

# 'Kratts' Creatures' gives birth to 'Zoboofafoo'

By Frazier Moore  
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**NEW YORK** — What sort of animal behavior is this, where every male of the species must be wearing a jacket before he is allowed to feed!

But Chris and Martin Kratt, husky brothers clad in outdoor wear, aren't troubled. Creators and stars of the wildly popular PBS kids' show *Kratts' Creatures*, they are used to beasts of all kinds, even a snooty maitre d' in a Manhattan bistro.

Having entered this lair, each brother accepts a shapeless blue blazer. Then, accorded lunch, they eagerly discuss their new series, *Zoboofafoo* (11 a.m. weekdays on PBS, Channel 56).

Unlike *Kratts*, now in its third season delighting grade-schoolers on up, *Zoboofafoo* (zah-BOO-mah-foo) is a wildlife series expressly for preschoolers.

"A lot of kids' show characters are based on animals," Martin says, "but nobody had been introducing kids age 3 or 4 to the world of animals. How do kids first learn about wolves? They read *Little Red Riding Hood*, where the wolf is a bad, evil character."

Chris jumps in. "Kids learn fear and negative stereotypes," he says.

To which Martin adds, "We just wanted to put out the truth."

With that, Martin orders roast chicken. Nothing personal, he insists: "Predation is part of the world."

Indeed, his embrace of the animal world seems absolute. Asked to name a critter he doesn't like, he can think of only one, a pesky bacteria that gave him a malarialike condition in Costa Rica.

With similar beneficence,



**Chris Kratt, left, Zoboofafoo and Martin Kratt take preschoolers on a romp through the outdoors.**

Chris concedes only "mixed feelings" about a leech that penetrated his boots, then his feet, when he was in Sumatra filming orangutans. "It was interesting to watch how the leeches did it. That's the part that I liked."

The Kratts bring a whole new meaning to the term creature comforts — an unconditional respect and amused indulgence for animals echoing throughout *Zoboofafoo*.

Meanwhile, though they are ages 29 and 33 respectively, Chris and Martin are squarely on a kid's wavelength with their wide-open gusto. This proves infectious for anyone older who might sneak a peak.

*Zoboofafoo* headquarters is Animal Junction, where the Kratts welcome animal friends that happen by, and where they set out for adventures they have chronicled all over the world with their wildlife photography.

Actually an enormous, in-the-round set erected in a Toronto TV studio, Animal Junction seems nestled beneath a forest canopy in the middle of a sun-dappled tropical anywhere.

"It's a magical kind of watering hole," says Martin. "Preschoolers get to look at the animals in this very safe place, where all the rules of nature are suspended: There's no predation in Animal Junction."

It's also the home of the show's namesake, a Sifaka lemur native only to Madagascar, as animated and playful as its human companions. *Zoboofafoo* (Zoboo for short) is portrayed by a real-life lemur puppet that can speak and otherwise follow a script.

"We chose the Sifaka lemur because he looks like a puppet in the first place," Martin explains.

TELEVISION PREVIEW



**'Zoboofafoo'**

11 a.m. weekdays on  
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"We like to talk about animals the viewer has never really heard of," says Chris.

Even so, *Zoboofafoo* plays no favorites: Dogs and cats are as likely to visit as more exotic fauna. On a typical half-hour, we hear a swish of wings and Chris calls out, "Everybody duck!"

"It's a vulture, not a duck!" chortles Martin as the creature lands atop his head.

"A turkey vulture has a better sense of smell than any other animal in the world," Chris reveals.

But baby elephant Toothbrush can do more with her trunk than smell: She plays the harmonica. Then, when the brothers aren't watching, she wanders away.

No problem. Bloodhound Myrtle picks up the elephant's scent from the harmonica, and leads Chris and Martin on a chase to find Toothbrush out in the wilds.

It was in the wilds of New Jersey that the brothers grew up, loving animals and keeping lots of pets. In college, Martin graduated with a zoology degree. Chris chose biology.

Then the real education started. They roamed the world with video gear, teaching themselves to film and play on-camera hosts to the creatures they encountered.

"From the beginning," Martin says, "we had a very clear mission: to introduce kids to the world of animals."