



*A wild Muscovy Duck at a feeder.*

## The Pointe-A-Pierre Wild Fowl Trust, Trinidad

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During a recent trip to the island of Trinidad I had the pleasure of spending the afternoon with Ms. Molly Gaskin and Karilyn Shephard of the renown Pointe-A-Pierre Wild Fowl Trust. For years AFA had a bumper sticker that read "Aviculture is Conservation Too." If there was ever an example of aviculture as conservation it is the Wild Fowl Trust.

The Trust was originally founded in 1966 by Richard Deane, a hunter who believed in the need for captive breeding and release of waterfowl as a management tool. From the beginning the Trust has had a strong link to the Wild Fowl Trust at Slimbridge. In fact the logo was designed by Sir Peter Scott of Slimbridge.

After Deane's retiring the Trust was reactivated by Ms. Molly R. Gaskin, an untiring aviculturist and outspoken conservationist. The Trust currently encompasses two lakes and about 25 hectares of land within a major petrochemical complex, PETROTRIN.

I arrived at the Trust with ornithologist Floyd Hayes and Michael Gartside, treasurer for the Center for the Study of Tropical Birds, Inc. Upon our arrival we were immediately impressed with the flowering trees and shrubs that adorned the grounds. Walking down the driveway we soon reached the "Learning and Interpretation Centre." My eye immediately went to the bird feeder in the front of the Centre. Perched upon a tree near the feeder was a brilliant Yellow Oriole, a Blue-

gray Tanager, a Palm Tanager, and a Kiskadee Flycatcher. Within a minute my eye went to the feeder itself as a wild Muscovy Duck landed upon it.

A brief tour of the facility included their wild Muscovy breeding pens, a Scarlet Ibis aviary, and a large pond with numerous Black-bellied Whistling Ducks. Behind the scene were several pairs of Blue and Gold Macaws set up for breeding and a rehab Yellow-headed Caracara.

Breeding successes at the Trust include:

- Black-bellied Whistling Ducks 574 released (1967-1992)
- White-faced Whistling Ducks 40 released (1988) 16 (1993)
- Fulvous Whistling Ducks 208 released (1985-1992)
- White-cheeked Pintail 44 released (1993) 47 (1994)
- Wild Muscovy Ducks 160 released (1985-1992) 82 (1993) 83 (1994)
- Scarlet Ibis 03(1991)06(1992) 11 (1993) 13(1994)

Their small resident flock of 15 Blue and Gold Macaws started breeding in 1993. Some interest exists in a release program for the macaws in the vicinity of Nariva Swamp where they were believed to occur naturally until the 1970s. Some consideration has also been made to translocating birds from the mainland. Before such an effort would have any lasting impact, a strategy to limit the illegal taking of birds from their nests would have to be implemented. Strolling around the

facilities grounds I twice encountered Red-capped Cardinals. While considered rare in Trinidad they are frequent inhabitants to the Trust lands.

The Trust's efforts do not stop with the breeding and release of birds. On the conservation front they have been involved with the Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Network initiating regular turtle patrols involving young people. Additional activities supported over the years includes the passage of CITES (1984), Scarlet Ibis protection (1986/87), a 2-year hunting ban (1987) and the protection of the Mucurapo wetland (1990). The Trust's recent battle has been to lead the effort to protect Nariva Swamp from illegal rice-farming.

The level of accomplishments can often be measured by the quality of the sponsors. In this regard the Trust stands ahead of the pack. Grants have been received from some notable institutions as the Organization of American States, the Interamerican Development Bank, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Environmental education at the Trust included the production of a variety of materials including:

- Energy flow of the Mangroves...a full-color poster
- Wonders of the wetlands-a teacher's pack
- Sea turtles and their habitats- a 60 page booklet for teachers

On an annual basis 16,500 people visit the Trust with 13,398 being school children. This fact, in addition to the 1998 awarding of Ms. Molly Gaskin as one of "Twenty-five Women Leaders in Action" given by the United Nations Environment Program, shows the impact of and intensity with which the Trust supports the education and environmental protection fields.

Captive breeding and release, along with public education, has made the Point-a-Pierre Wild Fowl Trust a shining example of how "Aviculture is Conservation Too." Perhaps its time to reprint those bumper stickers!!

### Source

Factual material for this paper was taken from: "Resource conservation and planning; the model of the Pointe-a-Pierre Wild Fowl Trust." International Conference on environmental technology and management. Molly Gaskin and Karilyn Shephard (authors). 20-24 March 1995.

