

# American Aviculture

## Those Were the Days

by Jean Delacour

**[Editor's Note:** The following article is reprinted from the *Avicultural Magazine* (April, 1937). The A.F.A. has been given permission to reprint this insightful article by Frank Woolham, editor of *The Avicultural Magazine* and Professor J.R. Hodges, honorary Council Chairman of the Avicultural Society (England).

In this article the famed ornithologist and aviculturist, Dr. Jean Delacour gives his impression of American aviculture in 1937. He travelled to several zoological and private collections. While reading this article in 1994, one must be impressed with the great variety of avian species found in captivity in the 1930's. Some were quite delicate in their dietary needs as the flycatchers and hummingbirds while others are now considered quite rare as the birds-of-paradise and the Weka Rail. Though many species of pheasants, curassows and waterfowl were very common, it was also a time when a variety of finches and softbills were quite plentiful. This article can give us a chance to admire the aviculturists of the past as to their ability to keep many of these species alive. The great variety of present day commercial diets were not available to them.

Several hybrids have been mentioned in this article and the editors have left them to preserve the contents of this article. The A.F.A. does not in any way approve of captive hybridization. The editors along with several knowledgeable

aviculturists have clarified several out-of-date or unfamiliar common and scientific names found in this article. These additions are in brackets. This article follows Dr. Delacour's travels through the eastern and mid-western U.S. A later article will follow his travels in the west. Dr. Delacour's wonderful sense of humor often came through in his writings. It can be seen at the end of the first paragraph of this article. Many of the names of the aviculturists of the past may be familiar to you. This article was printed for your enjoyment and education. DRT]

I had not been in North America since 1927. In those days there were very good public collections of live birds in different zoos, but only a very few private ones and some commercial breeding establishments. We all know that, since then, aviculture has spread considerably over there, particularly in California, and the tremendous change in the state of things which I have witnessed during my last trip is, I think, well worth recording in our pages.

In America, aviculturists are up against a general difficulty; labour is extremely difficult to find, and very expensive, so that, unless one has large means, one must be prepared more or less to look after one's birds oneself. That, of course, bars very large collections in most cases. Another drawback is the hard climate of many parts of the country. The whole North, North-East, and

Middle-West have six months of very cold weather which practically no birds from a warm or temperate climate can stand without artificial heat, and the summers, being oppressively hot, are also dangerous to some, although they suit others very well. But it all means substantial and costly buildings. The Southern states, on the other hand, mild in the winter, very hot and damp in the summer, are good for tropical species, and the Pacific coast, with climates varying from that of South-West England to that of the Riviera, is extremely favourable to bird keeping and breeding in general.

### I. The East

The autumn is the best season in North-East America, and I arrived in New York on 6th October, with M. Francois Edmond-Blanc. We took over some rare birds of different sorts which I presented to some of the zoos, and others which I acquired from them, all having travelled in perfect condition. Many friends met us at the wharf and Mr. P.M. Maresi took us straight to his charming house at Scardale, a pretty and country-like suburb. A Vice-President of the Avicultural Society of America, Mr. Maresi has the best private collection of delicate birds east of the Rockies at the present time. Although he keeps Pheasants and other Game birds, he is mostly interested in the rarer insectivorous and frugivorous species. In his garden, there are two large pergola-like aviaries, containing mixed collections, mostly of seed-eaters and native American birds; a series of pens for Pheasants and other large birds, and an excellent bird-room, including three large indoor compartments, connected with outdoor flights, to which birds have access in good weather. A corridor runs in front of the indoor flights, and on the other side excellent fixed cages cover the whole wall. The room is well lighted and heated, painted with white enamel, and perfectly kept. Mr. Maresi's collection contains several hundreds of birds, and many unusual ones; there are different Rock-Thrushes, a curious Glass-eyed Thrush (*Turdus jamaicensis*), a lovely Fauna's Tanager (*Calospiza nigrocincta*), several Cuban Solitaires (*Myiadestes elisabethae*), Western Bluebirds, Maroon Orioles, a fine Cock of the Rock, many other species of Tanagers, Starlings, Barbets, Finches, etc. I cannot give here a complete list of all the fine things that I saw there and elsewhere: our Editor would be frightened of the

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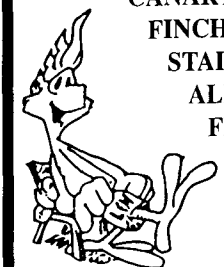
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room it takes! And I am frightened of her.

The next day we went to the Bronx Zoo, where it is always a joy to meet Mr. Lee Crandall, the very capable and kind Curator of Birds. The Bronx Zoo is exactly to-day what it was ten years ago, and the bird-house is typical of those that one sees in public gardens all through America. There is a large hall with big compartments right round, and a great flight in the middle. Two smaller rooms adjoin it, also with aviaries all round, some of which have outdoor flights as well. The roofs are mostly of glass; palms and bamboos in tubs here and there. The collection in the house is very fine, the best of the kind in America, and quite comparable to that of the London Zoo as far as Passerine and Picarine birds go. There are no fewer than fifteen species of Birds of Paradise, some very rare Hornbills, including the fine *Berenicornis comatus*, [White-crowned Hornbill], Sunbirds and Hummingbirds, different Cotingas; the Pompadour and a pair of pretty green *Euchloris auripictus*; a very rare Caique *Zarhynchus wagleri*, [Chestnut-headed Oropendola], many unusual Toucans, Fruit-Pigeons, several rare Tanagers, including *Compsocoma sumptuosa*, *Thraupis olivicyanea*, etc. Very tame and performing Greater Bird of Paradise and Cock-of-Rock are of special interest. The caretaker of this fine house has been for many years Mr. Stassey, who worked first at the London Zoo and, no doubt, one of the keenest and most capable bird-keepers I know.

I am glad to say that the Bronx Zoo authorities contemplate adding a new bird-house with large indoor and outdoor aviaries in the near future.

There is a good collection of Pheasants, and also of other Game birds; a pair of the curious "Stone" Curassows, or Pauxis, must be mentioned. Parrots and Pigeons are numerous, some of them very rare. Waterfowl are rather poor, but there are good Waders. During the winter, most have to be kept in large indoor cages, and there are several big houses for that purpose.

On account of the climate few of the smaller birds are reared in captivity in the East, but there are a number of private breeders of Game-birds and Waterfowl. Thanks to Mr. Maresi's kindness I visited the most important and successful farms. Almost all of them are semi- or completely commercial. Many are situated in New England, the very picturesque and beautiful country which ex-

tends from north-east of New York City to the Canadian border. In October, the densely wooded hills and valleys are bright with autumnal colours, gold, pink, and scarlet, such as we never see in Europe, and can compare with those of Japan. We motored long distances along fine roads, passing through pretty towns and villages, the white-painted wooden houses looking "colonial" and so pretty under the drooping branches of large American elms and maples which grow everywhere.

In the north of Massachusetts, near

Great Barrington, we saw the game farm of Mr. F. Yessler, who breeds successfully most species of hardy Pheasants, including Mikados and Edwards. All do well in this cold climate, and we saw many young birds. Mr. Yessler is now using exclusively electric brooders for his chicks, and so avoids all contagion from broody hens. But all his eggs are incubated under hens, so that he does almost exactly the reverse of many other breeders. He declares that, in this way, he never fails to rear a healthily born chick.

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Mr. Yessler's pheasantry for adult birds consists of two adjoining rows of pens, of moderate size (10 to 15 by 20 to 30 feet), with an open shelter running along one of the narrow sides, the whole lot forming a rectangular ensemble, which is made rat-proof. The deep snow of the winter does not trouble the birds.

Not far from New Haven, Connecticut, Mr. C.S. Sibley possesses a large bird farm near Wallingford. Although one sees there a large number of Pheasants and Waterfowl, many of his birds are reared at different other farms in New England, particularly Ducks, where warm springs and extensive waters make things easier. Mr. Sibley possesses most species of Pheasants, including the rarest, such as Mikados, Tragopans, and Imperials, and even some of the more tender ones, which live during the winter in heated shelters. His collection of Waterfowl is the best in America, and includes practically all the North American species and many of the others. He is successful in rearing them each year. At Wallingford, the Swans, Ducks, and Geese are kept in several large enclosures, through which a shallow but wide stream runs. His Pheasants have rather small pens, scattered all over the slopes of an orchard.

Mr. Sibley is a keen and enthusiastic bird-lover and does much to popularize bird-keeping in his country. I was his guest for two days and had many interesting talks with him.

In the same district, Mr. P. Plant owns, at Waterford, a very good collection of Pheasants, and also Bantams of many breeds. Mr. Plant is a newcomer to aviculture, but has already gathered an almost complete series. His pens run along two sides of a large meadow, forming an L-shaped pheasantry; they are good sized, with substantial open shelters at the back; others, with heated shelters, have been built in the vicinity for Polyplectons, [Peacock Pheasants,] Firebacks, and Argus. Mr. Plant is the president of the American O.P.S., and has altogether the opportunities and the enthusiasm to make his hobby a great success.

On Long Island, we saw one day the astonishing farm of Mr. Tinker, a well-known cinema producer, so we were told. It is supposed to be an entirely commercial undertaking. There are rows of good Pheasant pens, with the more ordinary species and a few rarer ones. But the particular asset there is the

numerous Ring-necked, Reeves', Golden, and Amherst's Pheasants, which are reared annually, along with Turkeys, Fowls, Ducks, and Geese, and sold to the market for food. The farm covers many acres.

There are also on Long Island two interesting establishments: the American branch of the well-known German firm, Louis Ruhe, where many rare animals and larger birds are kept in pens and heated stables (the smaller birds are in shops in New York City), and Mr. Frank Buck's Zoological Park. Mr. Buck's name, of "Bring them back alive" fame, is popular all over the world. But before becoming a cinema star, he had been for many years a most skillful and successful collector and importer of animals and birds. Many of the rare specimens which have adorned American zoos during the last thirty years have been "brought alive" by him. But Mr. Frank Buck's recent Hollywood fame has not spoiled him; he is just as affable, kind, and unassuming a person as can be found anywhere. He has recently acquired a large wooded tract of land and converted it into a show place for animals and birds. Installations are simple, but excellent. Besides a wonderful collection of large mammals, there are very good Pheasants, Waders, and Waterfowl, and also nice small birds. Many of the specimens are for sale, so that the collection is continually being renewed.

There is a small zoo in the heart of the city of New York, in Central Park. It has been recently rebuilt in the most attractive way. There are only a few birds, kept in a large house, but the mammal collection is good and well shown.

In different parts of the town one finds bird shops. That of Louis Ruhe is the largest and best. They sell mostly birds from Europe, India, Abyssinia, etc., but also some from Central America, Venezuela, and Columbia, which rarely come to us nowadays. Otherwise there is usually less choice than in our European shores, and prices are higher as a rule.

There is no proper zoo in Boston, but in one of the suburban parks, a very fine bird-house of Japanese style, has been recently erected, as well as a large outdoor flight. There are a few interesting birds, but many more common ones.

The Philadelphia Zoo, the oldest in America, shows signs of age, and is soon to be rebuilt. The big bird-house, of the usual type, contains some very good birds, including Birds of Paradise.

Not far from that city, Mrs. Wikoff Smith and her daughters have a fine collection. There is a very good series of Pheasants, some Waterfowl, Parrakeets, and small birds. Several cages and aviaries, in the pretty winter garden adjoining the house, are inhabited by Australian and other Finches, Mynahs, Cissas, Orioles, and several other interesting species. In the extensive grounds, one sees also a beautiful and large kennel and many pens for Bantams and domestic Pigeons. Mrs. Smith's collection is one of the best private ones in the country.

A few miles out of Washington, at Rockville, Maryland, Mr. C. Denley owns the oldest and one of the finest collections of Pheasants in America. His name, experience, and kindness are known the world over to Game-bird amateurs. The climate of Maryland is not so severe in the winter as that of New England, although still considerably colder than that of England and Northern France. But summers are extremely hot, so that precautions must be taken to keep the mountain species as cool as possible. However, Mr. Denley has been for many years very successful in breeding practically all sorts of Pheasants, including Argus and Tragopans. His pheasantry covers a large piece of ground, and there are many dozens of pens, some being heated during the cold season. I noticed two curious cock hybrid Tragopans (Satyr X Blyth's) with bright green faces quite intermediate between the yellow of the Blyth's and the blue of the Satyr.

Between Philadelphia and Washington, Mr. W.J. Mackensen's farm, at Yardley, is also interesting. There, several species of Pheasants, including Mikados, and of Waterfowl, are reared every year.

The Washington Zoo is situated in a beautifully hilly and wooded park, very picturesque. Ten years ago it contained much of interest, but the different installations were old and sometimes inadequate. To-day, it is quickly becoming one of the best equipped zoos in the world. A large and fine reptile house has been erected, while marvellous buildings for large mammals (Elephants, Hippos, Rhinos, and Cattle) and a beautiful small mammal house are almost ready to be opened. The new bird house is very large and good; it includes several long galleries, luxuriously fitted, and a very fine central flying cage. The largest gallery consists of a wide central space for the public with aviaries all round,

separated by plate glass, a process far superior to the old-fashioned wire-netting partitions. Contrary to some expectations, birds do not bang and hurt themselves against the glass.

There are also many excellent out-of-door aviaries and pens. I particularly admired a pair of the rare Flightless Cormorants from the Galapagos Islands, which nested last year. Also the three old Californian Condors look as fine as ever. It is impossible to mention here more species, but, on the whole, the collection of birds is very good and increases continually. I noticed two curious and gorgeous hybrid Amherst's X Reeves' Pheasants, bred and presented by Mr. Denley. On the wonderful improvements which are being made to the Washington Zoo we must congratulate its enterprising, learned, and genuine director, my friend Dr. W. Mann. The Washington Zoo is the only one in the U.S.A. which belongs to the Federal Government. All the others are either the property of cities, or of private societies helped by municipalities.

During the month that I spent in the East, much of my time was spent visiting museums, attending meetings, and also watching wild birds in the field; therefore, I could only visit the best zoos, private collections, and bird farms. There are many more of interest, however. Practically every city possesses one or several zoos, or at least some bird collection in a public park, and there are many breeders, mostly of Game-birds, all over the country.

## II. The Middle West

My first visit, after leaving New York, was for Toronto. The Zoo of this pretty Canadian city, ably managed by Dr. Y.A. Campbell is small, but nicely situated, and includes many animals and birds of interest. There are large outdoor aviaries, several ponds, and lakes in different public parks are well stocked with waterfowl, mostly native. There are only a few small birds. I noticed a Weka Rail and a rare Crestless Curassow *Mitua tomentosa*.

The new Detroit Zoo is quite far from the centre of the city; it is a large tract of land, and one of the prettiest zoos I have ever seen. People who have seen the new Vincennes Zoo, in Paris, will have a fair idea of the Detroit Zoo when I say that it is built on the same plan, but ten times larger as far as the open runs go. The shelters, under rocks, are small and rough, and not open to the public. The

general effect, outside, is very pleasing. The gardens are beautifully kept, and I was surprised to see lovely lawns in most of the pens. There is no attempt at keeping a general collection, only groups of animals and birds, according to geographical distribution, with some very rare specimens. The only old-fashioned building in the Zoo is a bird house, like those one sees everywhere in America; but the collection includes no rarities.

The new Brookfield Zoo at Chicago is one of the sights of America, although

it is not quite finished yet, and will still be greatly improved during the next few years. The same enthusiastic promoters, whose skill and generosity are already responsible for the great Field Museum of Natural History and the marvellous Shedd Aquarium, have started it. The grounds are very extensive and the means of developing them adequate. No doubt within a few years it will be the largest establishment of its kind in the world. Most of the accommodation is of the modern "fenceless" style, but there are also quite a number of luxurious

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houses for the smaller mammals and birds.

The Brookfield Zoo is very ably managed by Mr. E.G. Bean, assisted by his son for the mammals (of which there is already a beautiful collection). As the curator of birds, the Chicago Zoological Society has had the luck to obtain the services of Mr. Karl Plath, whose name is already familiar to our readers. Mr. Plath has been for many years a private amateur and has successfully kept many of the rarest and most difficult birds; his pictures have also been much admired. His knowledge and experience have seldom been surpassed. At the new Chicago Zoo, Mr. Plath has a great opportunity for collecting and studying birds in a big way, and he takes every opportunity of making the collection one of the finest. He has at his disposal a large Small Bird House, a Parrot House, another one for larger species, extremely decorative and practical, and many pens and aviaries; other accommodation will soon be added. Just to mention a few birds, I will say that there are several Birds of Paradise, including one Sickie-bill, a large selection of rare insectivorous and frugivorous birds from all parts of the world, a very good series of Western and Middle-Western American birds, including the most difficult American Warblers, other insectivorous species, nearly all the Australian Finches and Parrots, Humming Birds, etc. Some hand-reared American Avocets and Stilts attracted my attention, as well as a Wattled Crane and an Albatross, which has been over two years in captivity. I hope that Mr. Plath will give us from time to time news of the great collection under his care.

The old municipal Zoo of Chicago, in Lincoln Park, is still being kept and even improved. Some of the houses are fine and there are many good mammals; but the collection of birds is rather indifferent.

There are hardly any private collections in this part of America, but the very interesting Kellogg Bird Sanctuary, in Michigan, and several game-bird farms would have been well worth a visit; unfortunately, I had not the time for it. Zoos, of various sizes and merits, are to be found in most Middle-Western cities, and I much regret not to have seen, particularly, those at Milwaukee, Toledo, Cincinnati, etc. But I was luckily able to visit the wonderful St. Louis Zoo, probably the best all round to-day in America. It is a municipal zoo; all the accom-

modation has been renewed lately and much is still being done. The situation of the park is very favourable, as the grounds are hilly, with good trees and water, and close to the centre of the town. Like Chicago, there are very fine houses as well as fenceless pens and rocky dens for the larger mammals. At St. Louis the rock work is particularly elaborate and good, and it imitates perfectly different natural formations of the neighbourhood. There is a very fair collection of waterfowl on the lake—a rare feature in American zoos, where horrible domestic ducks and geese usually disfigure the ponds. As to the Bird House, it is the prettiest that I have ever seen so far. A very nice construction of Spanish style, it has a unique feature: a central patio, under a glass roof, laid out and planted as a tropical garden, the front of which is truly fenceless, so that the small Waders, Doves, and other birds which live there can, if they choose, fly right round the gallery, where the public walk. But they hardly ever do so, as the gallery is rather dark. In the centre, on both sides of the patio, and at the back, are several large planted aviaries, stocked with rare Starlings, Shrikes, Fairy Bluebirds, Pittas, Finches, Sunbirds, Sugarbirds, Tanagers, etc. One very roomy and high compartment is the home of three magnificent male Cocks of the Rock, who have lived there over three years; it is a wonderful sight to watch them jump and fly among the limbs of a large banyan tree, and catch on the wing the grapes that their keeper throws up in the air. To my amazement they never fight seriously. Right round the public gallery, on the outer sides, are many compartments of various sizes, where an excellent collection is kept. On the southern side there is a large planted aviary for Humming Birds. All the compartments are separated from the public by plate glass. A long corridor, with aviaries on both sides, some corresponding to outdoor pens, is used for larger birds. There is also a huge and beautiful flying cage. The St. Louis Zoo is very ably managed by Mr. G. Vireheller who is helped in his task by an enthusiastic amateur, Mr. E.A. Lemp, whose country estate, 50 miles from St. Louis, contains many mammals, living in semi-liberty, as well as birds. I regretted that I was unable to visit it. Both Mr. Vireheller and Mr. Lemp showed me round their Zoo and entertained me in the most cordial way. I went to St. Louis and back by air from Chicago in one day. ➤

## Fun With Photos

by Sheldon Dingle,  
Alhambra, California

Wonderful convention. Lots of fun and action. Clifton thrown out of bar. Dingo banished from hotel then from Concord. Lights out, snuck back into dark bar. Squeals, slapped faces, next day Hazell has black eye. Joe Freed's tongue in someone's ear—Freed doesn't remember. Photos to prove it.

Ollson with a strange woman—it's OK she came with his wife. Not a stranger after all. Greenberg sampling good booze in Sam's Club parking lot. Elder hauls him back to hotel in shopping cart. Foot on the bottom rack, Elder rides cart better than a cowboy. Beth Greenberg used to such antics. Dingo was innocent—really.

Wild South African (Ashington) starts riot at auction—increased the bids 50%. Ford's headlights glowed in the dark, added light in the dark bar. Old Tymers out of hand. Roer's cane used for pointed emphasis—where it counts. Couldn't get Elgas off hotel roof—looking for a goose.

So much fun. So much to say. No room. Oh well! Look at the pictures.



Lynn Hall (right) and Bob Elgas are among the finest of the Old Tymers in aviculture. Hall keeps and breeds a wonderful lot of exotic doves and pigeons among other sorts of birds while Elgas keeps waterfowl, parrots and assorted species and has done a lot of highly acclaimed field work with wild geese.