

# Colorado's Creature Teacher

Begin with a childhood spent playing with frogs and snakes at Cherry Creek Reservoir. Add four years immersed in the performing arts at Smoky Hill High School. Complement this with college studies at UNC heavily slanted towards teaching and science. If combined properly, and given the right encouragement, you just might create something unique and foreign to the arid environment of Colorado — a Jungle Lady.

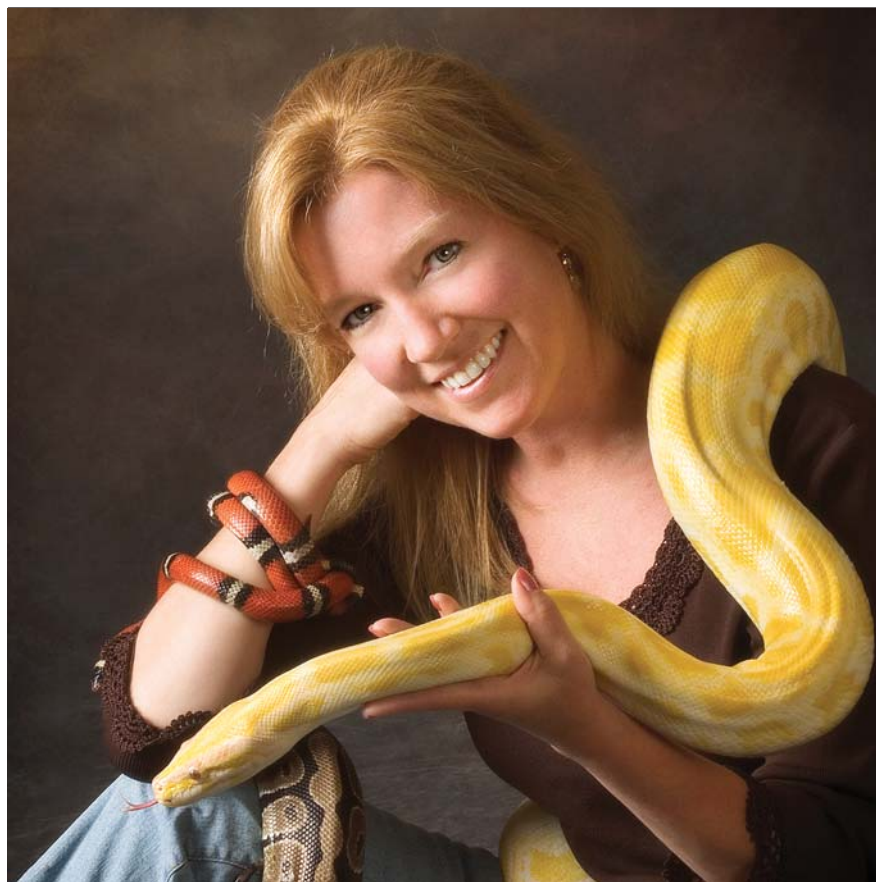
Linda “The Jungle Lady” has transformed her love of reptiles and her skills at performing and teaching into an unlikely career. She entertains groups of all kinds by making some of nature's scariest creatures approachable and fun.

The needle-like fur of the seemingly cuddly hedgehog. The ticklish little feet of a repulsive looking four inch millipede. The cool, smooth feel of a slimy -looking ten foot python. Using a hands-on, interactive style Linda delights her audiences with these and many other unique experiences.

“My basement looks like a pet store,” she tells us as we descend into her “animal room.” The walls are covered in large, well-lit cages from floor to ceiling. “There are over a hundred ‘critters’ down here. I’ll typically use ten or so during one of my shows,” Linda tells us.

Peering into the cages in The Jungle Lady’s “animal room” is like taking a quick tour of our planet’s most exotic locations. There is Ted, the enormous tortoise from Central Africa. And Lola, the fourteen foot python from Myanmar. An enormous bearded dragon from Australia tracks our movement to his cage. Fluffy, a rose hair tarantula from Chile, seems aloof – indifferent to the fact that we’ve arrived with dinner.

While the collection is clearly skewed towards large examples of exotic and colorful animals, Linda assures us that



Linda enjoys the embrace of her bright yellow show-stopper, a Burmese python named Cleopatra. Easily mistaken for a venomous coral snake, the bright red creature coiled around her right arm is a milk snake. A ball python has also playfully slithered onto Linda’s right leg.

the quality she values the most is a calm disposition. “My animals must be able to perform for small children, which means they must be safe to touch and calm in noisy, busy environments.”

Some little boys might visualize Heaven as a magical place full of bugs, lizards, and snakes. For Linda’s two middle school aged sons, Dan and Brian, this paradise is an everyday experience. Helping with the animals is second nature to her boys. Their knowledge of the habits and origins of each member of Linda’s menagerie makes them expert assistants at Linda’s large shows.

It was one of the boys’ teachers, a science instructor, who inspired Linda to embark on her new career. An experienced performer familiar with educational shows, “Captain Vic”

immediately saw the appeal Linda’s engaging demeanor and exotic reptile collection would have for young audiences.

With Vic’s prodding and guidance Linda made her first appearance as The Jungle Lady in 2004. Now that she has hundreds of shows behind her, Linda’s performing repertoire has grown along with her animal collection. Thanks to Linda’s unique career path gatherings along Colorado’s front range can experience first-hand the diversity and mystery of the jungle. ■

*Linda the Jungle Lady has performed in venues from the Wildlife Experience to private birthday parties. Reach her at [Linda@TheJungleLady.com](mailto:Linda@TheJungleLady.com) or [www.thejunglелady.com](http://www.thejunglелady.com)*