

The Zoos of Texas – 2003

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[Editor's Note: We bird lovers have always been delighted with zoos because they usually contain a large and beautiful assortment of birds – quite often birds we seldom see in private aviculture. With this in mind, Josef Lindholm has kindly put together an overview of the zoos of Texas. Hopefully, those of you who are driving to the convention will take time to visit the zoos along your way. Due to space constraints, it may take several issues to include all the zoos. SLD]

At the beginning of March, 2003, ISIS (The International Species Inventory System) listed 647 species and subspecies of birds held by participating Texas animal collections.

Ninety-six were psittacines, 92 were ducks, geese, and swans, 37 were pigeons and doves, and 148 were passerines. As several interesting places don't submit their statistics to ISIS, the number of bird taxa held by public exhibits in Texas is actually somewhat higher. On the occasion of the scheduling of the 2003 AFA Convention in San Antonio, here follows the first installment of a State-wide review of public bird exhibits.

Abilene Zoological Gardens

Abilene is situated on the main road between El Paso and the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. Its zoo concentrates on African and North American animals, though its master plan calls for an eventual world-wide focus, along with a significant increase in acreage. Presently, the bird collection stands at roughly fifty species, primarily African.

Abilene was among the first places to breed Abyssinian Ground Hornbills and Secretary Birds, and

Trumpeter Hornbills and Green Wood Hoopoes have also been prolific. A walk-through aviary shares a fascinating building with aquaria and small mammal and reptile displays, and is home to several avicultural rarities. According to ISIS, the Gray-backed Sparrow Lark (*Eremopterix verticalis*), at Abilene more than a decade, is the only one exhibited anywhere. The only other institution exhibiting Orange-winged Pytalias (*Pytilia afra*) is Honolulu Zoo, while Woodland Kingfishers can otherwise be seen only at San Antonio, San Diego Zoo, and Hagenbeck's Tierpark in Hamburg, and Arrow-marked Babblers at San Diego Zoo and the Durban Zoo in South Africa. While a growing number of zoos exhibit Blue-throated Carmine Bee-eaters, it happens the one in this aviary is the only Bee-eater in Texas, as of early 2003.

Off exhibit, Abilene is a participant in the vitally important Attwater's Prairie-Chicken project, holding eight males and seven females as of mid-March, 2003, and hatching five in the previous six months.

Dallas Zoo

For more than ten years, this venerable collection (with about 140 species of birds) has sort of been two zoos in one. Wilds of Africa is connected to Zoo North by a tunnel, and both have impressive bird exhibits, backed up by extensive off-exhibit breeding facilities. While the popular monorail in Wilds emphasizes African Antelope, a mixed flock of more than 150 White-faced and Fulvous Whistling Ducks (vocalizing each time a train passes) is a breath-taking sight.

Among the array of African birds are White-breasted Cormorants, breeding groups of Kori and Red-crested Bustards, a Goliath Heron, breeding Saddle-billed and Marabou Storks, breeding Eared and Hooded Vultures, Erckel's Francolins, the only East African Green Pigeons (*Treron calva*) in the U.S., more than thirty Fischer's Lovebirds, breeding African Ring-necked parakeets, a large and prolific flock of speckled Mousebirds, a Gray-headed Kingfisher, Bearded Barbets, and a Black-winged Bishop.

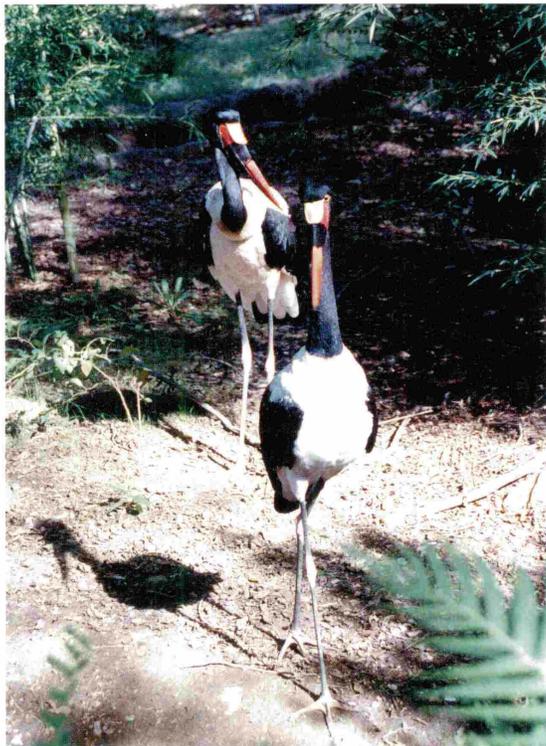
In Zoo North one may admire Ocellated Turkeys, Beautiful, Black-naped and Wompoo Fruit Pigeons, Blue-crowned Hanging Parrots, Blue-crowned Motmots, Swainson's Toucans, Lesser Green Broadbills, Fairy Bluebirds, Bearded Reedlings, a Long-crested Jay, and a Collared Sunbird, in Dallas more than a decade and the sire of the first of its species hatched in North America.

Frank Buck Zoo

The only birds I remember from 1970s and '80s visits to this little municipal zoo in Gainesville, a few miles south of the Oklahoma border, were Ostriches, Mute Swans, and Golden Pheasants. Quite recently, as part of an overall redesign, a bird collection has begun to take form. Among the more interesting species as of March, 2003, are Bolivian Military Macaws, Blue-crowned Conures, East African Crowned and Florida Sandhill Cranes, and Chilean Flamingos.

Caldwell Zoo

Out in the direction of the Louisiana border, Tyler is known as the "Rose Capitol of the World." This city has also long been famous for its innovative, privately administered, non-profit zoo. Texas, South America, and Africa and Madagascar are emphasized. The bird collection numbers about 90 species. A special feature of the Texas exhibit has long been large numbers of various species of ducks. The sight of multiple male Redheads,



Saddle-billed Storks at the Dallas Zoo where the first captive breeding took place in 1997.

Shovelers, Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Green-winged, Cinnamon and Blue-winged Teal, and Hooded Mergansers, against a background of White-tailed Deer and Bison, can be breath-taking. Various species hatch each year. A couple of Mississippi Kites are another imposing native exhibit. Large number of Rosey-billed Pochards, Chiloe Wigeon and Sharp-winged Teal likewise distinguish the South American exhibits, which also include Red-legged Cariamias, Salvin's Pigeons,



Nearly 20 Hooded Mergansers live near the entrance to the Abilene Zoo. This is a popular species in Texas collections. Several zoos have bred some recently.

Hyacinth Macaws, Golden, Jendaya, and Sun Conures, and one of the more successful breeding flocks of Chilean Flamingos. The African area includes outdoor exhibits for the only South African Black Ducks in Texas, Trumpeter and Red-billed Hornbills, prolific East African Crowned Cranes, and Hammerkops, as well as a beautiful building featuring Nile Crocodiles, Rock Pythons, Lake Malawi Cichlids, Leopard Tortoises, along with free-flying African Gray Parrots, Hartlaub's touracos, Golden-breasted (or Royal) Starlings, and breeding Taveta Weavers. Through glass walls, beyond this panorama of birds and fishes, one can admire lions, giraffes and various antelope.

The Caldwell Zoo is the most recent participant in the Attwater's Prairie Chicken project, and

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as of March, 2003, held twelve birds off-exhibit, with one hatched in the previous six months. ❖

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