

# New 'Zoboomafoo' show brings wildlife to preschoolers' television

BY CATHERINE NEWTON  
*Knight Ridder Newspapers*

It's a safe bet your preschooler doesn't know that binturongs smell like buttered popcorn. And she's probably never seen the webbed feet of a capybara up close, either.

That, say brothers and animal adventurers Martin and Chris Kratt, is a shame. And they decided to do something about it. Beginning Monday, the popular hosts of the 2-year-old "Kratt's Creatures" PBS series for children bring a new wildlife series to public television: "Zoboomafoo" (8 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. weekdays on KCTS-TV.)

Sharing host duties with the brothers is Zoboomafoo himself, an endangered leaping sifaka lemur from the island of Madagascar that is at various times shown as a puppet, animated clay figure and real-life primate. Although portions of the show involve adventures in Zobooland, the lemur's imaginary clay-animation world where he learns life lessons in cooperation and friendship, the heart of the show is the up-close and personal interactions among the Kratts, Zoboomafoo and a wide range of wild animals.

"It's about making friends with animals," Martin Kratt says. To that end, for the premiere season, more than 500 untrained creatures visited the set's Animal Junction, including a flesh-eating Southeast Asian catlike creature with a prehensile tail (the binturong) and a 4-foot tailless South American rodent (the capybara). Squirrel monkeys escaped into the lighting grid. A black bear ducked out through an air-conditioning duct. A camel made a large wet spot on the

floor.

For the Kratts, it's all part of the fun. "Just as preschoolers are learning about animals, we hope that a lot of parents have the opportunity to see animals from a more personal perspective," says Martin Kratt, whose experiences 10 years ago

working with lemurs as an undergraduate at Duke University provided the inspiration for the series. "We'd like parents to come away reaffirming that learning is fun."