

## Animal Television Pioneer & Wild Kingdom Ambassador Educating Families on Conservation & Wildlife



For over four decades, **Peter Gros** has entertained, educated, and enlightened millions of people with his major contributions to promoting wildlife conservation and fostering a greater appreciation for animals, though his work in television, park management, and now as a global ambassador.

One of the last pioneers of television wildlife programs, Gros, who first starred on Mutual of Omaha's *Wild Kingdom* in 1986, has been charged, clawed, kicked, bitten, gnawed, and knocked senseless by the wild animals he has dedicated his life to protecting. His work helped bring a part of the unknown, natural world – the “wild kingdom” – into the living rooms of others, shedding misconceptions about that world while inspiring one's love for all animals and the precious planet.

Gros, who has appeared with legendary TV personalities that include Johnny Carson, Jay Leno, Marv Griffin, and Larry King, has been on hundreds of local, national, and international television shows. The wildlife expert often shares fascinating stories while offering useful tips on how one can embrace nature and the wildlife in their own backyard. He supplies positive insights into successful conservation projects and enjoys highlighting which species have been removed from the endangered list.

Gros, a legend in his field, engages audiences with amazing stories about close-up encounters with danger. He also dazzles people with the presentation of in-studio/on-stage wildlife, showing the spectacular power of these beautiful creatures while providing interesting and useful facts.

His unexpected adventures have taken him to nearly 50 countries, where he experienced some wild times, including:

- Chasing a 12-foot python through the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in Manhattan

- Liberating a fist-sized tarantula from inside Jay Leno's shirt
- Rafting Class 6 rapids on Africa's Zambezi River
- Leaving part of his nose in an Alaskan spruce tree after an ill-fated jump from a helicopter
- Bottle-feeding a 500-pound Bengal Tiger named Nadji that spent time in his house for 21 years
- Being thrown 4 feet by a camel – and 11 feet by a giraffe
- Suffering a painful bite by an Andean Condor while filming on TV
- Dodging rocks thrown by African elephants in Zambia
- Coming face-to-face with a cattle-eating 15-foot crocodile in Costa Rica's Tarcoles River
- Getting chased through a field of stinging nettles by a grizzly bear in an Alaskan spruce forest

Prior to taking to television, Gros served for 22 years as the Director of Land Animals at Marine World Africa USA near San Francisco. He also spent hundreds of hours visiting hospitals, schools, and community centers with his Bengal Tiger, Nadji and many other battle raised young animals

Gros continues his life dedicated to working with exotic, often dangerous wild animals by touring the nation with both enlivening and educational presentations. Today, he is Mutual of Omaha's wildlife ambassador.

Gros is the founder and president of the Green Valley Center for Wildlife Education. He's a USDA-licensed Exhibition and Animal Educator, a fellow of the American Zoo and Aquarium Association and a board member of the Suisun Marsh Natural History Association and The Cheetah Conservation Fund. Gros interweaves sound scientific facts with interesting anecdotes, providing behind-the-scenes tales of what it was like to host wildlife television shows in the early years of those type of programs. He shares tales of the real dangers, unexpected adventures, wonderful animals, and bizarre characters that he's encountered in a lifetime of serving as a passionate spokesperson for the wild animals millions love.

**Gros is available to share the following:**

- What families can do to experience nature and wildlife in their neighborhood
- A behind-the-scenes look at filming wildlife documentaries, including close calls from the past 30 years
- How one summons the courage to confront dangerous animals in the wild
- How his 40+ years in the profession have afforded him the chance to accumulate a trove of fascinating experiences, from poignant to funny and touching to harrowing
- What he's learned from his close relationships with hundreds of animals representing 70 species – some of which he raised from birth, providing him with a unique perspective about the behaviors, habitats, and quirks of life, from aardvarks to zebras
- What can be done to motivate and inspire conservation and preservation at the local, national, and global level
- Trends in ecotourism and changing attitudes towards the environment and animals
- How he established breeding programs for over 375 endangered animals and developed a rehabilitation program for birds of prey, as well as the largest captive breeding colony of ostriches in the U.S.
- How his hard work and determination allowed him to achieve his dream career working with animals of all kinds

He's a frequent lecturer on conservation and wildlife at universities, zoos, and nature and science centers, conventions, and more around the nation. Venues have included The White House, Sea World, San Diego

Zoo, and several film festivals. He also appears at several dozen events annually, speaking to corporate and association investors including the American Orthopedic Association, American Bankers Association, American Veterinary Association, and the Society of Independent Insurance Brokers.

His research expeditions have taken him to Lake Baikal in Siberia to explore the wonders of the world's largest, oldest, and deepest lake, and to the Amazon River Basin, where he led an expedition of seventh-graders from Michigan to study the Peruvian rain forest. He has also studied the effects of ecotourism on wildlife in Venezuela, Costa Rica, Belize, Mexico, and the Galapagos Islands.

“We need to continue to deliver a message to all about how each of us can make a daily difference in preserving our natural world.” – Peter Gros.

**Sample TV Appearances:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7q0MogskOkI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUI6LxRaInY>

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# Peter Gros

## 25 Questions & Answers With A Pioneering Animal & Conservation Expert

1. **What was it like to work on television for Mutual of Omaha's *Wild Kingdom*, which now celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary?** It was a thrill to be asked to join a legendary show that I grew up watching with Marlen Perkins and Jim Fowler. I had spent many years creating endangered species breeding programs in the USA but never in the wild, needless to say I jumped at the opportunity. The beginning of my filming career started at locations in Africa, tracking elephants at night to Australia, swimming with sea snakes and white sharks, to Costa Rica, catching crocodiles. My life in the exotic animal observation and research field changed in every way.
2. **How many times did you escape danger during the filming of the show?** There was always a tremendous amount of research prior to filming on location. So, the risks we took were well calculated. However, filming wild animals in the wild comes with many x-factors. During one of my very first shows, I reached into the water to grab what I thought was a 4-foot alligator during a night gator relocation show. I felt a large hand on my shoulder as Jim Fowler whispered into my ear on camera, "don't grab that one his eyes are too far apart." I was unaware that for every inch an alligator's eyes are apart, he is one foot long. I was reaching for a 13 foot alligator. Thank you Jim! If it weren't for that bit of advice, today my nickname would be lefty.
3. **Sometimes you weren't so lucky. What happened to you that would make the average person wince?** I was part of an education program where we took thirty-nine 7th graders deep into the amazon basin in Peru to do a cross cultural exchange with the Yauga and Rivienos people who live along the Amazon River. We explored the rain forest for 10 days learning about the inhabitants of the rain forest and how comfortably tribal people lived in this extremely humid and bug infested climate. I woke up one morning with a yell, to discover a large spider had built its web over my mouth as it would over a hole in the wild to catch mice. Needless to say, the next two nights I slept on my stomach and closed my mosquito netting very carefully.
4. **Peter, you used to have an interesting guest at your house. For 21 years, you raised a 511-pound Bengal Tiger. Are you nuts?** Many of the animals that I had to bottle raise became very attached to me. If the parents won't take care of them, you start with bottles of milk immediately, and the first thing a wild animal sees becomes their parent. In my case, one of those was a Bengal tiger, Nadji. Nadji bonded to me like a loyal dog. He would roll on his back and let me scratch his stomach, swim with me, and take long walks in the fields. I had a special room added to our house with what I think was the worlds largest litter box. Nadji became so bonded and trusting of me that he would accompany me to schools, nature and science centers, hospitals, universities, and television programs to talk about conservation and saving tigers in the wild. What better ambassador for his species? The first time you look a tiger in the eyes, up close and personally, you think what can I do to preserve these magnificent animals?
5. **What do you especially encourage young families to do to appreciate wildlife and to value time in the great outdoors?** In the time in which we live, young people seem to be spending so much of their lives staring at screens or other technological devices. This is the 21st century, and technology is a valuable part of our lives; however, we need to spend more family time in the great outdoors. I think we should at a very young age introduce our children to hiking, backpacking, bird watching, camping, orienting, kayaking, and any of the outdoor activities that give us a balanced life. It is time that we push back from our screens and shopping malls and

enjoy our local, state, and national parks. Nature is the best teacher. The combination of exercise, enjoying nature, and family time is the balance I think we all need.

6. **Peter, you've traveled to over 50 countries to share your insights into the animal world, and have singularly encouraged millions of people to embrace nature. What lessons have you learned about co-existing with the natural environment?** As I have traveled around the world, I have seen the result of many of our natural environments destruction. What I have also observed is that we are learning from our past mistakes. Many countries used to use DDT, almost wiping out their birds of prey populations. Many have stopped and there is a healthy resurgence of our beautiful birds of prey. I've seen sections of rain forests that were slashed and burned that were supposed to never come back. With current controls, I've noticed small pockets of success where new forests are over 15 feet tall. Reforestation is going on in some of the poorest countries in the world and being harvested sustainably. Fish farming in the tropics is feeding hundreds of thousands of people, reducing the pressure on our wild streams and rivers. Water conservation, the use of solar energy, and general conservative use of our resources is becoming popular. We have a long way to go, but what better example to show the next generation than our recent so called "unsolvable problems"?
7. **What can people do in their own neighborhood to experience the amazing world of animals and nature?** Zoos are evolving nicely into education centers and cages are disappearing for moats and free roaming displays. Science centers, estuaries, and botanical gardens, even a visit by a local stream in a county park, observing frogs, fish, and the many other living things that you find at a close look along a babbling stream can be rewarding for a young family. Volunteer programs replanting indigenous saplings and flowers to attract wildlife are a fantastic way to connect young people with philanthropy and nature.
8. **You probably have some fascinating stories and some thrilling moments to reveal about all the years you've interacted with exotic animals. Please share one with us.** While studying the relationship between grizzly bears and moose in Alaska, we learned that a 900 pound grizzly bear can run almost as fast as two very scared humans. When the grizzly bear population grows too quickly they prey on young moose when they're only a few days old and vulnerable. The large grizzly we were studying had a transmitting radio collar for its one year tracking study. We landed our small helicopter near the bears stash (a mound of animal parts from a recent kill covered with pine needles), while he was out hunting. While we were digging through the stash, facing the camera, and describing what we were uncovering, our research scientist had his headset on listening to the tell tale beeps coming from the grizzly bears collar. As the sound got louder, he kept saying "he's coming back, HE'S COMING BACK!" As the bear came charging through the bushes, Jim Fowler and I ran towards the parked helicopter. Jim is 6'6" and I am 6'5", we both dove through a 4' by 5' door simultaneously. Our pilot quickly started the chopper, as we left the angry grizzly to have his dinner. We were relieved it wasn't going to be us.
9. **That's amazing. Give us one more story, please.** We were filming a story in Zambia, Africa about the elephants that lived near the famous Lake Kariba. The first part of the show was to take place at the base of one of the 7 natural wonders of the world, Victoria Falls. Our director had decided since we were both experienced rafters to add some more excitement to the show and raft a category class 6 river. FYI, people in their right mind don't raft over class 5. Soon after launching, we reached an area called Valley of the Giants with huge boulders and rapids. After capsizing, even with a life jacket on I was shocked how long the rapids will hold you under water until you reach the eddies on the side. One of our guides remarked, "you should swim over to the raft faster, because the crocodiles lay over there on the eddies, waiting for food to float by."
10. **As an active conservationist, you've made presentations at the White House, and currently lead a nationwide conservation education program. What tips do you have that we, as a society, should adopt to help conserve nature?** We are rapidly learning to be conservative with

our natural resources. I like the fact that this generation thinks its very “in” to be green. Research what you can do locally to help. There is a misconception that it takes a lot of money or resources to make a difference. Each person can make a difference at their household. Small things like recycling, not being wasteful, leaving a small footprint, sharing rides. Contact one of your local conservation groups and ask what you can do to help. You will feel great when you participate in a local project.

11. **What do you advise when it comes to the increasing trend of ecotourism?** Some of the most beautiful parks in the world are here in our country. Yosemite, Yellowstone, Glacier, etc.; take your family and experience all that we have in our country. It will greatly enhance their appreciation of their life on earth, standing under a huge waterfall or walking through a forest or gliding down a river and will greatly improve their quality of life and hopefully instill the message of stewardship in this magnificent planet in which we live. Another upside of ecotourism, poor countries are experiencing an increase in ecotourism which creates jobs, and a consistent economic base versus the old slash and burn or one time use of their natural world.
12. **Which place would you suggest an adventurer go to first – and why? Would it be to Costa Rica for crocodiles, Alaska for grizzly and polar bears, Nepal for rhinos, Australia for sharks, or Africa for lions and cheetahs?** Alaska truly is a great remaining frontier. Denali Park is a wonderful destination to see wildlife as you’re safely guided on tours. Grizzly bears abound, along with many other species of wildlife in their wild spectacular Alaskan landscape. Costa Rica is a short flight, and an easy destination to visit rain forests and their inhabitants. Over 30% of their country has been set aside for ecotourism. For a first visit to Africa, I would recommend South Africa, whose cities are like European cities. Kruger National Park is a short flight away. You are almost guaranteed to see an abundance of Africa’s wildlife in the comfort of a gaming vehicle. A portion of your funds will go directly to conserve wildlife.
13. **Where have your research expeditions taken you that just amazed and floored you?** One of my favorite research locations are the Galapagos Islands. A must see trip to get closer to wildlife than any other place in the world. Being 500 miles on the equator off the coast of Ecuador none of the wildlife has been pressured by humans at all and therefore have no fear of people. You can swim with penguins who dart at your mask and turn away at the last second, be surrounded by seals and friendly marine iguanas on the shoreline, have 600-pound tortoises bump into you as they graze by your trail. The famous blue footed boobies perform their mating dance with each other clacking their beaks together within 5 feet of where you’re standing, even the hammerhead sharks are friendly; just to name a few.
14. **How are zoos and circuses evolving? Should either be banned?** Circuses are a part of Americana as far back as I can remember. They have evolved from displays of menagerie of touring animals to Cirque de Solei and other forms of entertainment. I do think that seeing animals up close is an important way for people to meet and learn to appreciate wildlife. Not everyone can hop on a plane and go to Africa to see wildlife in their natural habitat. Zoos used to be like a stamp collection of as many distinct species that you could fit in a suburban display, and are evolving quite nicely. Now, and I have been proud to be a part of this evolution personally, we are eliminating cages and turning the animals loose in fields or veldts or wide open spaces and caging the people in trams, rafts, and safari vehicles. I have often wondered what the animals are thinking when they see those large groups of homo sapiens, passing by in their metal cages. “What a strange species?”
15. **By interacting up-close with the world’s most powerful predators, did you gain insight into how humans treat each other? What impact do you feel, as a wildlife television pioneer, and you have had on society by bringing global wildlife into everyone’s living room?** I am hopeful that I have affected public attitude and concern for preserving nature. It has given me a platform to hopefully excite young people and families alike to explore and protect nature. The

media has done a good job making animals seem extremely dangerous; I hope to replace fear with knowledge, understanding and respect for wildlife.

16. **How do TV shows of today's era, such as *Shark Week* or *Untamed and Uncut*, compare to the work you did?** Sadly, some of the shows have succumb to selling fear, teeth, claws, and blood thirsty animals looking for people to consume to boost ratings. Believe me I know ratings are important, but when we talk about a shark being at the top of the food chain let's also discuss its role in nature. They aren't giant carnivorous marauders patrolling the ocean looking for people to consume. So I do think we should keep shows exciting and interesting, but let's do our best to keep it accurate. Let's teach people to understand, respect, and appreciate wildlife in addition to being fearful. They *are* wild animals, but let's keep the danger aspect in perspective.
17. **Why do you believe that without providing a context as to why certain species matter to humans, or how we share both a habitat and a future, the larger message may be lost?** I think the message is that wildlife, open space, and wilderness are important to our lives. What would the quality of our life be like without the beauty of nature and its inhabitants sharing the planet with us? It is hard to explain, considering the misinformation that has been shared with us over the years. On a platform, I like to ask a volunteer to pull out a handful of three-inch-long Madagascar hissing cockroaches out of my pocket, the general response is "yuck, gross!" "Why are they important? What good are they?" They are decomposers, they eat leaves and decaying bark and materials that land on the forest floor and thousands of them turn it into perfectly fertilized soil (if you know what I mean?) So, the birds in the forest, eating the fruit, drop the seeds and land in the soil and get covered by the cockroaches and their fertilizer. Thus, the regenerating of the forest starts. Bats; who likes bats? Do you like mosquitoes gnawing on you? Did you know, the average bat eats 3000 mosquitoes in one night? What about those big ugly fruit bats? When they fly tree to tree eating fruit, they get covered in pollen, re-pollenating the forest. The list goes on and on; all animals in nature have a purpose.
18. **How do you help people overcome a fear of animals?** There are emersion programs to get over one's fear of animals. The most common fear is snakes. I like to start with a tv host holding a worm, then a lizard, then a legless lizard, then a small snake. It's mostly a tactile fear, people have been told they are slimy, they are not. They are room temperature, clean, and friendly. For the graduation, I let the host hold an 8-foot boa constrictor, affectionately. Most problems that people have with animals come from stepping on them, being aggressive around them, or cornering them. With enough time I can reduce almost anyone's fear of any animal. I am still working on my fear of walking around New York at night.
19. **How did a ski bum in Aspen, who served in Vietnam as a Navy Sea Bee, get into wildlife conservation?** After working in the PR department at Aspen Highlands and then serving the Navy Sea Bee's building hospitals and roads, I returned to the realities of life in California. Having had a 3600 acre wildlife reserve as my backyard playground that my grandfather had forested, I already had a strong connection to finding a career that related to nature. I attended a college in SoCal that taught Animal Husbandry and a kind of behavioral modification that begun with positive reinforcement and affection to build a bond with human-raised wildlife. Many of the species that I raised had no fear of people or flight so they were very comfortable in their "people environment" and reproduced very well. I was asked to assist other zoos with my programs that, over the years, evolved into displays of which I am most proud where people were caged in 40-person Colorado river rafts for a tour at our park to see animals roaming freely on their islands. I took a large litter of hand raised tiger cubs Johnny Carson show, and who was there but one of the hosts from Wild Kingdom. The rest is history.
20. **What was it like working with TV's Jim Fowler?** My first introduction to Jim was watching him Sunday afternoons bring wildlife into our living room with Marlen Perkins. He was the big guy that Marlen Perkins would send downstream to catch the two horned rhino in heat while he

went to get a martini, as Johnny Carson used to quip. Jim was unflappable, regardless of what type of venomous snake he was holding or elephant he was out running, he would always keep his cool and turn to camera and deliver his lines. He could not have been more patient as I learned the ins and outs of on location filming and presenting in extreme conditions. To this day Jim is still an active spokesman for nature. Although I still like to kid him about his famous one liners and segways, “like the little squirrel storing his nuts for the winter, you too should plan ahead and buy Mutual of Omaha Insurance.” There are many Jim and Peter stories to follow.

21. **Were you nervous bringing a world-record litter of eight tiger cubs onto *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*?** No, I was quite comfortable bringing the tiger cubs to bring Johnny Carson, since he had such a wonderful reputation for being respectful of his wildlife guests. The tigers were strong and healthy at 8 weeks old and were thinking only about the bottles of milk that I had with me. I also had the father, my old friend Nadji, at 500 pounds and very careful and patient around the cubs.
22. **The world hears about climate change, deforestation, and other calamities. Can you tell us some good news, such as the number of species coming off the endangered list?** I grew up in a time when there was little discussion about climate change, deforestation, and endangered species. The general thinking was there is plenty more where that came from. How lucky we are to live in a time where people are conserving water, getting their power from the sun, driving electric cars, eating sustainable foods, and becoming good stewards of our planet for future generations. Just to point out a few, I have seen sections of the forest in the northwest that have been replanted and thriving as well as sections of rainforest in South America, rivers that were so polluted they used to catch fire. Our national bird the bald Eagle, the paraben Falcon, the black footed ferret, the grizzly bear, wolves, just to name a few, are no longer on the endangered list. As I speak around the country I notice excitement and energy and the accompanying questions of “what I can do to help to preserve nature?” The ball is in our court, this next generation is poised and active and wants to make a difference. They are aware we need to use our resources, but in a much more frugal manner. Let’s be sure to give them the hope and education so that they can actively participate in preservation.
23. **What myths about animals do you hope to dispel?** Generally that there are no animals out there looking for people to eat. The myth that has affected people the most is the big bad wolf; wolves are afraid of people. Wolves are predators that take out the weak and the sick thus strengthening the gene pool. Bats don’t nest in your hair, owls don’t attack people walking their dogs, sharks aren’t looking for swimmers to eat. There are an increased number of people on surfboards. From under water a person’s arms and legs look like a big seal. Snakes don’t plot to bite people, people get bitten when they step on them or try and pick them up.
24. **How can one live his life adventurously – without necessarily being face to face with a 3-ton elephant or a killer snake?** Get up and get out! Be at Central Park, a short train ride to a county or state park, or your closest sea shore or river, or nearby hiking trails. It is important that we are physically active and mentally immersed in nature to stay healthy mentally and physically. Make wildlife, open space, and wilderness an important part of your life.