

Little Grouse

On The Prairie

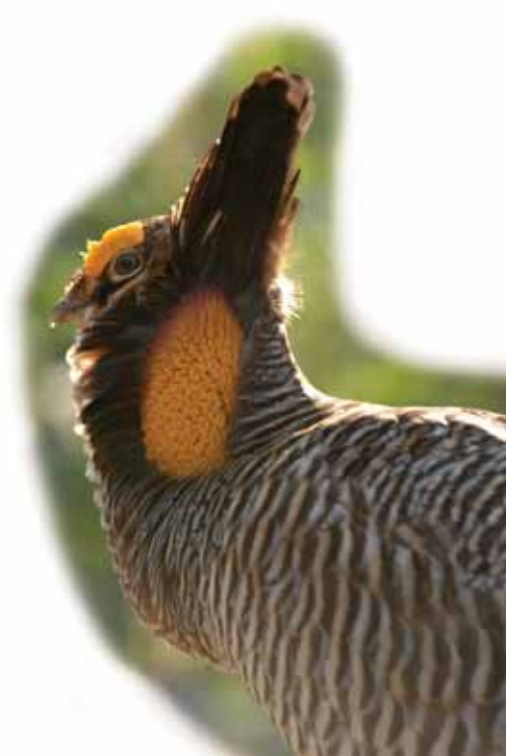
By Houston Zoo, Inc.

Photos by Stephanie Bledsoe/Houston Zoo, Inc.

The Houston Zoo is committed to the survival of the Attwater's prairie chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido attwateri*). This colorful bird is not really a chicken at all. It is actually a critically endangered grouse, named after the English naturalist and Texas conservationist, Henry Philemon Attwater. Small flocks survive on only two remnant coastal prairies in southeastern Texas, as well as, in a handful of captive colonies.

The Houston Zoo is deeply committed to the recovery of this bird and since 1994 and has been home to a captive breeding facility affectionately called "Boom Town." The staff derived this name from the characteristic "booming" sound made by male birds during courtship displays. The area comprised one and a half of the Zoo's 55 acres and provided suitable space for 10 pairs of breeding birds. The Zoo contributed numerous birds raised in Boom Town to an ongoing release program. However, new development within the Zoo and in the Texas Medical Center directly across the street exerted pressure on the colony and limited expansion options at the Zoo. An urban zoo location has its drawbacks as a breeding site for these prairie birds that live naturally in quiet, open expanses of grasslands.

To improve captive reproduction efforts, the Houston Zoo entered into a special agreement with NASA in the spring of 2005 to replace Boom Town with a much more spacious, state-of-the-art breeding facility on



the grounds of the Johnson Space Center. NASA's mission of protecting the home planet encompasses the preservation of species and the support of other agencies and institutions engaged in conservation work. The new site offers a larger total area, reduced disturbance to breeding birds, a more naturalistic habitat, and increased security.

Construction began a few months ago. Rainy weather delayed our progress somewhat, but construction of the first set of pens should be complete and ready to receive adult birds by this summer. Plans are to add a hatching-and-rearing facility next year and then two additional sections of pens, which could help triple or quadruple current chick production! ■



*Prairie Chicken
"Booming".*

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#15
Blue Headed Pionus



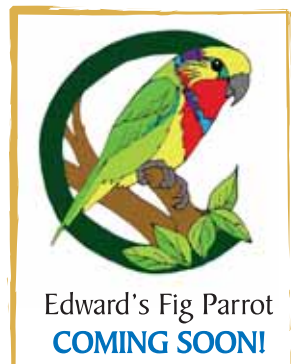
#16
Violaceous Touraco



#17
Lady Gouldian Finches



#18 Blue-crowned
Hanging Parrot



Edward's Fig Parrot
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