

'River Monsters' Hooks Viewers With Mysterious Creatures

by Alan Mowbray



There is just something so cool about a show that can combine danger, science/biology, fun and fishing—Animal Planet's *River Monsters* easily fits the bill.

Jeremy Wade is a one-man guide to the dangers that lurk below the surface of freshwater rivers and streams around the world, including Germany, Australia, India, Brazil, Ethiopia, Uganda, South Africa, the Republic of Congo, Alaska, Florida and Texas.

In the same spirit as those crazy guys at *Mythbusters*, Wade—biologist and extreme angler—investigates what can seem to be outlandish fishing stories, mysteries and folklore of man-eating river predators to see if they're true or just legend.

Sometimes it's about finding just how vicious a certain species really is. Other episodes, Wade searches for a purported "man killer," which turns out to be a pussycat with gills—although it generally has a mouthful of ridiculously sharp teeth. But whatever the quarry, he almost always lands his catch, including piranha, goonch catfish, alligator gar, Wels catfish, bull shark and arapaima.

Since I dabble in fishing, I enjoy *River Monsters* because it offers a fun and informative behind-the-scenes look at finding, understanding and catching the "big one." Even for those who are not even remotely sport fishing inclined, Wade makes each episode a riveting mystery that must be solved. In minutes, you find yourself hooked by his story—pun intended

and much more easily than the creature he's looking for.

Not to be confused with a faith-based TV reality show, *River Monsters*, interestingly, often touches on spiritual themes and legends. For example, Wade journeys up the infamous Congo River in Central Africa in search of the notorious Goliath Tiger Fish in the episode titled "Demon Fish." He seeks some supernatural help from the local witch doctor to catch one.

After we had finished watching an episode on Florida's giant snakehead, my 11-year-old son gave his review: "It was really cool and kinda scary. I don't know what you think, but a mean, snakehead fish that can stay alive out of the water and sort of crawl to attack something on land without dying is creepy. And awesome!"

Sound advice. As a dad, this is a perfect teaching opportunity. In my humble opinion, one of the most important lessons in life is understanding that life and death live side-by-side. Death isn't usually pretty. But sometimes, as nature shows like this reveal, life isn't all rainbows and bubble gum either.

Growing up, I watched *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom* with Marlin Perkins. I learned a lot from him. Also as a farm kid, death occurred on a regular basis in the natural scheme of things. So how do I give my children an experience that relates on a similar level as my childhood?

Even if I'm not able to give it to them hands-on, I'm grateful for a show like *River Monsters*—also seen on the Discovery Channel. It does a pretty good job—when I think my children are mature enough to handle it. I expect that years from now, my son will look back on Wade the same way I remember Marlin Perkins—as a man who opened my eyes to the new and sometimes dangerous natural world I hadn't yet seen.

River Monsters is currently in its fourth season. Check local listings for times in your area.

Content Watch: *River Monsters* may be a reality show, but it is real and there are times when host Jeremy Wade himself is bloodied from a cut or bite from one of these creatures. Also, in demonstrating how dangerous these creatures can be, may include the feeding of dead animals to them as they film the feeding frenzy. If you're squeamish, this is the perfect opportunity to get over it. Viewer and parental discretion is advised for some of the graphic re-enactments and creepy supernatural folklore.

Alan Mowbray is a husband, father of two children and technical writer for an Orlando, Fla., area software company. Visit his blog by clicking [here](#).