

'Wild Kingdom' zoologist visits Biophilia Center

By Matt Brown
Beacon Correspondent

Visitors to the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center, Freeport, welcomed a special guest to the educational facility Saturday.

Jim Fowler, zoologist and host of "Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom" on Animal Planet, was on hand to speak to the hundreds who showed up at the facility on the Nokuse Plantation. Visitors of all ages came to see the world-famous naturalist, who brought some furry guests of his own.



Jim Fowler

also gave a brief introduction. Davis credited Fowler for his appreciation for nature.

"My first experience of real-

ly being enthralled by nature was with Jim Fowler," said Davis. "I think it's only fitting that our paths cross again."

Fowler entertained members of the audience with a short video which included some of his career highlights from Wild Kingdom and his guest appearances on The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson. Fowler told several humorous stories that involved celebrities including Carson and Mary Tyler Moore.

Fowler delighted the younger crowd by showing off several wild cats they wouldn't typically see roaming the Florida Panhandle. A North American bobcat, an African serval and a Florida panther were just some of the highlights that wowed the audience, especially the kids.

His feline guests were from the Bear Creek Feline Center, Panama City, which is devoted to the preservation and conservation of these endangered cats. Center employees Jim Broaddus and Roger Newson assisted in the event by introducing and handling the cats.

The endangered cats were not the only reason Fowler was

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at the center—he was doing his part to spread a message that is important to him. The title was "New message for the 21st century." Fowler, who considers himself a spokesperson for the natural world, touched on many topics that involved today's natural environment.

"I'm a little annoyed about the things that are occurring in the natural world," said Fowler. "How do we communicate with a public on why it is important to save the wildlife, wilderness and open space? More importantly, why is it important to human welfare?"

"We're pretty far disconnected from the natural world," he continued. "There are places in the world where people are too afraid to go in the wilderness, for fear that animals are going to attack them."

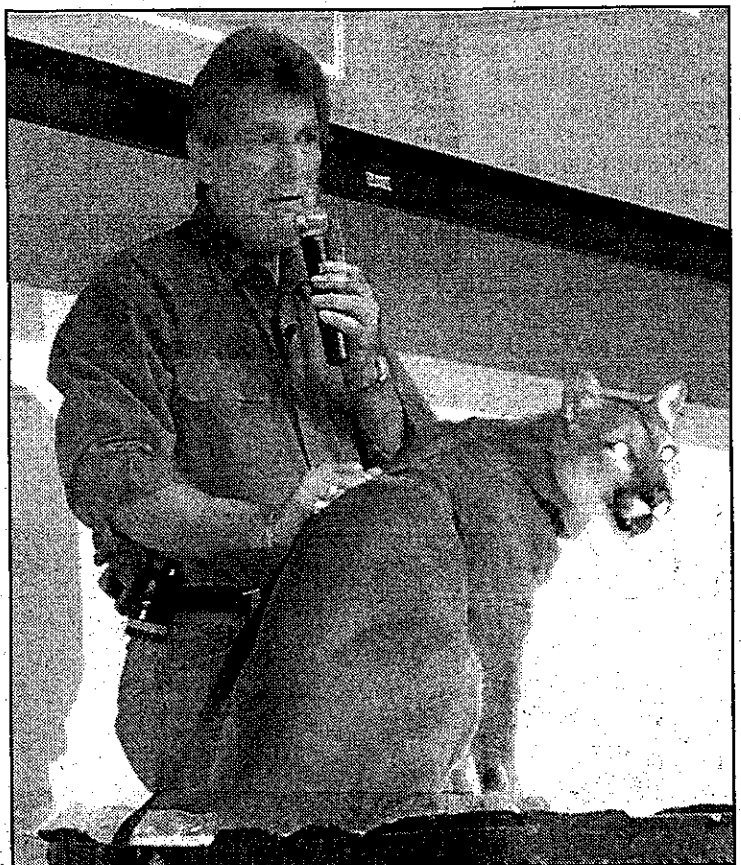
Fowler insists on not using the term "wild animals," preferring "animals in the wild." "It gives the impression that animals are always going hurt us," he said. "The number of people getting hurt by animals is so small." He said statistics show that more people get seriously injured or killed by lawnmowers than by animals.

Fowler praised everyone who is involved at the Biophilia Center for reaching out and

reconnecting people to the natural world.

"Our goal is to have everyone

who leaves here feeling like a naturalist," said Davis following the event.



Beacon photo by Matt Brown