

# A.F.A. Visits A Member's Aviaries



Top — White-headed Piping Guan  
Bottom — Bronzy Guan on nest



Mickey Ollson  
with Muntjac deer.  
Blue-neck  
Ostrich in background.



A highlight of any bird enthusiast's experience would certainly be a tour of the very impressive collection of Mickey Ollson's Rare Bird Farm in Phoenix, Arizona. His collection is not only impressive in terms of the variety of birds kept (over 1000 individuals of 140 different species), but also in their housing.

The original and main body of the collection is situated on five acres of ground, which is covered with spacious, planted flights, pens, and ponds. A new and larger project is under development on 40 acres of ground at another location. At this site very large pens covering nearly one half acre each are being constructed along with additional enclosed flights. In addition to bird flights, enclosures for mammals have been built, some of which are approximately one acre in size. Mammals so far in the breeding collection include Wallaroos, Llamas, Sitatunga swamp antelope, and Muntjac deer.

The original farm has been developed to maximum efficiency. Pens have been laid out in orderly fashion, thus providing easy access for maintenance. There are 150 aviaries at this location. The enclosed flights are eight to twelve feet high and vary in size from 14' to 16' wide and 20' to 28' long for breeding flights to 4' x 12' for holding pens for young birds.

Each breeding flight contains one pair of birds — in a few cases a trio. The

flights are well planted and shaded against the hot Arizona sun. Many of the flights contain a bushy Mulberry tree or a Mimosa tree, which provide a natural setting and perching area for the birds. Each winter the dirt floors are roto-tilled then planted with grass, which provides good forage and nesting sites for many species.

Mickey's aviaries are kept immaculately clean — no small feat given the sheer number of flights. To assist him in the upkeep, Mickey has a young zoology graduate living on the premises. Additional contributing factors to the cleanliness include the large area housing a relatively small number of birds, which minimizes the accumulation of debris.

Mickey maintains the largest U.S. collection of Cracids, i.e. Curassows, Guans, and Chacalacas and has the distinction of receiving First Breeding Awards for Salvin's Razor-billed Curassow, Lessor Razor-billed Curassow, Black Curassow, and the Spotted Chacalaca.

The Ollson collection does not end with the Cracids. He maintains thirty-five species of pheasants; twenty five species of ducks; fifteen species of geese; eight species of dove; four species of cranes — Stanley's, Demoiselles, East and West African Crowned; three species of frankolins; three species of spur fowl, including the rare Ceylon spur fowl; four species

*Rheas –  
rare white  
one on left.*



*Double Wattled Cassowary male,  
with eggs he is incubating in background.*



of swans – the Coscoroba, Black, Whooper, and Black-necked; three species of Tinamou; and all four Ratites – Ostriches, Emus, Rheas, and Cassowaries. A singular achievement in the last category was the breeding of the Double-wattled Cassowary, which Mickey considers the highlight of his experience.

Other birds in his collection include the Ocellated Turkey, Seriamas, Bustards, Peafowl and Crimson-wing Parrakeets – the only non-gamebird type at the farm. The Crimson-wings are housed one pair to a very large flight, well-planted. Both pair had young in the nest ready to fledge and both have reproduced successfully for several years.

All of the waterfowl (Mickey's favorite) are kept in pens rather than flights, since these birds have been pinioned. The pens vary in size from approximately 30 feet on a side to the large pens mentioned earlier. These pens are planted in grass and shrubs with a pond in the center providing a psychologically comfortable environment Mickey feels necessary to successful breeding.

On a corner of the farm is a small lake with an island in the center – all created with a bulldozer. The island is covered with Weeping Willows and shrubs interspersed with nesting boxes. A pair of Whooper Swans and a half dozen species of ducks inhabit his large area.

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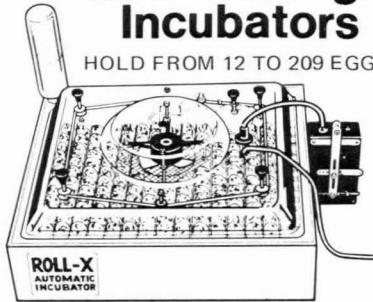
*Top –  
Black Currasows  
(Crax Alector)*

*Bottom –  
Greater Currasows  
(Crax Rubra)*



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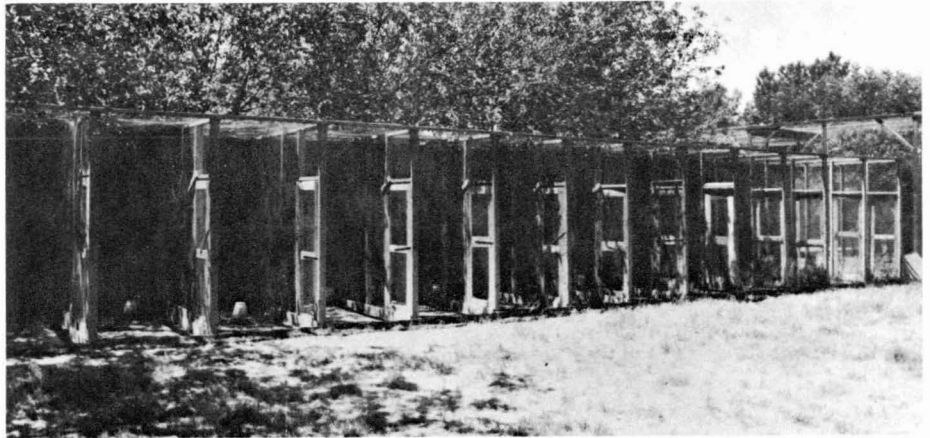
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*Flight Cages for young birds.*

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More impressive than the number of species kept at the Ollson Rare Bird Farm is the number bred each year. In fact, there are so many that he maintains a large number of flights solely for the housing of young birds during the Spring and Summer months.

Although many of the birds rear their own young, Mickey has augmented that activity by employing broody chickens as surrogate mothers. Several small buildings have been set up to house a combination of Bantys and normal sized chickens, which are used to incubate eggs ranging in size from Spur Fowl to Cranes. The size of the egg is naturally fitted to the size of chicken. The eggs are checked and turned twice daily. Should any eggs show signs of pipping, they are removed to the incubator for hatching to insure the hens continue brooding. Under such conditions hens will continue to brood for more than two months without interruption.

Once the eggs have hatched, the young birds are placed in brooding boxes which contain an adult hen chicken for warmth. Other features of the boxes include a feeder, waterer and light bulb. The young birds are kept in the brooders until old enough to be placed alone in a flight. An important ingredient of the diet at this stage is a copious supply of mealworms. In fact, Mickey uses approximately 100,000 every two weeks.

The omnivorous diet of the adult birds includes a mix of high protein poultry crumbles (75%) and milo or other grain (25%), hard boiled eggs (also fed to young hatchlings), fruit, and fresh water daily. Chopped horsemeat is fed to a number of species and lettuce is given to the waterfowl and ratites.

Mickey's breeding accomplishments are matched by his contribution to the success of a number of avicultural organizations. In addition to serving A.F.A. as the Arizona State Co-ordinator, he is

servng his eighth year on the Board of Directors of the American Game Bird Breeders Federation, for which he acted as Secretary and Treasurer for 6½ years. Mickey is currently involved in the formation of the Arizona Aviculture Society, which holds monthly meetings in Phoenix.

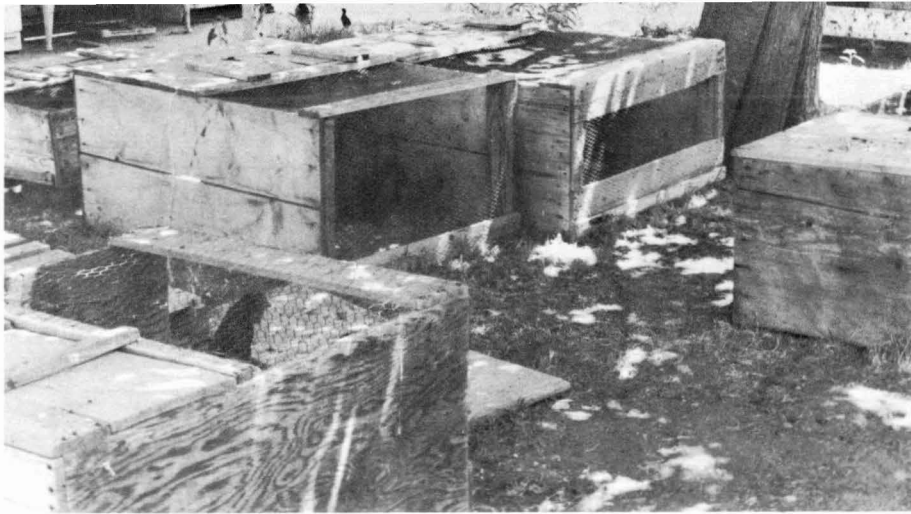
Mickey's friendly nature is readily apparent and his willingness to share his knowledge and experience with other aviculturists is refreshing. He has written articles for a number of publications including the *Watchbird* and enjoys speaking at conferences. Mickey will address the A.F.A. Convention in Long Beach on gamebirds.

Mickey is a native of Phoenix — born May 12, 1941. He attended local schools through high school and went on to Arizona State University at Tempe, graduating in 1963 with a degree in advertising and public relations. He went on to pursue an MBA obtaining a teaching credential along the way. Shortly after being credentialed he took a job as a teacher in the Alhambra School District of West Phoenix where he has worked the past twelve years.

Mickey's father and grandfather are responsible for kindling his interest in birds, via a collection of budgies and canaries they respectively maintained. Mickey and his folks lived next door to his grandfather's farm at that time, and at the age of six obtained his first birds — some domestic ducks (Black East Indian) from Bernard Roer. Mickey's father raised Indian Ringneck Pheasants for the table then and kept a pair of Golden Pheasants.

During the years from six to sixteen Mickey kept a variety of animals — rabbits, Guinea Pigs, Lovebirds, Cockatiels, fancy Bantams and Pigeons, and over sixty species of finches. Mickey's childhood dream was to build his own zoo drawing a picture of his project-to-be at age ten.

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Brooder boxes containing hen chickens for brooding young ducks, pheasants, etc.



Crested Tinamou



Ashy-head Geese

Emu in its spacious enclosure.




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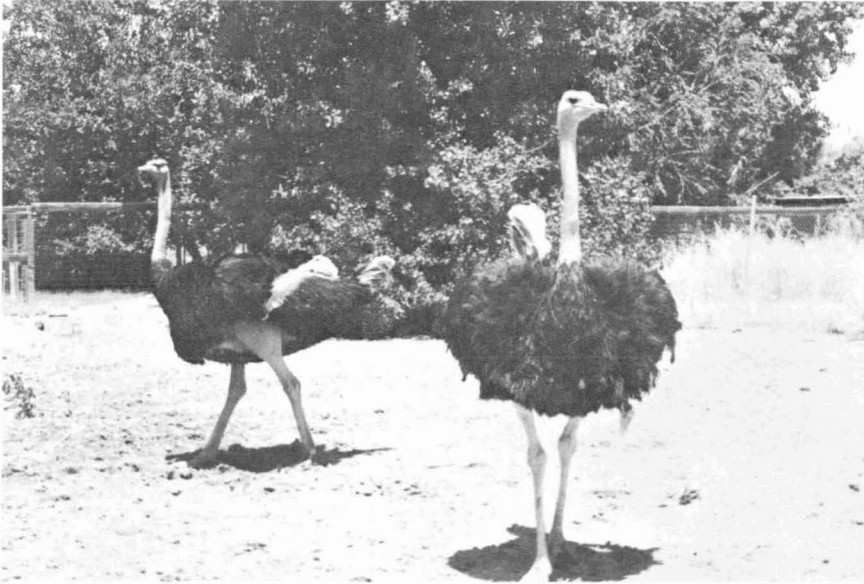
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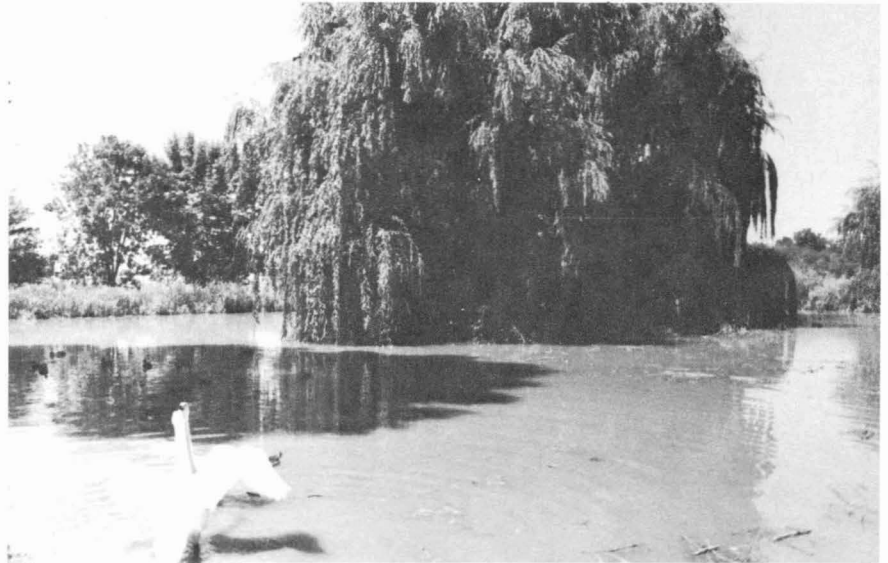
At seventeen the urge to own his own car was so strong Mickey sold his bird collection to raise money for the purchase. Two years later, though, he began to rebuild his collection. While attending college Mickey raised Guinea Pigs commercially to pay his way. The venture was so successful he was able to save enough money to purchase 2½ acres of land in Glendale, Arizona in 1965. This purchase was to form the nucleus of his rare bird farm, to which he later added an adjoining 2½ acres to reach the present size. Recently Mickey purchased the forty acre parcel now under development.

The by-word of the Ollson's Rare Bird Farm is "captive propagation" — not display. Mickey sums up his philosophy of aviculture in quoting William Beebe, former Curator of Birds at the Bronx Zoo, "The beauty and genius of a work of art may be reconceived, though its first material expression be destroyed; the harmony of a vanished melody may yet again inspire a composer, but when the last individual of a race of living things breathes no more, another heaven and another earth must pass before such a one may be again." Let this guide all of us ■

*Two male Ostriches*



*Stanley Cranes displaying at nest site.*



*Whooper Swans displaying on the Ollson's one acre lake. Willow shrouded island in background is the nesting site for many of the waterfowl.*

