

Vogelpark Walsrode Places Spix's Macaw in Breeding Program

by Steffen Patzwahl, Curator
Vogelpark, Walsrode, Germany

Editor's Note: The following article is an example of the cooperation between two facilities which benefits a very rare species in both captivity and in the wild. The placement of a single bird (as in this case, the Spix's Macaw) into a breeding situation in hopes of enhancing the species' long term survival must be commended. We congratulate Vogelpark Walsrode and its director, Mr. Wolf W. Brehm, for their foresight and unselfish work in this project.

Situated between Hannover and Hamburg, Walsrode is a small town in northern Germany. This town is also well known to bird lovers and ornithologists as having the world's largest birdpark.

About 900 species of birds and approximately 5,000 specimens live in Vogelpark Walsrode in aviaries, open pens, sheltered houses and walk-through aviaries. The park is open during summer (from March to November) and is visited by more than a million visitors per year.

It's about a three mile walk to tour the length of the park's unique landscaping, which includes a collection of more than 3,000 rhododendrons and azaleas. The park began as a private collection of waterfowl and

pheasants about 30 years ago and is still in private hands.

For breeding purposes and for scientific research, Walsrode also runs two breeding centers, one in the Caribbean for parrots and the other on Mallorca (an island in the Mediterranean) for subtropical and tropical birds.



The Vogelpark Walsrode is the world's largest birdpark. Located in the northern part of West Germany, it is noted for its beautiful grounds with thousands of flowers blooming in the springtime.



Photos by Muller-Verlag, Walsrode ©

With a unique spirit of cooperation, Vogelpark Walsrode in West Germany sent its lone Spix's Macaw to Brazil to hopefully breed successfully with another bird held there by an aviculturist. The Spix's Macaw is the world's rarest macaw.

Concerning conservation projects for endangered and threatened birds, the Brehm Fund for International Bird Conservation (initiated by Vogelpark's director, Mr. Wolf W. Brehm) has now been active for more than ten years. This fund concentrates on several endangered species of birds around the world, including the Nippon Ibis (*Nipponia nippon*) which is the fund's symbol, Eastern Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone sharpii*), Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), Eastern White Stork (*Ciconia boyciana*), Pink Pigeon (*Nesoenas mayeri*) and many more.

Every year, several groups of scientists come to Walsrode for intensive training projects. These include the keeping, breeding and handraising of many delicate and endangered birds. In addition to the several world's-first breedings done at Walsrode, there is also a large number of birds being successfully raised at the other breeding stations already mentioned. These breeding stations, however, are not open to the public.

Close cooperation exists between other governments and Walsrode concerning several important breeding programs.

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For the first time outside of China, the Eastern White Storks were bred in Walsrode. This program was achieved with the aid of the Russian government. The earlier mentioned Pink Pigeons were given to Walsrode by the government of Mauritius and can be seen by visitors to the park. The Black-necked Crane (*Grus nigricollis*) was bred at Walsrode in 1990, the first time in any western country. This crane is one of the 19 species of cranes now living in the Vogelpark.

A bird-cage museum inside the park shows an incredible variety of cages from four centuries. This unique collection is shown in an old, renovated farm house dating back to 1717.

For those who want to visit the park, it is best if you can stay for several days. It takes this long to really see everything in the world's largest birdpark.

A Spix's Macaw Returns Home (*Cyanopsitta spixii*)

One specimen of the world's rarest macaw, the Spix's Macaw, returned back home to Brazil on October 18, 1990 with the help of the German airline Lufthansa. This is, hopefully, the beginning of a successful breeding program set up to save this unique parrot from extinction.

The species was discovered in 1819 and has since remained a rarely encountered and poorly known bird. Very few sightings have been made of this blue macaw in the arid regions in the Brazilian states of Piaui, Goias, Bahia and Maranhao. After a search in the mid-1980s by the Swiss ornithologist Paul Roth, it turned out that these birds only survived in one region. This single site was exploited until 1988 by trappers offering the birds for sale all over the world. As of today, only one bird is known to be left in the wild in northeastern Brazil. Besides the trapping of these birds, it is also clear that other factors such as killer bees and the hunting of the bird for food by the local inhabitants had led to the rapid decline of the Spix's Macaw. It is also clear that this species was never very numerous in the wild in the first place.

The Situation in Captivity

About 20 Spix's Macaws are known to exist today but evidence has now come to light that there are certain other (illegal) specimens scattered all over the world. The main goal now should be to concentrate on those

birds, now owned by aviculturists who are willing to participate in a cooperative breeding program. In 1988, at the 2nd International Parrot Conference in Curitiba, Brazil, attempts were made with some success to get at least some of the holders of the Spix's Macaw to cooperate. The International Recovery Committee for *Cyanopsitta spixii* was created to work on the rescue of this species. The known birds have to be sexed, and so far this has not been completed. Attempts now have to begin to pair up all the single birds.

Vogelpark Walsrode, holding a single male bird estimated to be about 20 years of age, immediately started to contact the other involved parties in order to find a partner for this healthy macaw.

An aviculturist in Brazil was soon found who had a female bird in his collection. He also was looking for a mate for his bird, but had so far not been successful. IBAMA, the environmental agency of Brazil, was contacted by both parties for permits to bring these two single birds together.

There were several reasons to send the lone male (named "Pele" after the world famous Brazilian soccer player) to Brazil. The most obvious reason was that the Brazilian climate is so much more favorable than the climate in Germany. Also, the female, named "Pic-Pic", had already laid several clutches of eggs in the past. They were, of course, all infertile as there was no partner available to her during this time.

The Actual Transfer

After all the paperwork was in order and the governments of Germany and Brazil had been informed about this transaction, Pele, accompanied by Steffen Putzwahl, curator at Walsrode, was sent on his long journey home. The International Recovery Committee was updated on all these transactions.

After a 16-hour flight, the Lufthansa plane arrived in Brazil. Customs and veterinary inspection were cleared in a very short time as everyone had already been informed about the return of this unique bird. Five TV teams and several newspaper journalists then followed to witness the "hello" of these two birds. The two birds would be separated by a fence for several days to ensure their compatibility. Later, they would meet personally in a more intimate atmosphere. ●