

Jim Fowler: Biography

Jim Fowler (James M. Fowler), one of the world's best-known naturalists, has presented information about wildlife and the wilderness to the American public on television for more than fifty-five years. In 1962, Jim became the co-host with Marlin Perkins of the award-winning program *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom*, which ran until 1989. During that time, he traveled all over the world filming wildlife and wild places while serving as a spokesperson for the natural world. He also hosted *Mutual of Omaha's Spirit of Adventure*. These programs received many awards, including four Emmys and an endorsement by the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) for family viewing.

In addition to ongoing appearances on many network talk shows, Jim was wildlife correspondent for NBC's *Today Show*, beginning in 1989. He became a regular on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* in 1964 and appeared more than eighty times until Johnny Carson retired in 1992. At that time, Jim and his wife, Betsey, accompanied Johnny and his family on a safari to Africa.

Other highlights of Jim's career include lecturing widely for many years with his trained animals before audiences of every kind. He always delivered a strong educational message to people of all ages concerning the importance of the natural world to our human welfare.

He was involved in the production of an educational film with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game on the effect of economic development and clear-cutting on grizzly bear habitat in Alaska's Tongass National Forest. He then worked on a film that showed, for the first time, the nesting habits of the endangered Florida crocodile in the cooling canals of Turkey Point Nuclear Power Plant near the Everglades. Yet another film documents an expedition to Lake Baikal in Russia, where Jim worked with Russian scientists to help protect this unique world heritage site.

Jim graduated with a degree in zoology and a minor in geology from Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana. He then pursued a graduate degree, conducting the first studies of the world's largest eagle, the harpy, in the wilds of the Amazon, and later tracked the movements of the Andean condor in Peru, becoming an internationally recognized authority on predatory birds. His studies were interrupted by his career in travel and television, although his passion for birds of prey continued. Since then, he has worked with many wildlife and conservation projects throughout the world. As a result of his achievements, he was awarded an honorary doctorate degree (doctor honoris causa) from Earlham College.

Jim's goal is to be an effective spokesperson for the natural world and to find new ways of reaching families and children so that wildlife and wilderness are important to their lives. His first book, *Jim Fowler's Wildest Places on Earth*, was published by Time Life and Mutual of Omaha's Wildlife Heritage Center in the fall of 1993. The 224-page volume features the most unique areas of wilderness in the world and teaches readers of all ages the importance of the diversity of the world around us. Jim is currently working on a book about his life's adventures.



Because of his extensive knowledge of animals and their behaviors, Jim was involved in the making of Disney's blockbuster hit *The Lion King*. He brought live animals into the studio for the animators to observe and draw, and he gave the animators lectures on animal movement.

Jim has been a member of the world-renowned, New York City-based Explorers Club since 1967, and he served on the club's board for twelve years. In 1994, he received the prestigious Explorers Club Medal, the club's highest honor, placing Jim in the company of Charles Lindbergh, Jane Goodall, Theodore ("Teddy") Roosevelt, and Neil Armstrong. In 2003, he was appointed the club's Honorary President, followed by Honorary Chairman a few years later, a position that was once held by the great explorer Lowell Thomas.

Jim was president of the Fowler Center for Wildlife Education in New York for many years. He also founded O.W.L., a national organization for professional wildlife lecturers that sets standards for important real-life educational encounters with wildlife. Further, he has served on the boards of many conservation organizations, including Friends of Conservation, Global Tomorrow Coalition, Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International, Morris Animal Foundation, and Global Communications for Conservation Inc.

Through Mutual of Omaha's Wildlife Heritage Center, Jim was a frequent guest and speaker at fundraising events throughout the country, supporting zoos, nature science centers, conservation organizations, and state and federal wildlife agencies.

He is pioneering a new concept that displays wildlife in large, free-roaming habitats, called "ecological parks." These parks are in the form of environmental learning centers that combine education with adventure so that children and their families can more easily stay in touch with nature. The centers are self-sustaining and introduce large groups of people of diverse backgrounds to the world of nature and wildlife by providing them with learning adventures that they will never forget. Jim has created a similar experience on his family's farm in Georgia, a private game ranch where a variety of exotic animals are bred and raised, including emus, ostrich, eland, and zebra.

Jim's mission as a spokesperson is to affect public attitudes so that they, in turn, help to protect wildlife and influence appropriate government policy. His message is clear: "The continued existence of wildlife and wilderness is important to the quality of life of humans." He noted in the 1990s that the challenge is to realize that we are very much a part of the earth's ecosystem and that we must learn to respect and to live according to the basic biological laws of nature.

Jim believes that, in order to protect wildlife and wilderness, we must show human beings how animals are of value to mankind. For example, in an appearance on the *Today Show*, he explained how the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone National Park increased attendance to the park and raised park revenues by \$20 million. In this way, the animal became a great economic benefit to the area.

Jim served as the spokesperson for the Discovery Channel's Animal Planet and filmed thirteen episodes of a show that began airing on Animal Planet in 1999, called *Back to the Wild with Jim Fowler*. He was also featured on the Lands' End website with stories of his episodes in the wild, called *Jim Fowler's Wild Planet*. However, one of his most memorable

moments for the younger generation was his cameo on the long-running TV sitcom *Seinfeld*, when he brought a hawk onto Kramer's fake *Merv Griffin* set.

In the early 2000s, Jim was the Executive Producer and the host of a television series, entitled *Jim Fowler's Life in the Wild*, with his son, Mark, and his daughter, Carrie. The syndicated series aired for several seasons and followed many of the topics that Jim and Marlin had explored on *Wild Kingdom* many years earlier and showed how things had changed over the decades.

One of his most recent appearances was in 2014 at the internationally known TEDxOrangeCoast Conference, focused on the topic of "The Tipping Point." Jim spoke on how tipping our natural resources affects humanity. His presentation can be viewed on YouTube.

Other awards

Charles Lindbergh Award
Environmental Media Award
Planet Earth Award
L.A. Zoo Conservation Award
Safari Planet Earth Award
Aquarium of the Pacific Ocean Conservation Award
Various awards from nature science centers and states
Awards and recognition from multiple conservation organizations

Activities on television

1962–1989 *Wild Kingdom*, various talk shows
1964–1992 *Johnny Carson*, *Merv Griffin*
1989–1991 *Mutual of Omaha's Spirit of Adventure*
1989–2002 Wildlife correspondent, *NBC Today Show*
1996–2000 Host, *Animal Encounters*, Animal Planet channel
2000–2003 Host, *Jim Fowler's Life in the Wild* (syndicated)
2004–present: Commentator on various talk and news programs;
guest appearance on *Seinfeld*
2014 TEDxOrangeCoast Conference, "The Tipping Point":
"How tipping our natural resources affects humanity"



Accomplishments

- 1960 Conducted the first studies of the harpy eagle in the wild
- 1968 Conducted the first studies of the Andean condor in Peru
- 1970 Designed Animal Forest for South Carolina tricentennial
- 1971 Began designing layout of Chehaw Park, Albany, GA
- 1973–1982 Design consultant for several wildlife parks, including:
 - Opryland USA, TN
 - The Wildlife Preserve, MD
 - Toronto Zoo, Canada
 - Maymont park, VA
 - Great Adventure, NJ
 - Silver Springs, FL
 - Grassmere Park, TN
 - Animal Forest, Stone Mountain, GA
 - Circus World, FL
 - Cumbre Azul, Venezuela
- 1984–present: Design consultant, developer of several unique wildlife parks across the country

Jim Fowler continues to be a public speaker and a spokesperson for the natural world, to appear on television, and to design ecological parks. He is one of the best-known wildlife experts in the country and is internationally recognized. He is one of the most popular communicators to the American public about the importance of wildlife, wilderness, and open space and their benefit to all life on earth.