we're filming a lot in the United States — the Everglades, the Mojave Desert," he said. "The next show will be more abroad."

Even though his career with animals has taken him 'round the world to glitzy locales — including the White House — Miller said he still enjoys meeting a new animal.

There was the time recently he got to feed the largest crocodile in captivity, a 20-foot-long animal that weighs more than 2,000 pounds.

"I gave him a whole chicken," Miller said. "He took it down like a chicken nugget."

Recently, his crew was in Philadelphia filming a blackfooted ferret, one of only 200 left in the world. A "very aggressive" animal, Miller said, it was part of an episode with a theme of "animals with attitude."

But this ferret was sick, with a toothache. "I was able to help take care of the ferret in surgery, to help extract the bad tooth.

"Awesome," he sighed.

### **Starting young**

Even his earliest memories have animals in them, Miller said. When he was 4 or 5 years old, a deer approached as Miller stood silently in his grandparents' woods. "He licked me," said Miller, "which is pretty cool."

As a kid, he wanted "to be surrounded by living things," he said. "I had turtles, tarantulas, I had dogs." He started working with a family friend who had championship Irish setters, training them for dog shows.

In the woods of Boston, he collected frogs and snakes, and watched deer. By the time he was 14, he'd started volunteering at zoos and with rehabilitators of wildlife. He studied animal care and applied for the federal permits required to own and care for wild animals.

His first customer was a prairie dog that had bitten its owner. “Digger” became his first educational ambassador to area classrooms.

By 17, he had a small animal sanctuary and educational foundation at his grandparents’ place, he said. Called Wild Encounters, it’s still in operation.

Miller said he’d always wanted to follow in the footsteps of Marlon Perkins, his hero. (In conversation he will name, unbidden, the date on which the white-haired zoologist died.)

“I already had that light bulb starting to go on” when he saw Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom, Miller said. “I love working with animals, and I see these guys — they’re doing exactly what I want to do. They’re not only working with animals directly, but teaching people about animals on a large scale.”

At an animal event in New York City, he met Perkins’ successor, Jim Fowler, who asked to use Miller’s lemur for a network television appearance.

Before long, the high school student was making trips to New York City television studios to assist Fowler. His high school graduation couldn’t compete.

### **College days**

“By time I went to college, I already had business doing wildlife presentations in schools, and a good network of zoos and other professionals,” Miller said. He’d already read all the library’s books on animals. It was time for college.

A program for budding zookeepers lured Miller to Oswego State College, where he studied under Professor Diane Chepko- Sade.

When she met Miller, he was already heavily involved in presenting his animals on television, Chepko-Sade said.

“It was actually impacting his grades,” she said. “He’d be doing just fine, and then he’d have a show on the West Coast at the same time as the exam, and he’d miss the exam.”

During the summers, Miller was already working for Hanna, another famed television zoologist, at the Cleveland Zoo and in network television.

It’s unheard of for someone to obtain their federal wildlife licenses as early as Miller did, said Hanna, who Miller credits as one of his main inspirations and mentors. But Miller was willing to do the work, and when his chance came, Hanna said, Miller was ready.

“All it takes is one break in this business, and he got a good break,” Hanna said. “He started from the ground up. He’s taken care of animals, fed and cleaned them, gone through the whole thing, you know. It’s a lot of work. His life is his animal world.”

People enjoy seeing animals on television but have little concept of what goes into making that possible, said Hanna, speaking by phone from his office at the Columbus Zoo.

“A lot of these animals take 24-hour care,” said Hanna. It’s 24 hours a day, seven days a week in this industry. Jarod doesn’t take a vacation — he hasn’t been on one, I think, in the last 10 years.”

Hanna said Miller is learning to become a first-rate educator, though he still has lessons to learn. The

question today for animal presenters is whether they're going to be swayed by the pressures of the television business, Hanna said.

"When I started my animal show, there were two animal shows. Today, there are 39," Hanna said. "A lot of the people doing those shows today are there for the ratings, the money, they're not conservationists. They're in there to get bitten, get blood, they want the reality TV, the big bang for the buck."

### **A good teacher**

Certainly you must entertain people to keep their attention, but you need to educate them at the same time, without mistreating the animals, Hanna said.

Hopefully, Miller "will be a person who would teach conservation through education, with his TV shows, in a fun way. So people will take something home mentally from whatever he does," Hanna said. His former adviser, Chepko-Sade, is confident that's exactly what Miller will do.

"He attracts people with his personality, but he also wants to get information across," she said. "He feels that you don't protect what you don't know, and you don't love what you don't know."

Miller said he's working on blending education and entertainment, like a recent Conan appearance where he had a large vulture clamber onto on the prone talk-show host to dramatize the fact that the carrion eater prefers dead meat.

"People wouldn't be entertained if I went out there and said, 'The animal does this, this and this,' like a professor," Miller said. "People have to love it."

### **TV Preview**

"Animal Exploration With Jarod Miller"

7 a. m. Saturday, WUTV

**agalarneau@buffnews.com**

Advertisement

#### **Sponsored Links**

##### **Kronos Optimal Health**

Custom corporate wellness programs: Weight Mgt, Screenings, etc.  
[www.KronosHealth.com](http://www.KronosHealth.com)

##### **Internet TV**

2,500+ Channels. No Monthly Fees. Now Only \$49.95 For a Lifetime!  
[MyNewSatellite.tv](http://MyNewSatellite.tv)

##### **Cash For Your Settlement**

Don't Wait For Periodic Payments, Get Your Payment In One Lump Sum!  
[www.jgwentworth.com](http://www.jgwentworth.com)

##### **Lose 15 Pounds This Month**

Oprah and CBS featured Hoodia, a dieting miracle. Try a Free Sample  
[www.mylipoplex.com](http://www.mylipoplex.com)

---

© 2007 The Buffalo News. The information you receive online from The Buffalo News is protected

by the copyright laws of the United States.

The copyright laws prohibit any copying, redistributing, re-transmitting, or re-purposing of any copyright-protected material.