



****EDITOR'S NOTE INCLUDED**

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PRIMATES AND BIG CATS AND SNAKES, OH MY...

ANIMAL PLANET EXPLORES CAUTIONARY TALES OF LOVE DOOMED FROM THE START

What causes this human fascination with dangerous animals?

-- FATAL ATTRACTIONS miniseries premieres Sunday, March 14 --

"I don't regret any of it," says Julie Burros, former owner of a full-grown black leopard that nearly killed her. "The only thing I regret is that I lost my JoJo."

Julie has loved animals all her life, so when she came across a black leopard for sale in an exotic pet magazine, she jumped at the opportunity and brought home Jovani, who she affectionately called JoJo. One ordinary February afternoon, Julie suffered the shock of her life. In his backyard enclosure, Jovani unexpectedly jumped on Julie and nearly ripped off her ear. Jovani's wild instincts set in – once he caught scent of the blood, he pinned down Julie and tore off a good portion of her scalp with his teeth. From then, a sequence of events put the cops in Julie's back yard and four bullets – two in Jovani's belly, one in his hip and one to his head. Julie lived but Jovani didn't.

Exotic pet ownership is not as rare as one might think – or as wildlife experts would wish. Millions of exotic animals are brought to the United States in any given year. A significant number of these pets have the potential to severely injure or kill their owners, neighbors or family. In **FATAL ATTRACTIONS, ANIMAL PLANET'S** three-part miniseries premiering **Sunday, March 14, at 10 PM ET/PT**, get inside the minds of people who own venomous reptiles, deadly big cats and chimpanzees as we try to understand what drives their obsessions and offer a cautionary tale. While their love, admiration and intrigue is genuine, these exotic pet owners often ignore the fact that their choice of a pet could cost them, innocent bystanders or their beloved pets their lives. Why is it that some people are comfortable with domestic pets like cats and dogs but others find companionship and love from animals that have the strong potential to kill them?

"Many of the characteristics of animal hoarding appear to be present in many of the cases of dangerous, exotic animal ownership," says Josephine Martell, program director of the Captive Wild Animal Protection Campaign. Martell's background is in animal welfare policy, and she has first hand knowledge of exotic pet ownership through investigative work and animal rescues. "In particular, many owners of dangerous animals, such as big cats, are in complete denial about the needs or safety concerns of large, free-ranging carnivores. Many of these owners, like animal hoarders, also profess to love their animals regardless of the conditions they may be keeping them in and seem to believe that the animals truly

love them in return.

"It's common for exotic animal owners to believe they have a special kinship with their animals," says Martel, "often to a degree that becomes extreme when they compromise their own and others safety as well as the welfare of the animals."

Montana resident Jeanne Rizzotto, owner of two young adult male chimpanzees Connor and Kramer, is fully aware of the risk of parenting two primates; however, her love for these chimps seems to outweigh her concern for her own life. Having purchased these primates under what she describes as false pretenses - the previous owner told her one would go to AIDS research and the other would be put down - Jeanne vowed to give "her boys" the best life possible. **[Editor's Note: The previous owner denies these claims were made to Ms. Rizzotto and asserts that chimps born in its facility would not be given to research or put down.]** And even though Jeanne personally knew the infamous Travis the Chimp, who brutally disfigured Charla Nash last February in Connecticut - Travis is Kramer and Connor's half brother - Jeanne remains faithful to her conviction that she's doing the right thing, "her thing." Both Jeanne's story and the tragic tale of Travis and Charla Nash are told in the third episode of **FATAL ATTRACTIONS**.

Not everyone has been as fortunate as Jeanne or even Julie; both of the people featured in **FATAL ATTRACTIONS'** reptile episode are deceased. One man was presumed eaten alive by one of his many monitor lizards, and one woman didn't survive the bite of her pet viper.

"I discourage venomous reptile ownership of any kind," says Winston Card, expert herpetologist who has several decades experience with reptiles and anti-venom research. "I consider this type of "pet" ownership as extreme because not only does it put the owner at risk and everyone who comes in contact with the venomous reptile, but the risk also reverberates outward to the zoo community."

In each hour-long episode, several exotic pet ownership cases are carefully reenacted, scrutinized and questioned. Human behavior experts and animal authorities bring forth their educated opinions and analysis. Owners unhesitatingly share their experiences with exotic pets and offer explanations as to why their love for these deadly animals are worth the risk for something horrible -- even death -- to happen.

FATAL ATTRACTIONS kicks off with the reptile episode **March 14, at 10 PM ET/PT** followed by the **March 21** premiere of big cats and the **March 28** premiere of chimpanzees.

FATAL ATTRACTIONS is produced for Animal Planet by Oxford Scientific Films. Executive producer for Oxford Scientific Films is Caroline Hawkins; Clare Birks is CEO for Oxford Scientific Films. Erin Wanner is executive producer for Animal Planet. Vice President of Development for Animal Planet is Charlie Foley.

Animal Planet Media (APM), a multi-media business unit of Discovery Communications, is the world's only entertainment brand that immerses viewers in the full range of life in the animal kingdom with rich, deep content via multiple platforms and offers animal lovers and pet owners access to a centralized online, television and mobile community for immersive, engaging, high-quality entertainment, information and enrichment. APM consists of the Animal Planet television network, available in more than 96 million homes in the US; online assets www.animalplanet.com, the ultimate online destination for all things animal; the 24/7 broadband channel, Animal Planet Beyond; Petfinder.com, the #1 pet-related Web property globally that facilitates pet adoption; and other media platforms including a robust Video-on-Demand (VOD) service; mobile content; and merchandising extensions.