

Zoos of Texas

Josef Lindholm III
Keeper, Birds and Small Mammals,
Cameron Park Zoo, Waco

[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.

Frank J. Smith Bird Sanctuary

The city of Borger sits out on the Panhandle, up in the northwestern corner of Texas. When the circumstances of 9/11 dictated a cross country drive from California back to Waco, a slight detour was planned, as I had heard

much of the city park aviary. As it happened, about the first thing we saw at the Frank J. Smith Bird Sanctuary was Frank J. Smith. That Saturday morning Frank was running grocery errands when he noticed, driving past the park, that budgies were where they didn't belong. Natalie and I showed up in time to help put them back in their compartment. The Sanctuary consists of one big complex of aviaries (built around a pool), with several smaller ones nearby. Along with Budgies, Cockatiels, Zebra Finches, Canaries, Barbary Doves, Domestic Pigeons, and Ornamental Poultry, there are Golden and Amherst's Pheasants, Black Swans, and Bobwhites. The most recent addition is an exhibit for a Scarlet Macaw and Yellow-naped and Yellow-headed Amazons, some of which were procured through arrangements of the Cameron Park Zoo.

Frank J. Smith, in insurance for more than fifty years, visited zoos around the world and always felt a need for a public collection in his home city. He was finally able to realize his dream around ten years ago. Frank died last year, and his old friend, Clarence Dixon, the Sanctuary's supervisor (and builder of the aviaries) suffered a severe injury around the same time. Thus things are in somewhat of a holding pattern at present. Clarence hopes to soon return to his work, and it will be

interesting to see how this municipal aviary develops over the future.

El Paso Zoo

In the Southwestern corner of Texas, El Paso faces the Mexican City of Juarez. For years this compact zoo has specialized in the fauna of North and South America, and, more recently, Asia. An unusual series of indoor exhibits, including aquaria and a nocturnal house, are interspersed with attractive outdoor displays. Outstanding among its collection of more than eighty species of birds are Spotted Whistling Ducks, Cotton Teal, Hooded Cranes, Rhinoceros Hornbills, Flame-tufted Barbets, Bali Mynahs, Jacarini Finches, Red-rumped Cassiques, and breeding Clay-colored Robins. The collection of native species is unusually rich and includes a Sanderling and Dunlin, American Avocets, breeding Mourning Doves, Eastern Bluebirds, a Brown Thrasher, Cedar Waxwings, Painted Buntings, and an Eastern Meadow Lark.

Fort Worth Zoological Park

At around 120 species, the bird collection at Fort Worth is somewhat smaller than it was in the mid 1990's, but concentrates on conservation-significant species and avicultural rarities. A Pied-billed Grebe has recently passed its fourth year at Fort Worth, a significant

longevity for any grebe. This is also the only grebe ISIS lists for any Western Hemisphere collection. It is exhibited in one of a series of pools which otherwise showcase an unusually fine collection of waterfowl, as well as flocks of Caribbean, Chilean, and Lesser Flamingos. Last year the zoo joined the still small number of places that have bred Lesser Flamingos. The colony was isolated in an off-exhibit facility and three males were sent to Cameron Park Zoo, which, in turn, sent its only two females to Fort Worth, resulting in a group of twelve males and seven females. A single chick was raised and hand-reared. The bird staff had already had considerable experience hand-raising flamingos, as a collection of Caribbean Flamingo eggs arrived from the famed Hialeah Racetrack last year as well. Included among the rich collection of ducks, geese, and swans are Lesser White-fronted and Red-breasted Geese, Southern Spur-winged Geese, Bronze-winged Ducks, Indian Spotbills, and a Magellanic Flightless Steamer. At Fort Worth since 1995, this is the only Steamer on public exhibit in North America. Long-established breeding programs continue for Black-necked Swans, North American Ruddy Ducks, and Hooded Mergansers.

The pheasant collection includes breeding pairs of Malay Argus Pheasants, Rothschild's Peacock Pheasants, and Malay Crestless and Malay Crested Firebacks. Scaled Quail and Brush Turkeys have also hatched recently. A pair of Red-crowned Cranes directly imported from the Shenyang Zoo in Manchuria in 1994 produced its first chick in May, 2003, following just one attempt at artificial insemination. Among other interesting species are a Marsh Hawk and an Aplomado Falcon (featured in the new "Texas Wild" area), pairs of Harpy and African Crowned Eagles, a pair of African Pygmy Falcons, a breeding pair of Spectacled Owls, six Thick-billed Parrots, breeding Sulawesi Ground Doves, a pair of Wrinkled Hornbills that have produced chicks since 1998, breeding Northern Green Jays, and a flock of Sulawesi

Grosbeak Starlings. After an absence of several years, birds are again represented in the vast space of the World of Primates building – A Great Hornbill which has so far proved impossible to pair makes an impressive spectacle there.

Fossil Rim Wildlife Center

There were still around 450 Attwater's Prairie Chickens in the wild in 1992, the year the Fossil Rim breeding program was established. Today, the population persists at 50, despite the fact roughly 90 captive-bred birds are released each year. Sixty percent of the releases have come from Fossil Rim. As of March, 2003, ISIS recorded 53 males, 52 females, and 86 unsexed birds, the largest single group of the only living subtropical grouse. Ninety hatched in the previous six months. Tours of this and other off-exhibit breeding facilities may be specially arranged for a separate fee. Most visitors to this park in Glen Rose, however, come to drive through huge enclosures and view a grand array of hoofed animals. At the centrally located visitor's center, are several parrot species, including Bare-eyed Cockatoos (now very scarce as public exhibits in the U.S.).

Dallas World Aquarium

Celebrating its tenth anniversary in 2003, the privately-owned Dallas World Aquarium did not begin to maintain softbills until 1995, and now has one of the most remarkable collections in the world. Its collection of toucans, aracaris, and toucanets numbers 24 species and subspecies, and eight have been bred so far: Green, Black-necked, Chestnut-eared, Northern Collared, and Ecuadorian Collared Aracaris, Emerald and Saffron Toucanets, and Toco Toucans. While Northern Collared Aracaris breed in the enormous rainforest exhibit, the others hatched in what are likely the most elaborate off-exhibit softbill facilities in any zoo. Along with groups of such rare toucans as Ivory-billed and Many-banded Aracaris, and Citron-throated Toucans (exported through the special cooperation of the Venezuelan Government),

off-exhibit birds include a variety of tanagers and honeycreepers, a recently-imported group of Jamaican Streamer-tailed Hummingbirds, fifteen Spangled Cotingas, and a unique flock of one dozen Eastern Cocks of the Rock in a specially designed roof-top aviary, intended to encourage group lekking.

On exhibit in the great rainforest building, at large above Giant Otters, West Indian Manatees, Emperor Tamarins, schools of Arapaimas and Peacock Bass, and a breeding pair of Orinoco Crocodiles, are Keel-billed, Swainson's and Red-billed Toucans, San Blas, Northern Green, Plush-capped and (by permission of the Brazilian Government) Curl-crested Jays, Moriche Orioles, Pompadour Cotingas, Green and breeding Crested Oropendolas, Blue-crowned Motmots, Northern Helmeted Curassows, Buff-necked Ibises, and breeding American Purple Gallinules, and many others. Along the path are individual exhibits for a unique breeding colony of Red Howler Monkeys, and the only Three-toed Sloths in North America, as well as the only Grove-billed Toucanet outside of South America, Bare-throated Bellbirds, Guyana Toucanets, Hawk-headed Parrots, and other birds. In the African courtyard, a noisy group of Black-footed Penguins and an exhibit for Rock Hyrax, Yellow-billed Hornbills, and breeding Vulturine Guineafowl are complimented by a collection of rare aloes.

Mundo Maya, a richly complex indoor exhibit celebrating Meso-America, is scheduled for a Fall, 2003 opening. Birds already held for this exhibit (which will also feature a shark tunnel) include breeding Ocellated Turkeys, Caribbean Flamingos, Jabiru Storks, Guinea Crested Eagles, Ornate Hawk Eagles, and the afore mentioned tanagers and hummingbirds. At the same time, exhibits for Australian Fairy Penguins, Bali Mynahs, and Palm Cockatoos will be unveiled, adding further dimensions to this remarkable collection surrounded by downtown skyscrapers. ❖