

Birds in Texas Zoos

by Josef Lindholm, III
Keeper/Birds
Fort Worth Zoological Park

Editor's Note: This article was written to open up a whole new world for those of us who love birds, love zoos and love to vacation. To some folks, "Texas" conjures up armadillos, dust and cowboys—or oil barons and villains of the old TV program "Dallas." There may be some truth to these images but there is a great deal more—particularly for bird lovers—as the following article explains. Read and enjoy. See you in San Antonio. SLDJ

As of 1 January 1996, of the 25 largest U.S. zoo bird collections (by species) listed by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (1996), five were Texan. Two of these, San Antonio and Houston, are in the top ten. Collectively, roughly 600 species and subspecies of birds are held by the nearly 20 zoos, aquariums and wildlife parks in Texas.

Since at least the 1940s, the San Antonio Zoological Gardens has been one of the world's great bird collections, at times exceeding 500 species and subspecies, and, in some years, being the second largest U.S. zoo bird collection, after the San Diego Zoo. On 1 January 1996, San Antonio ranked Number Five, after the San Diego Zoo and Wild Animal Park, the Bronx Zoo, and Cincinnati Zoo, with 1,014 specimens representing 219 taxa.

San Antonio Zoo

San Antonio Zoo is uniquely endowed with an artesian well supplying numerous canals and pools at a constant warm temperature, so that tropical fishes, such as tilapia, shark catfish, and plecostomus flourish year-round. It is only to be expected that there is a wonderful collection of aquatic birds, including such oddities as Horned Screamers, Straw-necked Ibis, and a Black-necked Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*). African White-backed Ducks (*Thalassornis l. leuconotus*) are the gems among 44 taxa of ducks, geese and swans. At the beginning of 1977, the two pairs, occupying their own canal-fed enclosure, were the only ones in any American public zoo. Of course the pair of Whooping Cranes stand out among

the eight crane taxa, which also include one of the few proven breeding pairs of Hooded Cranes in captivity.

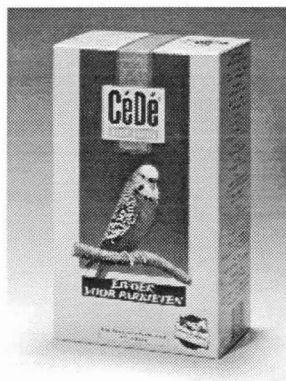
Most zoos today display far fewer parrot species than they used to and it is rare to find more than a dozen or so taxa on display. San Antonio, however, holds more than 40 species. While it is, of course, exciting to see such rarities as Blue-throated (or Caninde), Red-fronted, and Buffon's Macaws, breeding Golden Conures, Red-tailed Black Cockatoos, and Long-billed Corellas, it is also very satisfying to find serious exhibits of all three species of *Polytelis*, Senegal Parrots (with Jackson's Hornbills in the walk-through Rift Valley Forest Aviary),

Grey-cheeked *Brotogeris*, White-bellied Caique, and White-crowned Parrot (*Pionus senilis*).

Inside the beautiful Hixon Tropical Bird House can be found the last White-necked *Picathartes* in the Western Hemisphere (hatched at San Antonio), the first Woodland Kingfishers (*Halcyon senegalensis*) to breed in an American Zoo, Golden-headed Quetzals, breeding Cinnamon Warbling Finches (*Poospiza ornata*), Long-tailed and Lesser Green Broadbills, Golden-headed Manakins, Chinese Bamboo Partridges and many other species. Softbills exhibited out-of doors include breeding Lesser Birds of Paradise, a large flock of Yellow-rumped Caciques (in the Amazonia walk-through exhibit), Malay Wreathed Hornbills, and Black-headed Gonoleks.

The limitations of space do not allow me to more than mention such

Birds Do Not Live By Seed Alone



In their natural habitat, birds select and nourish themselves with a variety of insects and fruits in addition to seeds. However, birds in captivity are fully dependent upon their owners for proper nutrition. That's why **CéDé Eggfood Products** are a necessary part of your bird's diet.

Sunflower, canary, rape and other seeds alone do not provide a well balanced nutritional diet that is essential to the bird's health and growth. **CéDé Eggfood** supplements your birds with essential vitamins, minerals, amino acids and animal proteins. **CéDé Eggfood** is perfect for your bird's nutritional needs during resting, breeding, and molting.

CéDé Eggfood has proven to be an essential contribution to successful breeding both in Europe and in the United States. **CéDé Eggfood Products** are available for all types of birds. If you aren't feeding **CéDé Eggfood Products** to your birds, your birds are not breeding to their potential!

NEW! Aluminum nitrogen flushed packaging for guaranteed freshness.

Distributed By Sunshine Bird Supplies, P.O. Box 830366, Miami, Florida 33283
Distributor inquiries welcomed at 1-800-878-2666 or fax (305) 591-9567

other San Antonio zoo species as African-White-backed Vultures, African Pygmy Falcons, full-winged Secretary Birds, Northern Helmeted and Razor-billed Curassows, Northern Greater Prairie Chickens (Attwater's are held off exhibit), Congo Peafowl, Malay Peacock and Bulwer's Wattled Pheasants, Masked Lapwings, and Salvin's Pigeons (*Columba oenops*)—in the same aviary with Andean Condors.

Sea World of Texas

Sea World Of Texas is located some distance from Downtown San Antonio. Though the acreage is huge, the seventy or so species of birds are concentrated in several areas. A variety of waterfowl are kept with the colony of Lesser Flamingoes, one of the very few colonies to thus far reproduce in captivity. The rarely seen Argentine Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura vittata*) shares a walk-through aviary with Smew, Australian Bush Stone Curlew, Hammerkops, Scarlet Ibis, Kookaburras, and other species. The Penguin Encounter features large flocks of four species: Kings, Northern Gentoo, Rockhoppers, and Chinstraps. The *Alcid* exhibit in the same building features Common Murres and Common and Tufted Puffins, with a pair of Northern Eiders (*Somateria mollissima borealis*).

As Busch Corporation now owns the Sea World Parks, a number of parrots, including Golden Conures and Red-fronted Macaws, have been transferred from Busch gardens in Tampa. These are currently off-exhibit, but may be viewed by those taking the special behind-the-scenes tours offered at extra charge.

Houston Zoological Gardens

The Houston Zoological Gardens housed 183 *taxa* of birds on 1 January 1996, the second largest collection in Texas, and the tenth in the U.S.A. Although the famous bird house is currently closed for renovation, visitors will find a marvelous collection exhibited in out-door aviaries, with a special emphasis on softbills and gamebirds. Houston has bred an enormous number of Touracos over the years. Fourteen species and subspecies were present 31 December 1996, among which the Great Blue, the Grey Go-

Away Bird, the Western Grey Plain-tain-eater, the Fischer's, and the Eastern Violet-crested are rarely met with elsewhere.

Other spectacular Houston Zoo birds include Blue-Knobbed, Yellow-knobbed, Bare-faced, Wattled, and Northern Helmeted Curassows, Rothschild's Peacock Pheasants, Red-crowned Cranes, Green-naped Pheasant Pigeons, Molucca Imperial Pigeons (*Ducula perspicillata*), African Crowned Hornbills (first bred at Houston), breeding Javan Rhinoceros Hornbills, prolific Magpie Shrikes (*Corvinella melanoleuca*), breeding White-tailed, Plush-crested, and Northern Green Jays, recently obtained African White-Necked Ravens, and Red Birds of Paradise.

Moody Gardens

About an hour's drive from Houston is Galveston Island, the home of Moody Gardens. The 10 story glass pyramid houses a priceless plant collection and a marvelous array of imported butterflies, so the variety of birds at large in this structure were selected to harm neither. Among the 16 species of pigeons and doves are breeding Wonga Wongas, as well as Jambu, Superb, and Beautiful Fruit Pigeons, Pinon and Purple-tailed Imperial Pigeons, and the rarely seen Bare-eyed Pigeon (*Columba corensis*). There are also large flocks of seed-eating birds, including breeding European Goldfinches, African Golden Sparrows, Bronze-winged Mannikins, the rarely imported Grey-headed Munias (*Lonchura caniceps*) from New Guinea, and various neotropical species.

Gladys Porter Zoo

The Rio Grande Valley is a birder's paradise, full of species one otherwise sees south of the border. The Gladys Porter Zoo in Brownsville, with about 150 species of birds, almost entirely displayed out of doors is also very much worth a visit. Giant Coots from South America are a unique feature of an extensive collection of waterbirds, which also includes Southern Spur-winged Geese, African Black Ducks, very old Greater Adjutant and European Black Storks, Wattled

Cranes, and a long-time captive Reddish Egret.

Among other interesting species are Malay Argus Pheasants, Peruvian Thick-knees, Mauritius Pink Pigeons, Jendaya Conures, both species of Ground Hornbills, and White-cheeked Bulbuls.

Texas Zoo

To the North, but also in prime birding habitat, is the city of Victoria. True to its name, the Texas Zoo keeps only state natives. Among the roughly 40 species of birds can be seen American Wood Storks, a White-tailed Hawk (*Buteo albicaudatus*), Broad-winged Hawks, and Purple Gallinules.

Ellen Trout Zoo

Another East Texas collection is the Ellen Trout Zoo, in Lufkin, with a growing series of birds, presently at about 60 species. Famous for breeding West African Crowned Cranes, this zoo also displays a nice collection of waterfowl and parrots (including a Tucuman Amazon, Hyacinth Macaws, and Leadbeater's Cockatoos).

Among recent additions to the collection are Malay Crestless Fire-backed Pheasants and Fairy Bluebirds.

Waco Zoo

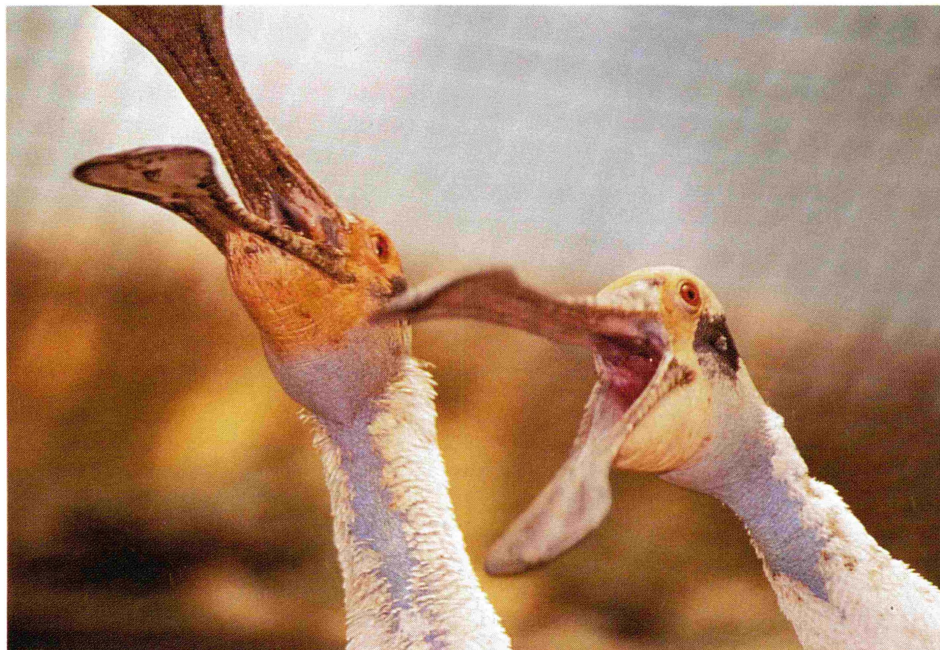
Waco, on the road between San Antonio and Dallas, relocated its zoo several years ago, so the bird collection, concentrating on African species, is still small. However, the collection is distinguished by a pair of African Open-billed Storks, hatched at the San Diego Wild Animal Park.

Dallas Zoo

Also concentrating on African species, but in a much bigger way, is the Dallas Zoo, with around 150 species of birds. The world first breeding of the Saddle-billed Stork was preceded by first U.S. breedings of Goliath Herons and Kori Bustards. Other African birds (in the "Wilds of Africa" as well as the older section of the grounds) include breeding Lapet-faced Vultures and African Green Pigeons (*Treron calva*), Bateleur Eagles, Collared Sunbirds, and an extensive group of Estrildid finches, including breeding Orange-cheeked Waxbills,



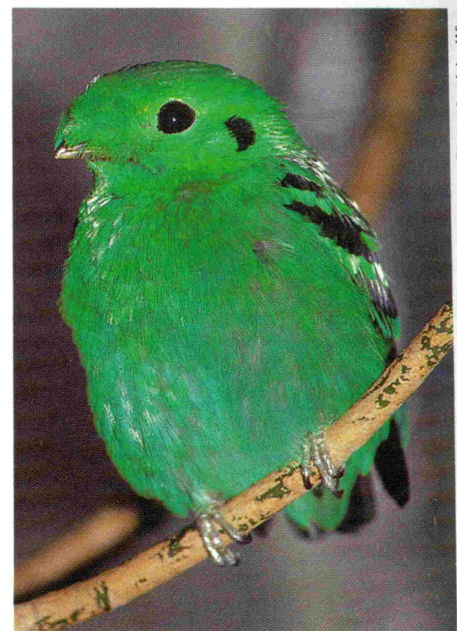
Dallas Zoo includes a pair of Javan Long-crested Jays (*Platylophus g. galericulatus*) among its extensive collection of softbills. This species can otherwise be seen in the U.S. only at the National Zoo, San Diego Zoo, and the San Diego Wild Animal Park.



Since 1967, more than 300 Roseate Spoonbills have been hatched at the Fort Worth Zoo, which maintains the largest captive colony. Offspring have been sent to zoos all over the U.S., as well as the Jurong Bird Park in Singapore.



Fort Worth Zoo's "Raptor Canyon" offers the unique opportunity of standing directly beneath this pair of Harpy Eagles. The female, on the branch, arrived at the zoo in 1955.



Photos by John Wise

A male Lesser Green Broadbill (*Calyptomena viridis*) in the Dallas Zoo's beautiful Bird and Reptile Building.

Blue-capped Cordon Bleus, White-headed Buffalo Weavers and Red Bishops. The Cordons have been especially prolific.

Among the many other species can be seen Ornate Hawk Eagles, a Harpy Eagle, Wompoo Pigeons, Swainson's Lorkieets, the only Rufous Hornbill in a U.S. Zoo, Lesser Green Broadbills, and Long-crested Jays.

Dallas World Aquarium

The privately owned Dallas World Aquarium in Downtown Dallas' Historic West End will open "Secrets of the Orinoco," an enormous conservatory, in August, 1997. The bird collection is presently in formation, but species already acquired include a unique assemblage of *Ramphastids* — a dozen Collared Aracaris, several pairs of Keel-billed Toucans, as well as Swainson's, Red-billed and Toco Toucans. Other species to be obtained will be ibises and caciques.

The World Aquarium opened an outdoor exhibit for South African Black-footed Penguins, resplendent with huge rare aloes, in 1996.

Fort Worth Zoological Park

Asian and-North American species are the focus at the Fort Worth Zoological Park's bird collection, currently numbering around 130 species. While efforts to breed Long-tailed Broadbills, Yellow-bellied Laughing Thrushes and Green Avadavats take



Photo by John Wise

Christopher Brown, Fort Worth Zoo's Curator of Birds arranged for the importation of five pairs of Red-crowned Cranes from the Shenyang Zoo in China in 1994. One pair arrived at Fort Worth, the others going to American zoos and a private aviculturist, thus greatly improving the U.S. gene pool of the second most endangered crane (after the Whooping Crane).



Photo by Bill Johnston

Only a handful of U.S. Zoos exhibit the African Yellow-billed Stork (*Mycteria ibis*). One of the pair at Fort Worth Zoo was hatched at Miami Metrozoo, whose breeding colony was wiped out in the 1992 hurricane.

place behind scenes, public exhibits of rare Asian birds include a flock of Red-breasted Geese, the only Japanese Mountain Hawk Eagles outside of Japan (on loan from the Los Angeles Zoo), breeding Pairs of both Malay Crested and Crestless Fire-backed Pheasants, Rothschild's Peacock Pheasants, breeding Malay Argus Pheasants, prolific Demoiselles Cranes, Hooded Cranes, a specially imported pair of Red-crowned Cranes from the Shenyang Zoo in China, and Wrinkled Hornbills.

Fort Worth's masterplan calls for an extensive display of Texas animals. A centerpiece will be the zoo's famous research colony of Roseate Spoonbills—the largest in captivity at about 50 specimens, with offspring represented in collections around the world. Among other interesting species are a pair of Magellanic Flightless Steamer Ducks that recently produced the first duckling in a U.S. zoo in 20 years. Bronze-winged Ducks, Smew, a Pair of Harpy eagles (the female at Fort worth since 1954), Wattled Cranes, Jamaican Crested Quail Doves, and breeding Collie's Magpie Jays.

At present, the birds have been removed from the World of Primates pending renovations, but a new exhibit for Black-footed Penguins in the 43-year-old James R. Record Aquarium has met with a great deal of enthusiasm from the public.

Caldwell Zoo

The Caldwell Zoo in Tyler, about 100 miles east of Dallas, has gained much attention during the last 15 years for its almost total renovation, with an emphasis on "immersion" exhibits where one is surrounded by animals from a given habitat which are actually in a variety of enclosures but appear to be kept together. These displays focus on Texas, South America and Africa.

Of its more than 80 species of birds, waterfowl are the most represented. Some of the ducks, such as the North American Redheads, Cinnamon Teal, Hooded Mergansers, Rosey-billed Pochards, and White-faced Whistling Ducks, are exhibited in impressively large flocks.

Other species at Tyler include Chilean Flamingoes in a prolific flock, Crested Seriemas, Hartlaub's Touracos and breeding Jendaya Conures, Hyacinth Macaws, and Red-billed Hornbills.

Abilene Zoo

As one heads west from the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex, the Abilene Zoo may be encountered. It has been recently redesigned to compare and contrast the ecology of Africa and Texas, and its 60 or so bird species come from these two areas. This zoo was one of the first to breed Secretary Birds and Northern Ground Hornbills, and a pair of Bateleurs are also to be seen out-of-doors. Inside a building, also housing fishes, reptiles and small mammals, there is a walk-through aviary featuring Emerald-spotted Doves (*Turtur chalcopsilos*) and Fort Worth Zoo-bred Southern Gold-breasted Waxbills, among other species. An interesting Texas native is the Red-billed Pigeon (*Columba flavivrostris*).

El Paso Zoo

Near the Texas-New Mexico state line, El Paso sits on the Mexican border. Long specializing in only New World species, it has recently added a new Asian area, expanding its bird collection to more than 70 species.

In the building devoted to South American animals, the central exhibit startlingly combines Golden Lion Tamarins, Acouchies (an agouti-like rodent), large fishes, Grey-winged Trumpeters, Green Aracaris, Red-rumped Caciques, Brazilian Cardinals and other South American Birds.

In their own exhibit in this building are Venezuelan Red Siskins, otherwise seen in U.S. zoos only at Dallas. Spotted Whistling Ducks, breeding Yellow-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus goiavier*), and Himalayan Whistling Thrushes are among the more interesting Asian birds. The newest addition is a display for North American Songbirds, among which Eastern Bluebirds and Red Crossbills stand out.

References

AMERICAN ZOO AND AQUARIUM ASSOCIATION (1996) *Zoological Parks and Aquariums in the Americas, 1996-97.*

