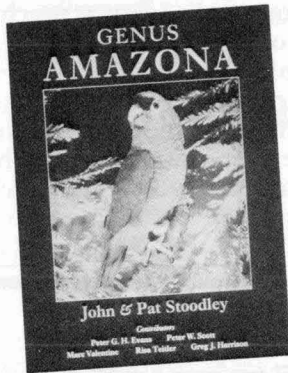


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## Rare Birds at the Rio Grande Zoo

by Sherry Rind

Redmond, Washington

Although small, the Rio Grande Zoo in Albuquerque, New Mexico breeds and maintains an important collection of rare birds under the stewardship of Curator Bill Aragon. It is one of the few places in the United States to which Australia will send its native birds. To achieve such an enviable status, the zoo had to petition the Australian government. Every three years, the birds are inspected by the local Australian consul.

The consul should find nothing to complain about. The psittacines are housed in spacious enclosures with tree branch perches, nest boxes and indoor shelters, sunny and shady areas, gravel to dig in, and plenty of room to fly. The Aussie collection includes Major Mitchell Cockatoos, Australian King Parrots, and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos.

The King Parrots laid eggs for the first time this year. Although usually cavity nesters, the female laid her eggs on the ground, as first-timers sometimes do. Zoo personnel pulled the first four eggs for incubating, leaving one for the hen to sit on. Out of a total of five eggs, four were fertile. Three unfortunately failed and one hatched. There are so few Kings known to be in the United States that even one increases the population by an important percentage.

Zoo residents for several years, the Major Mitchell's hatched three eggs in April and the babies were left to be raised by the parents, a reliable pair.

Another breeding success of an extremely rare species is that of the Mauritius Pink Pigeon. There are only about 30 of these birds left in the wild on the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean, former home of the Dodo. Deforestation and introduced macaques (primates) that eat eggs and destroy the nests are responsible for the near-extinction of the pigeon.

Pink Pigeons are about the size of park pigeons but colored in a soft pink instead of grey. They tend to be

inbred, due to the small size of their numbers and habitat. Like most creatures that evolved with relatively few enemies, they are not very bright. The humble park pigeon is canny and street-wise compared to the pink pigeon.

As part of a cooperative breeding program with the Jersey Wildlife Trust, the Bronx Zoo, San Diego Zoo, and others, the Rio Grande Zoo has maintained Pink Pigeons since the seventies. The original pair is still at the zoo and successfully raises its own babies in the zoo's indoor jungle habitat after having been offered various habitats and nesting spots.

Also living in the steamy, indoor jungle is a pair of Helmeted Curassows, large pheasant-like birds. The male sports a bright blue helmet and makes a deep, low-pitched booming sound. On their first day out of quarantine after their arrival from Albuquerque's sister city Guadalajara, Mexico, the pair laid an egg. The first clutch was pulled for incubation and the pair went on to lay a second. Only one chick survived that year but the pair is on another clutch, so the zoo is hopeful. ●

### Author Seeks Other Breeders' Input for Upcoming Book

Tony Silva is starting work on the companion volume to his *A Monograph of Endangered Parrots*. This new book, entitled *A Monograph of Macaws and Conures*, will be illustrated by Eric Peake. It will cover each species and subspecies of macaw and conure in field and aviary. The format will follow the first monograph, but will be much more expanded and will contain sonograms. Aviculturists are urged to send details of their breedings for inclusion. Of particular interest would be details on the growth rate of young, the number bred and year, diet fed, cage and nesting box sizes and any other information that may be considered important. Those persons with field experience are also urged to send information; of special interest would be reports of sightings, habitat type and locality.

The idea is to produce as complete a work as possible. Proper credit would, of course, be given.

Information should be sent to: Tony Silva, Curator of Birds, Loro Parque S.A., 38400 Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain. ●



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