

Live! On TV from the back yard

■ The *Fox After Breakfast* chat show came looking for interesting people. They found Lynn Ash and his home-grown Thonotosassa zoo.

By PAMELA DAVIS
Times Staff Writer

THONOTOSASSA — "I'm in Thonotosassa with a great story for you, Tom. It may look like a jungle or a rain forest but it's actually the back yard of Lynn Ash."

The speaker here has the kind of perkiness you'd think is fake (it's not). The man she's speaking about has the kind of hobbies you'd think would make him a flake (he's not).

Together, Suzanne Whang, a roving reporter, and Ash, a Busch Gardens graphic artist, were the focus of Friday's live *Fox After Breakfast* (10 a.m. WTVT-Ch. 13) on-location "Road Warrior" segment.

The "Tom" Whang spoke to in her opening line is Tom Bergeron, the show's New York host. Like the viewers who tuned into *Fox After Breakfast* on Friday, Bergeron watched the three-minute story about Ash unfold.

Part of each one-hour *Fox After Breakfast* show, includes brief stories filmed throughout the country about regular folks. All of last week's remotes were shot in Florida cities: Cape Canaveral, Christmas, Winter Haven and Thonotosassa.

The TV show found Ash through Tampa film commissioner, Edie Emerald. Before becoming film commissioner, Emerald had a six-year stint in public relations for Busch Gardens. She suggested the show take a look at Ash.

The 53-year-old Ash is a Dr. Doolittle of sorts. His one-acre woody compound is home to about 100 animals, including a donkey, two bobcats and numerous exotic birds.

When the show's producers scouted the location and met Ash,



Times photo — VICTOR JUNCO

Lynn Ash, center, is interviewed early Friday on live television by the crew from *Fox After Breakfast*.

they were hooked.

"There are so many dimensions to him. That always makes for a great guest," said Katrina Char-matz, a field producer. "I like the setting here and how it sort of looks like the *Swiss Family Robinson*."

Fox After Breakfast airs live at 9 a.m. weekdays in most markets, though in Tampa Bay it's shown at 10 a.m., after *Live with Regis* and Kathie Lee. Originally called *Breakfast Time* and aired on the fX cable network, the TV show went under a slight name change and set-up before Fox took it national Aug. 12.

For Friday's local remote, the *Fox After Breakfast* technical crew knocked on the door of Ash's stilt house at 5:30 a.m. By 7:30 a.m., Whang had shown up and an hour later was already deep in concentration.

"There are no cue cards or prompters so I have to have it ingrained," the 34-year-old Whang said. "If something goes wrong or something unexpected happens it might go out the window."

At the start of the show, Whang stood among Ash's cabbage palms and moss-laden trees and waited for her cue. The light was perfect.

With four minutes to go, Whang waited in front of the camera: "My nose is running. That's attractive" She then raised her head toward the sky and sniffed.

Seconds later, nose issue resolved, she was on live television.

During the entire segment, Ash cradled a golden pheasant in his arms. During Whang's introductions the camera inched closer and the bird panicked. It fluttered its wings and nipped Ash on the neck.

On camera, Whang wasn't fazed by the biting incident.

But afterward, Whang, a graduate of Yale and Brown with degrees in psychology, admitted it startled her a little.

"You've got wild animals here. They don't like lights and cameras and tons of people," she said.

"I think people at home love stuff like that. They love the sense that we're going on an adventure and anything can happen."