

= Meerkat Manor =

Meerkat Manor is a British television programme produced by Oxford Scientific Films for Animal Planet International that premiered in September 2005 and ran for four series until its cancellation in August 2008 . Blending more traditional animal documentary style footage with dramatic narration , the series told the story of the Whiskers , one of more than a dozen families of meerkats in the Kalahari Desert being studied as part of the Kalahari Meerkat Project , a long @-@ term field study into the ecological causes and evolutionary consequences of the cooperative nature of meerkats . The original programme was narrated by Bill Nighy , with the narration redubbed by Mike Goldman for the Australian airings and Sean Astin for the American broadcasts . The fourth series , subtitled The Next Generation , saw Stockard Channing replacing Astin as the narrator in the American dubbing .

Meerkat Manor premiered in the United Kingdom on 12 September 2005 , and the first 13 @-@ episode series concluded on 24 October 2005 . With the success of the programme in the United Kingdom , Animal Planet started broadcasting it on its national channels in Australia , Canada , and the US . It has since been rebroadcast in more than 160 other countries . The fourth , and final , series aired initially in the United States from 6 June 2008 to 22 August 2008 . In August 2009 , it was reported that the programme had been cancelled .

Although the show faced criticism from viewers for not intervening when a meerkat was injured and faced death , as a whole , Meerkat Manor enjoyed considerable success and was Animal Planet 's top series in October 2007 , both on the cable channel and through its video @-@ on @-@ demand service . The show 's experimental format broke new ground in animal documentary filming techniques and allowed viewers a long term , intimate look into the lives of its meerkat stars , breaking the traditional wall between viewer and subject found with most documentaries . In 2007 , Meerkat Manor was nominated for two Primetime Emmy Awards . It has won three awards at the 2006 Omni Awards , and at the 2006 and 2007 New York Festivals Award Galas . The first three series of the programme have been released to DVD in both Region 1 and Region 2 . In 2007 , a book entitled Meerkat Manor ? The Story of Flower of the Kalahari was released in the UK , detailing the life of Flower and the Whiskers before the series ' filming began . A television film , Meerkat Manor : The Story Begins , documenting Flower 's birth and rise to matriarch of the Whiskers aired on Animal Planet on 25 May 2008 .

= = Production details = =

Meerkat Manor was created by Caroline Hawkins , executive producer and series editor at Oxford Scientific Films , and commissioned for Animal Planet International by executive producer and commissioning editor Mark Wild . Filming for a 13 @-@ episode series took seven to eight months , and was limited to the Kalahari spring and summer seasons , as meerkats are less active during winter . Series three was filmed from November 2006 through April 2007 , and Series four began filming in October 2007 . Most scenes were filmed on location at the Kuruman River Reserve , where the Kalahari Meerkat Project that the meerkats are a part of is based . However , the meerkats seen in commercials and on the show 's website were not the same animals portrayed in Meerkat Manor . Instead , tamer @-@ rescued meerkats from the Fellow Earthlings ' Wildlife Center were filmed against a green screen .

The show was primarily filmed using Sony DSR @-@ 570 cameras , although special equipment was needed for some unique footage . For scenes inside the animals ' burrows , mini fibre @-@ optic infra @-@ red cameras were employed ; wide @-@ angle shots were filmed with a seven @-@ metre crane and a remote @-@ controlled camera platform . An off @-@ camera wireless microphone was also used to record many meerkat vocalizations , only partially audible to cameras ' on @-@ board systems . Most filming was done by a single cameraman and a single sound engineer ; researchers have required a minimal human presence to avoid stressing the animals . Eye @-@ level shots were difficult to achieve at times , due to the meerkats ' small size and the limited height of even the smallest tripods .

For tracking purposes by the researchers , the dominant female of each group is fitted with a radio collar , as are some dominant and roaming males . The meerkats ? especially younger animals ? are marked with dye to differentiate them . As the meerkats are habituated , they would tend to ignore the camera crew as long as their " personal space " was respected .

= = = National variations = = =

The UK and US versions of the show have the same content for most episodes ; however , the latter was sometimes edited for length to allow for more commercial breaks . Content was also sometimes altered ; mating scenes in particular were often removed from the US version . Animal Planet US occasionally changed the names of meerkats and episode titles . Two of Flower 's pups were renamed from Ren and Stumpy to Len and Squiggy ; the title of the episode was also changed . De la Soul (named for the rap group of the same name) , one of the sisters who started the Starsky group , was renamed Whoopi in the US as a tribute to actress Whoopi Goldberg , an early fan of the series . Animal Planet US has also renamed some of Flower 's pups born in season three to honour two other famous fans of the show , Elizabeth Taylor and Denis Leary . Several episodes were renamed : the title of the final episode of the second series was changed from " The Killing Fields " to " The Quiet Fields " . During the third series , the third episode 's title was changed from " Something 's Got to Give " to " Sister Act " (another Goldberg reference) , while the sixth episode 's title changed from " The House of Zappa " to " Sibling Rivalry " .

= = Narrative = =

The show follows several groups of meerkats , who act communally for the benefit of the groups in which they live . These groups are typically led by a dominant female and male , who maintain almost exclusive rights to have offspring . The group followed most closely is known as the Whiskers family . This group was chosen because of its matriarch Flower , an unusually successful dominant female who led the group for five years . During series three , Flower died from a snake bite and was succeeded by her daughter Rocket Dog .

Animals in neighbouring groups were highlighted in each series as well . In the first series , a group called the Lazuli were shown frequently in competition with the Whiskers family , and the opening credits referred to them as the " neighbours from hell " . Although their dominant male Big Si died between series , the Lazuli appeared in the second series , mostly as a source of roving males . Another group called the Commandoes , led by a one @-@ eyed male named Hannibal , introduced themselves by attacking the Lazuli burrow , killing a pup and badly wounding the babysitting adult . The Commandoes became the new major rivals in the area , killing the pups of evicted Whiskers female Mozart and taking over some of the Whiskers ' territory .

The Whiskers ' new neighbours were the Zappa and the Starsky . Although smaller than the Whiskers , the Zappa attacked frequently , and when they fled after one attack , the Whiskers ? in a rare occurrence ? adopted an abandoned Zappa pup . The Starsky group , on the other hand , was no threat to the Whiskers . Formed by a trio of Flower 's daughters permanently evicted from the Whiskers , the small group was ravaged by illness , predators , and a lack of new pups . The constantly struggling Starsky succumbed in the penultimate episode , with the death of the last survivor , Mozart , who was killed by a jackal . Former Whiskers female Maybelline broke away from the group at the end of the third series , forming a new group called the Aztecs which became the Whiskers ' rivals in the fourth series .

= = = Changes in representation = = =

While the show portrays real events among the Kalahari Meerkats , it also removes repetitive elements of the animals ' lives . Because many days are filled with behaviour related to grooming and foraging , these routines were often left out of the show in favour of more unusual events .

The meerkats are all named by Kalahari Meerkat volunteers ; the individual who first sees a new

litter emerge from the burrow is awarded naming rights . This has produced a variety of names , frequently drawn from volunteers ' favourite books , movies , musical groups , family and friends , historical figures and geographical locations . Animal Planet sometimes renamed the meerkats for narration , arguing that researchers ' names were too limited , often relating to spices and food condiments . Because of these changes , fans of the series who seek information on the Friends of the Kalahari Meerkat Project website sometimes have trouble locating particular animals . The project has created a list of alterations to help viewers connect the animals on the show to their real @-@ life counterparts , and to match episodes to the monthly KMP Life History reports . The list , however , is only available to paying members of their website .

Two of the major Whiskers family rivals were composites , created with footage and blended stories from multiple groups . For example , the Commandoes group on the show uses some of events from the real Commandoes group , but was primarily shown with footage from the Vivian research group ? including its dominant couple . Similarly , the show 's Zappa group was mostly presented using footage from a group called " The Young Ones " (named after the British television show) ; however , the actual story and dominant pair were from the real Zappa Group . Axel , the abandoned pup from series three , has a research number that indicates he was probably a Young Ones pup , rather than being a Zappa as the show claims .

= = Reception = =

Meerkat Manor has been well received by viewers and critics alike . In October 2007 , it was Animal Planet 's top series , with an audience of more than four million in the United States alone . In the United States , its first episode was viewed by one million viewers , and the second and third series premieres were watched by approximately 800 @,@ 000 viewers each . The fourth series premiere did not fare as well , with fewer than 500 @,@ 000 viewers . The viewership of the on @-@ demand video offerings for Meerkat Manor grew 20 % in September 2007 , when Discovery offered each third series episode , video capsules of series one and two , top ten moments from the show , and a memorial sequence for Flower . Building on the success of Meerkat Manor 's unique format , Animal Planet commissioned two similarly formatted programmes : Orangutan Island , which focuses on a group of orphaned orangutans at the Nyaru Menteng Orangutan Rescue and Rehabilitation Center , and Lemur Street , which looks at the lives of two rival gangs of ring @-@ tailed lemurs in Madagascar .

Some fans have criticized the show for its non @-@ interference policy with regard to the meerkats , asking why the film crew and researchers do not give anti @-@ venom to snake @-@ bitten meerkats , or euthanize those dying and suffering . US Executive Producer Mick Kaczorowski pointed out that Meerkat Manor was a show about the real lives and deaths of the meerkats . The research group has a policy against film crews interceding in natural events " because they don 't want to have an effect on the gene pool by saving a weaker meerkat [or] affecting the outcome of what 's natural in the Kalahari . " As the research project is monitoring " ... the breeding success and survival of individuals and ... the factors that affect reproduction and survival " interfering in the natural processes would render the research results invalid . There is one exception to this rule : researchers will euthanize meerkats that contract tuberculosis , to prevent outbreaks that would threaten both the meerkat population and nearby cattle .

= = = Awards = = =

Meerkat Manor was nominated for a 2005 Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival Award in the " Animal Behaviour " category , and in 2007 for " Best Original Score " . At the 2006 Wildscreen Festival , the series was a finalist in three categories : " Animal Behaviour " , " Innovation " , and " Popular Broadcast " . The series won Gold Statues in " Natural History " and " Cinematography " , and a Silver Statue for " Writing " , at the 2006 Omni Awards . The eighth episode of series three , " Journey 's End " which depicts the death of Whiskers matriarch Flower , was awarded the 2008 Wildscreen Festival Panda Award in the " Five Award for Popular Broadcast Programme " category .

Meerkat Manor was a two @-@ time Gold Medal winner in the " Nature & Wildlife " category at the New York Festivals Award Gala , in 2006 for series one , and again in 2007 for series one and two . The series was nominated for two Primetime Emmy Awards in 2007 : one for " Outstanding Cinematography for Nonfiction Programming " and one for " Outstanding Picture Editing for Nonfiction Programming " . In 2009 the series was awarded the Grand Award at the New York Festivals International Television Programming and Promotion Awards in the " Family Programmes " category .

= = = Impact on the genre = = =

Meerkat Manor 's innovative new methods of filming allowed the Kalahari Project scientists a chance to uncover aspects of meerkat life never before seen , including life within the burrows . The film crew was also the first to capture meerkat infanticide on film .

While many documentaries maintain an emotional distance from their subjects , Meerkat Manor ? due to its extended length , soap opera @-@ like narration , romanticization of the animals ' lives , and close @-@ up filming techniques , provides a closer , more personal view of the meerkats . Viewers describe being emotionally involved in the animals ' lives , sometimes forgetting they are watching a documentary . The meerkats ' frequently short lives and brutal deaths become surprising and disturbing to some audiences . This experimental format was seen as expanding the boundaries of both the nature documentary genre and the nature of reality TV .

Like the meerkats , Manor is an odd beast . The crew is forbidden to intervene , and the producers don 't sugarcoat the animals ' less cuddly habits (infidelity , abandonment of young , occasional cannibalism) . But the meerkats are named and given human traits (" courageous , " " caring , " " bully [ing] ") , and their antics and tragedies take place over a sound track . Manor is both brutal and melodramatic and thus more devastating than most documentary or scripted drama .

= = Merchandise = =

A book written by Professor Tim Clutton @-@ Brock entitled Meerkat Manor : The Story of Flower of the Kalahari (ISBN 0 @-@ 297 @-@ 84484 @-@ 9) was released in the UK in a hardback edition on 4 October 2007 . The book focuses on Flower 's life and the story of the Whiskers , tracing how the group started , providing a timeline of Flower 's life , and detailing all of the pups she had over her lifetime , as well as their current locations . The book also gives more background on how the Kalahari Meerkat Project started , the research goals and results , and researchers ' personal lives . A paperback edition of the book was announced for release in the United States by Simon & Schuster through their Touchstone imprint on 15 April 2008 . The US release was titled Meerkat Manor : Flower of the Kalahari (ISBN 1 @-@ 4165 @-@ 8767 @-@ 5) . In November 2007 , Discovery Communications announced that it was partnering with Activision to make a video game based on Meerkat Manor as the first in a new series of nature @-@ based games . The announcement stated the game would be released to multiple platforms in late 2008 , but no game was ever released .

= = = Film = = =

Oxford Scientific Films produced a feature film for Discovery Films that acts as a prequel to the Meerkat Manor series . Originally announced as Flower : Queen of the Kalahari , Meerkat Manor : The Story Begins was directed by Chris Barker and Mike Snee and narrated by Whoopi Goldberg . The film documents Flower 's early life as she grows from a young meerkat to become one of the most successful leaders of the Whiskers clan . The film was introduced at the 2008 Tribeca Film Festival in the Spotlight section , and then aired in the United States on Animal Planet on 25 May 2008 as a lead @-@ in to a thirty @-@ minute Making of Meerkat Manor : the Story Begins special . It was released to Region 1 DVD in North America on 3 June 2008 , with the Making of Meerkat Manor special , and another special , The Science of Meerkat Manor , included as extras .

The film included re @-@ edited footage and a new musical score . The Whiskers story was simplified , with the Lazuli being the only rival group to appear in the film . Unlike with the Meerkat Manor series , the film does not actually depict any of the real Whiskers meerkats . Untrained " meerkat actors " play the role of Flower and her family , with the camera crew searching out appropriately @-@ aged meerkats , then following them until the meerkats acted in a way that was needed for the film . Flower herself was depicted by approximately eight female meerkats .