

# A.F.A. visits . . . Mickey Ollson's Wildlife World Zoo

by Jerry Jennings  
Woodland Hills, California

Some of us are satisfied with our pet bird, deriving infinite joy from its antics and affection for us. Others find the pleasures of pet bird ownership lead to an interest in raising birds. These people we call aviculturists. Some aviculturists acquire moderate collections of birds, while others establish very large collections comprised of many different species. These latter aviculturists usually are looked upon as professional bird breeders. Then there is Mickey Ollson!

Mickey started raising birds as a small child, when he acquired some finches, waterfowl, and budgies under the encouragement of his parents. He liked other animals as well, especially "zoo types," and kept squirrels and a couple of alligators. As Mickey grew up, his interest in animals became more intense, and the menagerie larger.

In 1963 Mickey graduated from Arizona State University with a B.S. degree in advertising. He worked a couple years, then began teaching junior high school in 1965. That same year he acquired five acres in Glendale, a northwest suburb of Phoenix, and founded Ollson's Rare Bird Farm. By the early 1970s, Mickey had earned an international reputation as an aviculturist with a collection of over 135 species of birds of which he bred over a hundred.

In 1973 Mickey purchased forty acres in Litchfield Park, next to Luke Air Force Base and over 25 miles from the edge of Phoenix. Some of his friends thought he was crazy to buy so far out, but Mickey knew better, and today the city is catching up with him.

Originally, the forty acres in Litchfield Park were an investment and an expansion of his Rare Bird Farm which, by then, was bursting at the seams in Glendale. First, up went the aviaries for pheasants and waterfowl. Then came the mammals. Llamas were first on the scene, followed in quick order by several species of wallabies, walleroos, and the red kangaroo. Sitatunga antelope and zebras were close behind.

While the mammal collection grew, the birds continued to increase. Emu pens were built, along with mixed species flights of cranes, waterfowl, and various species of cracids (currawongs, guans). Several flights were added for jays and it was becoming apparent that a small zoo was emerging. It may not have been obvious to the casual observer that the farm was moving in that direction, but it was to Mickey, for it had been his lifelong dream.

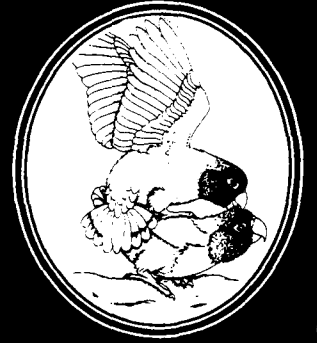
Although Mickey had some wallabies prior to 1973, the new farm had the space to dramatically expand. Initially, the new farm maintained duplicate flocks of the species at the Glendale location. As the mammal collection increased, Mickey began to think it was time to go public, which he decided to do in 1982. During the ensuing two years, construction began and was completed on a variety of projects that would enhance the character of the collection and make it attractive to the public. A walk-through aviary — the largest of its type in the southwest — was opened along with a gift shop, primate enclosures, and a walk-in lory feeding exhibit — the very first of its kind in the U.S.

In 1984, Wildlife World Zoo opened its doors to the public. Today the public portion of the zoo occupies over thirty-five acres of bird and mammal exhibits. The collection has dramatically expanded since the early 1980s. The bird collection is one of the largest in numbers of species in the U.S., and probably the largest in the southwest.

There are over thirty species of parrots, including ten species of lorries in the lory feeding exhibit. Twice daily the public is allowed into the lory flight, where they are given pieces of apple to feed these lovely residents. All the birds in this flight are handfed and tame. They fly down and land on the visitors to eat the apples out of their hands. It is, needless to say, one of the most popular exhibits at Wildlife World Zoo.

Other bird exhibits include one of the largest pheasant collections in the

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## • NEW RELEASE • Spix's Macaw (*Cyanopsitta spixi*)



by **Eric Peake**

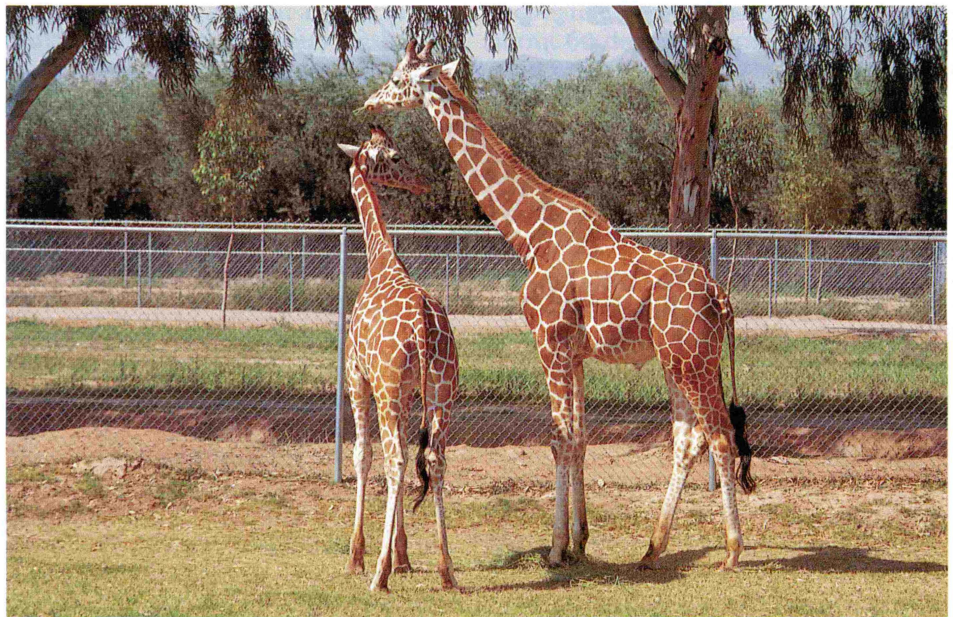
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U.S. and the second largest collection of curassows, chachalacas, and guans in the world! The crane collection is also quite large and interesting. In fact, Mickey has had exceptional success breeding the Stanley crane (over 80 young), and has done well with three other species. If you are into ratites, Mickey has five species — ostriches, emus, cassowaries, and two species of rheas. Other unusual birds include both species of seriama — red-legged and the Burmeister's, the king vulture and Andean condor, and the brush turkey of the South Pacific Islands — a curious species that builds a large mound of organic material in which it buries its eggs, letting the heat generated by the decaying material incubate them. These brush turkeys have successfully reared young at Wildlife World.

The mammal collection is equally varied. It consists of five species of marsupials, fifteen species of primates, many species of antelope, including the Beisa, scimitar horned, and Arabian oryx. The latter, formerly extinct in the wild, has recently been reintroduced from captive born stock. Wildlife World also has a good representation of camels, giraffes, maned wolves, African hunting dogs, jaguars and tigers. The tigers recently gave birth to six youngsters which were auspiciously born on exhibit!



Photos by Lincoln Allen, Salt Lake City, Utah

*Wildlife World's resident pair of reticulated giraffes, UpSee Daisy (female) and High Society (male).*



*The crested, red-legged seriama has something to say if you get too close to her nest.*



*The sarus crane has alot of room to stretch his legs.*



*At Wildlife World, the endangered Elliott's pheasant enjoys a very spacious compound.*



*Cape Barren goose with young.*



*A couple representatives of last year's crop of baby emus.*



*Baby ostrich.*



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The original gift shop has been turned into an exhibit — “Waters of the World” — featuring both fresh and salt water fishes, including electric eels, piranhas, and sharks. A new gift shop and administration building were recently completed. Future plans call for the development of the remaining eleven acres of grounds, an educational bird show, and a Polynesian style restaurant.

While the new bird farm has become Wildlife World Zoo, the emphasis still remains on breeding birds and mammals. If success is the proof in the pudding, there is plenty to show. Wildlife World is one of the most productive zoos in the U.S. The number of young birds and mammals reared there annually is inspiring, a model for the kinds of contributions captive propagation can make to conservation. As Mickey says, “The emphasis is on conservation. We are stewards of a sacred trust. We maintain these fellow inhabitants of our planet, not in captivity, but in zootivity, where they are in pleasant and comfortable surroundings, not unlike their natural state. As with any trust, we work with them for their benefit, knowing they are capable of being reintroduced into their native habitat when that day comes.”

Mickey welcomes members of the AFA to visit his zoo this coming August when the annual AFA Convention will be held in Phoenix. He will be delighted to arrange a personal tour for you. The variety of birds and their attractive facilities will both encourage and give new insight to aviculturists of all interests. ●

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**Oct / Nov '89**

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**Dec / Jan '90**

Oct. 1 — editorial copy  
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**Feb / Mar '90**

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**Apr / May '90**

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April 1 — editorial copy  
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