

The Ringed Teal...

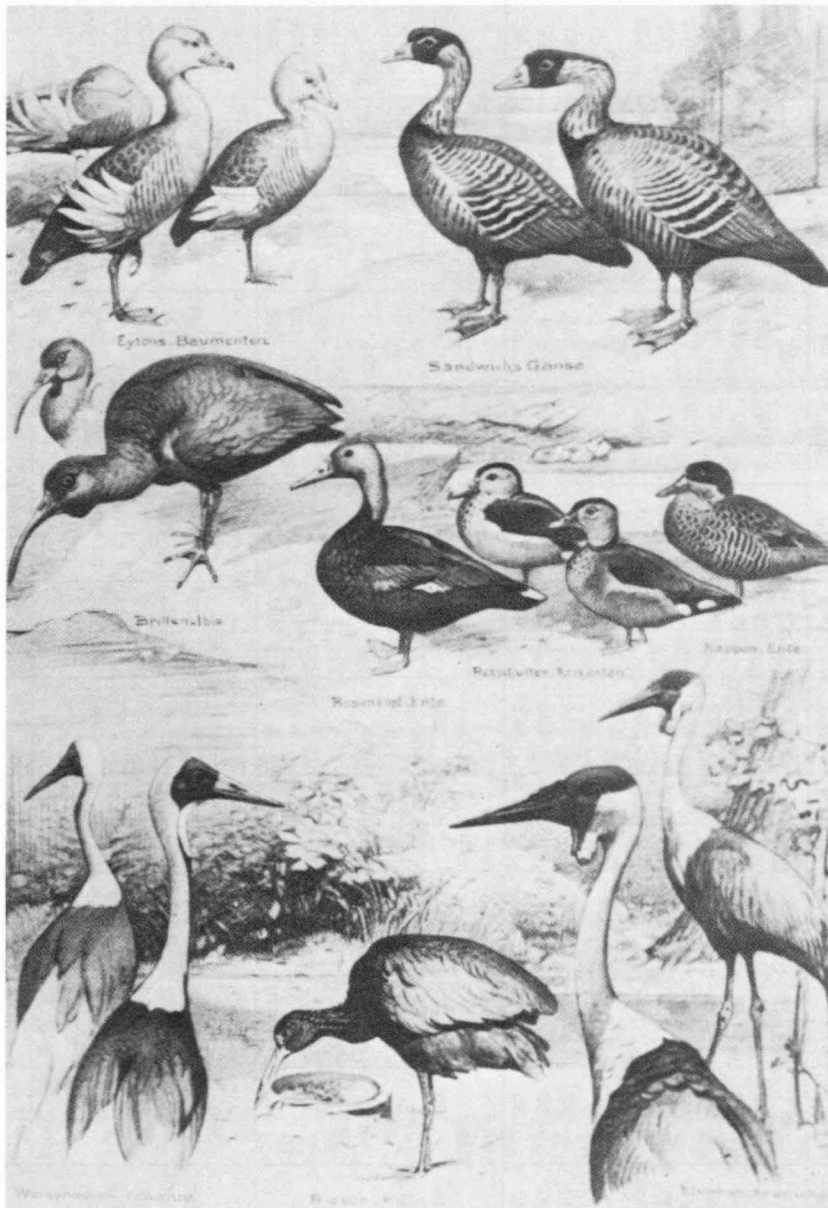
a duck for the softbill aviary

(*Calonetta leucophrys*)

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At the San Antonio Zoo's Hixon Tropical Bird House, a darkened circular walkway separates a ring of sunlit, landscaped, glass-fronted aviaries from a planted rotunda. Opened in the 1960s, this building has always held a wonderful collection and I was not disappointed at my first visit in June 1984. In beautiful exhibits were breeding White-breasted Bald Crows (*Picathartes gymnocephalus*), the first Giant Pittas and Pagodah Mynahs I'd seen, African Pygmy Kingfishers nesting in an artificial mudbank, a native Black-chinned Hummingbird and Yellow-rumped Warbler, a small flock of Saffron-crowned Tanagers (*Tangara xanthocephala*), and many other species. A bird I've never seen again was a Carmiol's Tanager (*Chlorothraupis carmioli*), from Central and South America. As I admired this large sombre bird, which shared its display with Andean Cocks-of-the-Rock and Blond-crested Woodpeckers *Celeus flavescens*, Assistant Director Ernest Roni, who was escorting me through the house, pointed with delight at a female Ringed Teal escorting a line of ducklings out of the undergrowth to the stream at the front of the exhibit.

The Ringed Teal, which breeds in tropical Argentina and Paraguay, and ranges into Brazil, Bolivia, and Uruguay, is primarily a forest bird (Delacour, 1956; Johnsgard, 1978). It is frequently perched in trees and nests in tree-holes and the bulky stick nests of Monk Parrots (Delacour, 1956; Johnsgard, 1978; and Todd, 1979). Being a little duck, a fourth the mass of a Mallard (Todd, 1979), it is thus superbly adapted to a free-flight existence in a tropical aviary, indoors or out. As it does not dive (Delacour, 1956; Johnsgard, 1978), it does quite well in shallow water. To its obvious advantage as an ornamental bird, the Ringed Teal does not undergo an eclipse plumage, so notable in Wood and Mandarin Ducks and Northern Hemisphere Teal. The drake's wonderful combination of



Two Ringed Teal drakes, the first of their kind in Europe, keeping highly distinguished company at Zoologischer Garten Berlin in 1907, depicted by staff-artist Paul Neumann. At the center of this picture is the now extinct Pink-headed Duck (*Rhodonessa caryophyllacea*) from India. While the Silver Teal, on the other side of the Ringed Teal, and the Plumed Tree Ducks in the upper corner, are not now very rare, they are still comparatively expensive. The Hawaiian Nene Geese, above the Teal, were, in 1907, probably rarer than the Pink-headed Duck. The South American Black-faced Ibis (*Theristicus caudatus melanopsis*) has never been common-place in zoos. White-naped and Wattled Cranes have continued to decline in the wild, and are now the subjects of careful captive management. The dark bird at center bottom is a Limpken (*Aramus garauna*). Although this specialized snail-eater has a very wide distribution in Central and South America as well as Florida and extreme Southern Georgia, it has been almost non-existent in collections and there are now none in captivity.

Photo courtesy of Zoologischer Garten Berlin (L. Schlawe, photographer)

Photo by Jerry Jennings

(1956) tells us that the Ringed Teal was Lord Grey's favorite waterfowl.

The German aviculturist Hartmut Kolbe (1979) states that few if any of these ducks appear to have been exported between 1910 and 1950, and the European captive population was displaying inbreeding depression by the 1930s. Delacour (1956), who bred them at Cleres in the '30s, states that none of the captive birds survived the Second World War. No Ringed Teal appear to have arrived in North America to that point.

The species does not appear to have been bred again until 1955, when six females were hatched at the Wildfowl Trust at Slimbridge, England (Delacour 1956). Aside from Slimbridge, only one other collection is listed in the breeding records of the first five volumes of the *International Zoo Yearbook*, covering 1959 to 1963; The New York Zoological Park (Bronx Zoo) hatched Ringed Teal in 1962 and 1963 (Zoological Society of London 1961-65). Through the 1960s, this bird remained a rarity in collections. When the San Diego Zoo obtained its first pair in December 1966, a photograph was prominently featured in

the zoo's magazine (Anon. 1967). Marvin Jones, San Diego's registrar, informed me that zoo records indicate only that these birds came from a Mr. Lintz, about whom I have found nothing further, and their subsequent history is not recorded. San Diego Zoo did not obtain additional birds until 1974, when a pair arrived from the Canadian dealer Ken Chisolm, and 1975, when another pair was obtained from the Miami Rare Bird Farm. Marvin Jones believes the 1975 pair were most likely wild birds. The San Diego Wild Animal Park also received birds about this time.

Mickey Ollson, owner and director of the Wildlife World Zoo near Phoenix, Arizona, told me that some time between 1970 and 1975, the Ringed Teal went from being an expensive rarity to an easily obtained bird. The *International Zoo Yearbook* records for 1970 list six institutions breeding this species: Jean Delacour's collection at Cleres; Slimbridge; the now defunct Sladmore Gardens at High Wycombe, England; and three U. S. Zoos — Great Bend, Kansas; Naples, Florida; and the National Zoological Park at



A Ringed Teal drake at the Waterfowl Grust, Slimbridge, from where many of this species now in captivity originated.

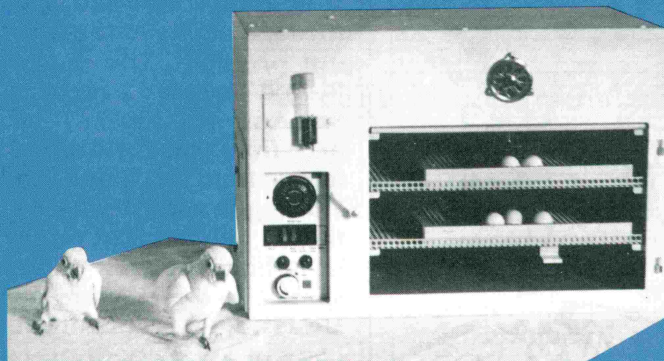
reddish-chestnut, pale peach, metallic green, white, grey, and black lines and trout speckles, is retained throughout the year, affording a pleasing contrast to the attractively subtle brown and white pattern of the female. As the "ringed" pattern of the male's head is often not very obvious, I agree with zoo historian Marvin Jones that the German name "Red-shouldered Teal" is far more appropriate.

It was to Germany that the first Ringed Teal were exported from South America, arriving at Zoologischer Garten Berlin, in the comparatively late year of 1907. The year is usually given as 1908, but the accompanying picture is dated a year earlier by avicultural historian Heinz-Sigurd Raethel (1979). Berlin's first specimens, regarded as treasured rarities in what was then the largest collection of birds in the world, were all males (Delacour 1956). Delacour (1956) further records that others shortly arrived in German private collections, the London Zoo, and the legendary aviaries of F.E. Blaauw at Gooilust, Holland.

Though Blaauw shortly bred large numbers of Ringed Teal, the first success appears to have occurred in Germany, as Delacour (1956) notes that young birds were offered on German price-lists in 1911. British successes soon followed; the great statesman, Lord Grey of Fallodon (Teddy Roosevelt's birding buddy), doing particularly well. Delacour

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Washington (Zoological Society of London, 1972). Great Bend's Brit Spough Zoo, specializing in North American animals, appears to have been listed in error. Doug Burt, a keeper, investigated the records and found no mention of Ringed Teal. On the other hand, Jungle Larry's African Safari at Naples took over Carribean Gardens, at one time America's largest waterfowl collection. Twelve hatched there in 1970, while 15 hatched at Washington.

In 1987, the latest year recorded by the *International Zoo Yearbook* (Zoological Society of London, 1991), 36 institutions that bred Ringed Teal are listed. Nineteen are in the U.S. Of these, the most successful were Houston, with 43 hatched, and 30 raised; Knoxville, Tennessee, 22 hatched, and 15 raised; Memphis, where 49 were hatched and reared; San Antonio Zoo, with 34 hatched and 28 raised; and Tyler, Texas, with 15 hatched, and 14 raised.

On the price-lists of waterfowl breeders, Ringed Teal are one of the least expensive species, a pair costing about the same as one Gouldian Finch from a pet store. Mickey Ollson told me that in the 1960s, a pair cost the same as a pair of Black-necked Swans – birds that now cost more than twenty times as much as Ringed Teal.

As excellent as this species is for aviaries, it does perfectly well pinioned, on lakes or ponds. While they do need protection from icy weather (Kolbe, 1979), the two pairs at Emerald Forest Bird Gardens came through nights in the low 30s without problem. The Emerald Forest Ringed Teal are a pair, hatched at the San Antonio Zoo in June, 1990, a male from Sea World of Florida, and a female from Sea World San Diego, all arriving in the fall of 1990. Despite their diminutive size, they have never been bullied by any of the 23 other species on our one acre lake, and can always be seen, usually in the company of a variety of other species. They do quite well on commercial gamebird pellets and flamingo meal, most likely supplemented by plant and animal food from the lake. Aside from protection from extreme cold, the one special concession they require is enclosed nest boxes (Delacour, 1956; Kolbe, 1979). Frank Todd (1979) gives the average clutch size as six to twelve.

For many years, the Ringed Teal

was believed by many to be a rare bird in the wild, possibly highly endangered. In the 1970s, however, field research showed they were quite abundant in certain localities, and in no apparent danger of extinction (Kolbe, 1979). This fact, and their current establishment in captivity, is especially pleasing in light of this species' peculiar evolutionary position. Though a number of references continue to include it in the Teal genus *Anas*, recent trends have been to follow Johnsgard (1978), who, in the 1960s, not only concluded that it belonged in its own genus, but that it should be included in the already fantastically diverse tribe Cairinini, which includes the huge and grotesque Spur-winged Geese and Comb Ducks, the three species of Pygmy Geese, the Muscovy Duck, the Wood and Mandarin Ducks, Brazilian Teal, and several other species. On the other hand, recent research on comparative feather proteins suggests a relationship to the Teal tribe after all (Johnsgard, 1978). Delacour (1956) suggested possible affinities to the Pochard tribe.

At a time when this bird had only recently reappeared in collections and was still very rare, Jean Delacour (1956) wrote, "It is hard to imagine prettier or more satisfactory teal in captivity. They are tame, gentle, quiet, but active, and they possess a bright plumage throughout the year." Now, when it is one of the most readily obtainable of all waterfowl, this description is just as apt.

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Acknowledgement:

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