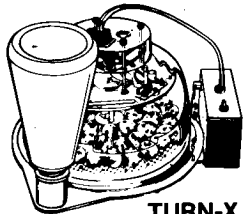
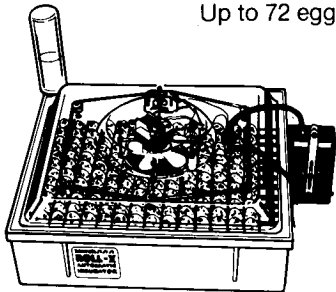


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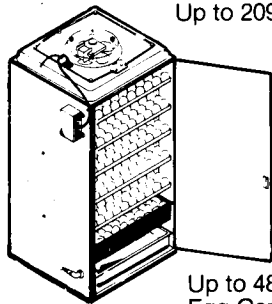
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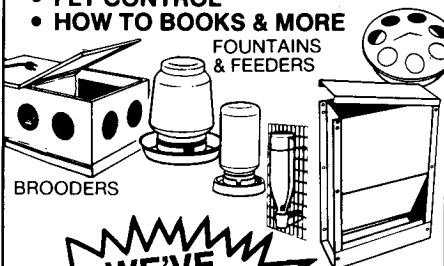
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Wings of Asia — a unique experience

by Rosemary Low, Curator
Loro Parque, Tenerife, Spain

One of the most memorable moments of a recent holiday was when Ron Johnson exclaimed, "Listen! That is a racket-tailed parrot!" We focused our attention at the top of a large tree and, after a few moments, this exquisitely pastel-coloured parrot came into view. But at that height the subtle lavender, gold and pink contrasts of this beautiful bird were not apparent. Then he flew down lower and perched quite conspicuously on the more exposed limb of another tree. Here I admired him for several minutes.

But no! We were not in Indonesia! We were in Florida, in Miami Metro-zoo's unique aviary known as "Wings of Asia." Spanning one and a half acres and with a height of 65 feet (over 20 m.), here one can watch birds under conditions which reproduce their natural habitats. Various types of habitat are reproduced, including a hardwood forest and a swamp.

If you are fortunate enough to visit "Wings of Asia" I suggest that you take your binoculars with you or leave at least half a day free for bird-watching within. If you sit for awhile, on some of the strategically placed benches, or stand quietly near one of the feeding stations, a wonderful variety of species will be revealed.

Most zoo visitors do not take the time to stand and stare. They would miss a lot here — if it were not for the specially trained zoo volunteers, also the keepers, who point out various species and explain some of their habits.

There are approximately 300 birds of more than 70 species. Some are spectacular — no one could miss the flock of yellow-billed storks (*Mycteria ibis*) who reside near the hanging bridge but can be seen soaring overhead elsewhere. The lesser flamingos (*Phoeniconaias minor*) and sacred ibis (*Threskiornis aethiopicus*) are equally conspicuous in the pool area.

In contrast, you need to look hard and listen carefully to locate two of the smallest species, both members of the parrot family: blue-crowned hanging parrots (*Loriculus galgulus*) and Goldie's lorikeets (*Trichoglossus gol-*

diei). The former are actually small enough to pass through the 1 inch (2.5 cm) hexagonal vinyl-coated wire from which the aviary is constructed.

Ron Johnson, curator of birds, explained how these were established within the aviary. They were placed within a small enclosure made from this wire — and made no attempt to escape. Introducing 300 birds when the aviary was completed in 1984 could have been a nightmare. But Ron had a careful plan which proved extremely successful. It took 16 weeks to accomplish.

The most timid birds were placed inside first, in small enclosures so that they could become accustomed to the environment and to the feeding stations. They were then released into the aviary. This continued, species by species, the most aggressive, of course, coming last. By then the others had established their own territories and were thoroughly at home.

How were the species chosen? Ron took into account size, preferred habitat (including altitude — ground-dwelling, mid-level or canopy), colour, song and compatibility. Perhaps the only species which was not a success was the eclectus parrot (*Eclectus roratus*). The female was continually harassing other birds at their nests.

The pair was still in the aviary and I enjoyed watching the leisurely flight of the male. The female spent most of her time in the nest, as is typical of the species. Others which were a joy to observe were the little roulrouls or crested wood partridge (*Rollulus roulroul*) and the spectacular and very rarely kept pheasant-pigeon (*Otidiphaps nobilis*). This pheasant-sized pigeon from New Guinea is chestnut above and purplish blue below — a most interesting and showy exhibit.

Another extreme rarity in captivity — in fact here one can see the only captive pair in the world — is the King of Saxony's bird of paradise (*Pteridophora alberti*). Collected in 1984, they are still in immature plumage, being mainly grey above and spotted below with black and white. Ron is looking forward to them attaining adult

plumage.

One of the problems of a large, planted enclosure is keeping track of the inhabitants. Here Ron Johnson and his staff have evolved an excellent system. The keepers have a check list; every day they tick off the birds as they see them. This is not too difficult as they are attracted by the food trolley. The keepers know at which feeding stations they can expect to find certain species. Incidentally, these are well disguised with logs yet strategically placed near the path which winds through the aviary.

Many of the occupants do not rely entirely on the food provided by the staff. There are over 40 species of food trees in "Wings of Asia," which provide fruit, berries and nectar. One can watch the hanging parrots taking nectar from the flowers of the coconut palm and observe the racket-tailed parrot taking minute seeds from the pods of the bottle brush tree. I saw a partly eaten fruit on a *Pandanus utilis* tree — a fruit which is relished by cockatoos, I know. Perhaps the eclectus had sampled it.

Some of the largest trees, such as a 35 foot (11 m.) high mango and a 40 foot (12 m.) gumbo limbo were planted with the aid of a 65 ft. high crane before the construction of the aviary was completed. After four years the plant growth looks mature and natural but is carefully maintained to ensure good views of the occupants for those who take the time to look. In South Florida's sub-tropical climate the 100 species of plants not only thrive but are an added source of interest to the visitors.

Some birds are exhibited here which would be impossible to house with the other occupants; they are contained in smaller enclosures at one side. Planting and landscaping are so cleverly accomplished, however, that the intervening mesh is not conspicuous. Various hornbills and rollers are thus separated. Nevertheless, the aviaries are large enough for one to hear the distinctive "whoosh" of hornbill wings in flight. And one pair does live in the main aviary.

Some excellent breeding results have been obtained, including first successes in the U.S.A.: the yellow-billed stork, black-naped oriole (*Oriolus chinensis*), greater coucal (*Centropus sinensis*), red-wattled lapwing and grosbeak starling (*Scissirostrum dubium*). The latter species-reared young before the aviary was even open to the public. This starling uses its strong beak to tear

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King of Saxony's bird of paradise — collected in 1984 and still in immature plumage.



palm fibres with which to line its nest. And palm logs are used as nesting sites by many species here.

Some off-exhibit aviaries within the

complex contain interesting breeding pairs or potential breeders. These include a pair of golden-mantled racket-tailed parrots (*Prioniturus plat-*

urus) and the difficult and rarely kept long-tailed parakeet (*Psittacula longicauda*). A pair of the latter produced young in the main aviary; sadly the female died but the young survived to carry on the breeding programme for this species.

The coledo (*Sarcops calvus*), that distinctive mynah which has a bare pink head but for a narrow line of black feathers which divide the crown, was very successful in 1987; six young were reared, two of which fledged in the aviary. This species, from the Philippines, is seldom kept in captivity. The same is true of the white-collared mynah (*Streptocitta albicollis*) from Asia and China. This very striking, long-tailed species is black except for the white breast and nape. Four young were reared in 1987 — only the second breeding in captivity. Two species of woodpeckers, the golden-backed and the red-rumped green, have also reared young. They were very conspicuous as they worked their way around the trunks of favoured trees.

The visiting public — even those who are bird keepers — have little idea of the amount of work, care and expertise required to make a success of this venture. A very large aviary is a potential disaster area unless carefully controlled. It is Ron Johnson's experience of breeding birds (dating from childhood) combined with his knowledge of the behaviour in the wild of many of the species exhibited, which have contributed in no small measure to the success of Miami Metrozoo's showpiece. ●

Aviculture is Conservation too...

Name: Swinhoe's Pheasant
Lophura swinhoii

Range: Forests of the island of Taiwan

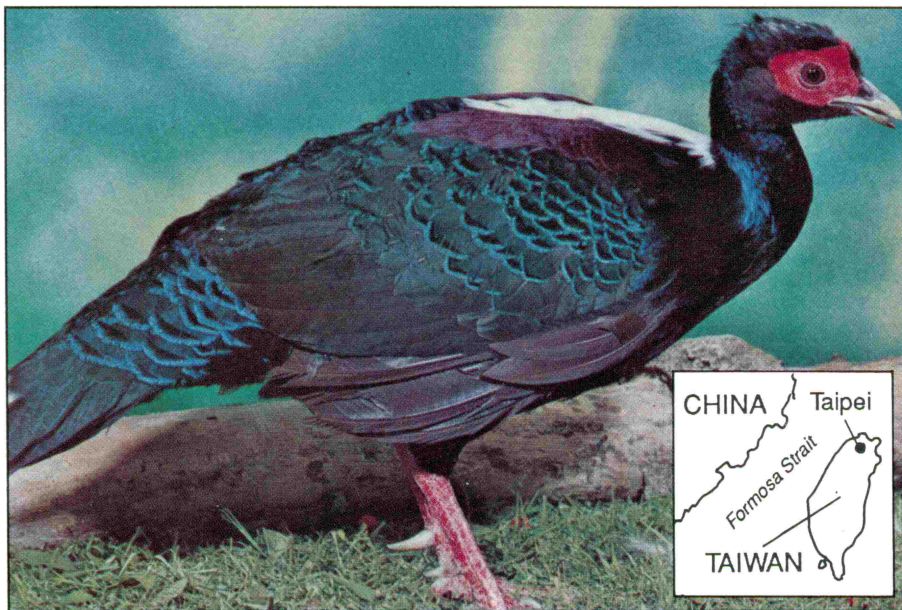
Status in the Wild: Endangered due to habitat destruction and human interference.

Status in Captivity: Well established in pheasantries in Europe and North America.

Conservation Action: In 1967 Philip Wayre took thirty birds captive bred at the Pheasant Trust in England to Taiwan where nine pairs were kept for captive breeding. The remaining birds were released in a well protected natural habitat.

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