

Tampa Triumvirate

(Three Bird Exhibits)

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Before the 1980s, bird exhibits in Tampa meant Busch Gardens. Period. In the '80s, the Lowry Park Zoo underwent a conversion from embarrassment to showplace. And in 1995, the Florida Aquarium opened to great fanfare.

Busch Gardens

The evolution of Busch Gardens has taken it from a collection of birds that opened, free to visitors, in 1959, to an enormous and complex theme park, one of a series of attractions across the country managed by Busch Entertainment Corporation, and its bird exhibits are now details in an experience of sensory overload. Throughout this time, serious aviculture has been practiced on a major scale and continues to be. Amidst the terrifying rollercoasters, continuous shows, scheduled appearances by Jack Hanna, and a major series of mammals and reptiles, an important bird collection (of nearly 170 species and subspecies) continues to impress (though the brewery around which this all started closed several years ago).

The nucleus of the collection was a fantastic

shipment of Australian parrots obtained by August Busch, Jr. just before Australia ended private importations. Busch Gardens was quickly recognized as one of the world's major psittacine collections,

and its breeding record soon drew attention. The International Zoo Yearbook records 105 species and subspecies of parrots hatched over the period from 1959 through 1994. The only U.S. collection to exceed

this was the San Diego Zoo, which hatched 125 taxa during the same time. The next best records for U.S. collections open to the public were Los Angeles with 38 taxa hatched, and San Antonio with 31 (Lindholm, 1999).

What is truly astounding about Busch Garden's breeding records is the enormous number of individuals produced. Among psittacines fully reared from 1963 through 1994 were 564 Sun Conures, 374 Blue-and-Gold Macaws, 348 Jendaya Conures, 173 Scarlet Macaws, 153 Golden or Queen of Bavaria Conures, 135 Golden-capped Conures (*Aratinga auricapilla*), 107 Swainson's Lorikeets, 95 Hahn's Macaws, 87 Scaly-breasted Lorikeets, 83 Senegal Parrots, 82 Chestnut-fronted Macaws, 79 Forsten's Lorikeets, 76 Mainland Moustached Parakeets, 57 Edward's Lorikeets, 40 Mitred Conures, 40 Orange-winged Amazons, 39 Illiger's Macaws, 37 Green-winged



African White-backed Vultures are one of the rarer Old World vultures in American Zoos. This one lives in Busch Gardens' startling "Edge of Africa."

Photo by Natalie Mashburn Lindholm



The Roseate Spoonbills at the Florida Aquarium were hatched at the Fort Worth Zoo.

Macaws, 32 Blue-fronted Amazons, 23 Moluccan Cockatoos, 22 Green-thighed Caiques, and 14 Rüppel's Parrots (Lindholm, 1999).

Mike Wells, Curator of Birds, told me this amazing production was motivated in part to saturate private aviculture with captive-bred birds, thus reducing demand for imported ones. Many of these birds were acquired expressly as breeders by aviculturists. Following passage of the 1992 Wild Bird Conservation Act, which ended commercial importation of wild-caught psittacines in 1993, the volume of parrot propagation at Busch Gardens has been greatly reduced, and most off-exhibit breeding facilities have been closed. However, significant parrot breeding continues: For instance, in the six months preceding 28 April, 2002, ISIS indicates nine Queen of Bavaria Conures hatched at Tampa, and 31 were in the collection on that date.

Originally the enormous parrot collection was displayed in a plethora of smallish cages scattered around the area now know as the Bird Gardens. Most of these have long since been taken down. There are still more than 50 species of psittacines at Busch Gardens. In the cages that remain, one might find Jendaya Conures,

Derbyan Parakeets, Orange-winged Amazons, and, of course, Queen of Bavaria Conures. An especially large series of cages, designated "Parrots of the Pacific," has been replaced by "Lory Landing," where guests feed a nicely diverse collection of lorries and lorikeets sharing an unusually large aviary with such birds as Golden-

crested Mynahs, Violet Plantain-eaters, and Red-wattled Lapwings. Associated with this exhibit are roomy aviaries for such birds as Red-tailed Black Cockatoos, Thick-billed Parrots, and Hyacinth and Military Macaws.

Elsewhere is a recently opened walk-through aviary for softbills and aquatics, including Purple-crested Touracos, Purple-headed Glossy Starlings, American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, Hammerkops, and the rarely exhibited Australian Shoveller (*Anas r. rhynchotis*). Nearby are exhibits for a variety of other waterfowl, and, of course one of the most prolific flocks of Caribbean Flamingoes ever established. In the 1960s alone more than 130 were hatched, and robust reproduction continues today. Incidentally, AFA has awarded Busch Gardens three Avy Awards for sustained propagation: Caribbean Flamingoes, Golden Conures, and macaws in general (Snow, 1992).

More birds will be found in Busch Garden's "Seringeti Plain" and the remarkable new "Edge of Africa" where, along with a wonderful fish-



Photos by Natalie Washburn Lindholm

One of the two Whooping Cranes at The Lowry Park Zoo. The only other places which presently exhibit any are the Crane Foundation, in Baraboo, Wisconsin, the Audubon Zoo in New Orleans, the San Antonio Zoo, and the Calgary Zoo.

filled exhibit for hippos and a colony of now rarely-exhibited Guinea Baboons, is an open display for African vultures, with a gruesomely realistic "carcass" feeding station. In addition, fly-in American Wood Storks are everywhere on the "Seringeti." Throughout the park one may see feral Monk Parrots and Collared (not Barbary!) Doves (which colonized Florida from the Bahamas).

And yes, there is still a bird show, which remains charmingly traditional in comparison to many of the shows one sees elsewhere.

Lowry Park Zoological Garden

According to the August International Zoo Yearbook, the Lowry Park Zoo did not exist in the 1970s. For Tampa, Volume 12 of the IZY (published in 1972) lists only Busch Gardens – and the "New Age Assembly Ranch" (as the Rev. Ramon Noegel's collection was then titled). Actually, the zoo was started in 1957. However, suffice it to say the

American Zoo and Aquarium Association did not accredit it until 1990. By that time however, Lowry Park was already gaining attention for a remarkable bird collection. A half acre aviary complex was one of the first things built as part of a renovation that utterly transformed the zoo, commencing in the 1980s. This is in part because Lex Salisbury, first as General Curator and now President/CEO, is himself an aviculturist (somewhat unusual in the highest levels of zoo management nowadays). As early as 1989, the zoo achieved the first U.S. breeding of the Chestnut-capped Ground Thrush (*Zoothera interpres*) (Salisbury, 1991).

While now sharing the spotlight with a remarkable series of mammals, herps, and aquarium species, birds are still the most well represented part of the collection, with around 130 species. The aviary complex holds a rich collection including a true Blue-breasted Parrot

Finch (*Erythrura tricolor*), in the collection for several years now, breeding African Open-billed Storks, White Nutmeg Pigeons, and Crested Oropendolas, a Bronx Zoo-hatched Red Bird of Paradise, and the last Rufous Treepies and Pagodah Mynahs in U.S. zoos.

Among the many other species are Purple-tailed Imperial Pigeons, Black-naped Fruit Doves, White-throated Kingfishers, Blue-bellied Rollers, Great Hornbills, Red-crested Touracos, Golden-fronted Leafbirds, and Black-naped Orioles. A colony of Egyptian Fruit Bats shares the larger of the two walk-through aviaries in this section.

Elsewhere, the recently opened lory feeding aviary is unique for a large number of the predominantly green Weber's subspecies of the Rainbow Lorikeet, displayed with many of the more commonly seen inhabitants of such exhibits. Of course, the avian stars of the native

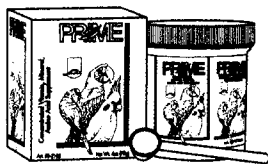
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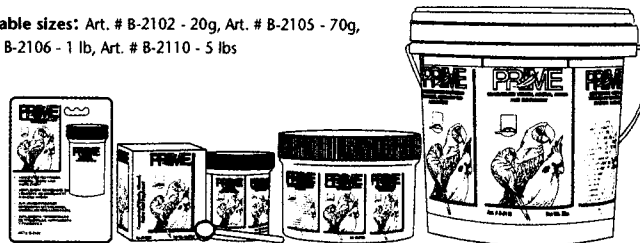


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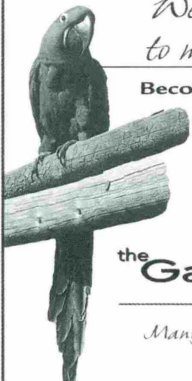
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A hammerkop in one of Busch Gardens' walkthrough aviaries.

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Florida displays are the pair of Whooping Cranes, but near the famous Manatee rehabilitation center, the only captive Sooty Tern shares its enclosure with a Royal Tern.

The Florida Aquarium

The trend in recent years has been to stretch the definition of "Aquarium" far beyond the traditional tank-lined halls. And so it is with the Florida Aquarium, a glittering jewel on Tampa Bay, which opened in 1995. The greater part of the aquarium is devoted to a series of habitat galleries tracing the progress of a drop of water from a freshwater spring to the Gulf of Mexico.

The Wetlands Gallery is enclosed under a lofty glass roof, and is full of tall trees. Above the remarkable series of fresh and brackish water exhibits are an attractive series of smaller herons and other waders, as well as Red-bellied Woodpeckers and (non-flighted) Great Horned Owls. Along with such rarities as Florida Sturgeon and

a rather startling exhibit of Nutria, Ruddy Ducks and Hooded Mergansers can be admired at delightfully close range. As one progresses through the wetlands towards the Bays and Beaches Gallery, American Avocets, Willets, Black-necked Stilts, and a rarely displayed American Oystercatcher may be seen, and finally, visitors arrive at a sunny beach sloping into a beautiful display of inter-tidal fishes, with an excellent opportunity to closely observe justly named Royal Terns.

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