

Texas Zoos 2003

Part IV (Conclusion)

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Photos by Natalie Lindholm

The Ellen Trout Zoo is in Lufkin, in the part of Texas traditionally known as the "Piney Woods." However, this zoo's atmosphere is distinctly tropical (for most of the year, at least). The grounds are overgrown with exotic plants, and Gordon Henley, the long-time director, takes as great a personal interest in the maintenance of the palms and other specimen trees as in the animal collection.

The zoo started as a prank – Walter Trout, a local Captain of Industry got a hippopotamus for Christmas in 1965, from a fellow Director on the Board of Texas Utilities Company. Named after Walter Trout's mother, the zoo grew up around "Hippy," becoming well known for an unusual collection of reptiles and amphibians, as well as interesting series of birds and mammals.

Until the breeding male recently died, the zoo's prolific pair of West African Crowned Crowns were its most well known avian inhabitants, with descendants all over the country. More recently, the Ellen Trout Zoo has been especially successful breeding White-faced Whistling Ducks, inhabitants of the recently opened African area, and in September, 2003, its first Chilean Flamingo hatched. Among other birds in a collection of over fifty species are Red-breasted and Nene Geese, White-headed Piping Guans, Abyssinian Ground Hornbills (a personal favorite of General Curator Celia Falzone), Yellow-billed Hornbills (exhibited by only six other U.S. collections), Spectacled Owls, Tawny Frogmouths, Leadbeater's Cockatoos, Hyacinth Macaws, King Vultures, Bali Mynahs, and Green Jays.

Houston Zoological Gardens

Ringed around by skyscrapers and somewhat formally laid out, the Houston Zoo may seem rather compact. However, it is difficult for serious zoo visitors to see all of its enormous and very diverse animal collection in a single day, and its bird collection alone can fill a day's visit. At well over 200 species, the bird collection is one of the finest in the world, and its breeding record one of the most remarkable. Among its world first successful captive breedings are the Golden-headed Quetzal, the Andean Cock-of-the-Rock, and the Red Bird of Paradise. Its influential propagation programs for Cracids and touracos commenced more than a quarter century ago. Birds hatched over the last year-and-a-half include Roul Roul Partridges, Attwater's Prairie Chickens (less than fifty in the wild), North American Ruddy Ducks, Nenes, Northern Pintails, Hooded Mergansers, Javan Rhinoceros Hornbills, Siberian

Hoopoes, Golden-headed Quetzals, Blue-bellied and Racket-tailed Rollers, Blue-Crowned Motmots, Guam Kingfishers (extinct in the wild), Guira Cuckoos, Red Lories, Quaker Parrots, White-crested Touracos, Western Gray Plantain-eaters, Mourning Doves, Luzon Bleeding-heart Doves, Green-naped Pheasant Pigeons, Beautiful and Marianas Fruit Doves, Gray-Winged Trumpeters, Spotted Thick-knees, Hammerkops, Chilean Flamingos, Fairy Bluebirds, Beechey's Jays, Northern Green Jays, Collie's Magpie Jays, Emerald Starlings, Bali Mynahs, Sulawesi Grosbeak Starlings, Pekin Robins (from Hawaiian stock), Black-throated Cardinals, and Red-crested Finches. The hatching and assisted parent-rearing of two Golden-headed Quetzals in July, 2003 is particularly gratifying, as it is not only the first propagation in years, but the male was hatched at Houston in 1990.

Among the many rarely seen birds to be found in the extensive series of indoor and outdoor exhibits are Blue-faced Curassows (critically endangered), Lesser Borneo Crested Firebacks, Rothschild's Peacock Pheasants, Congo Peafowl, Ocellated Turkeys, African and Indian Pygmy Geese, Crowned Hornbills, Orange-breasted Trogons, Blue-crowned Lories, Rosenberg's Lorikeets, Giant and Fischer's Touracos, White-bellied Bustards, Red-crowned Cranes, Piping Plovers, Long-toed Lapwings, Northern and Southern Bald Ibises, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, Andean Cocks-of-the-Rock, Magpie Shrikes, White-necked Ravens, Red and Lesser Birds of Paradise, Rufous-bellied Niltava, Chestnut-bellied Starling, Sulawesi Collared Mynahs, Cactus Wren, Black-crested Bulbuls, Amakihi, Green Grosbeaks, and Painted Buntings.

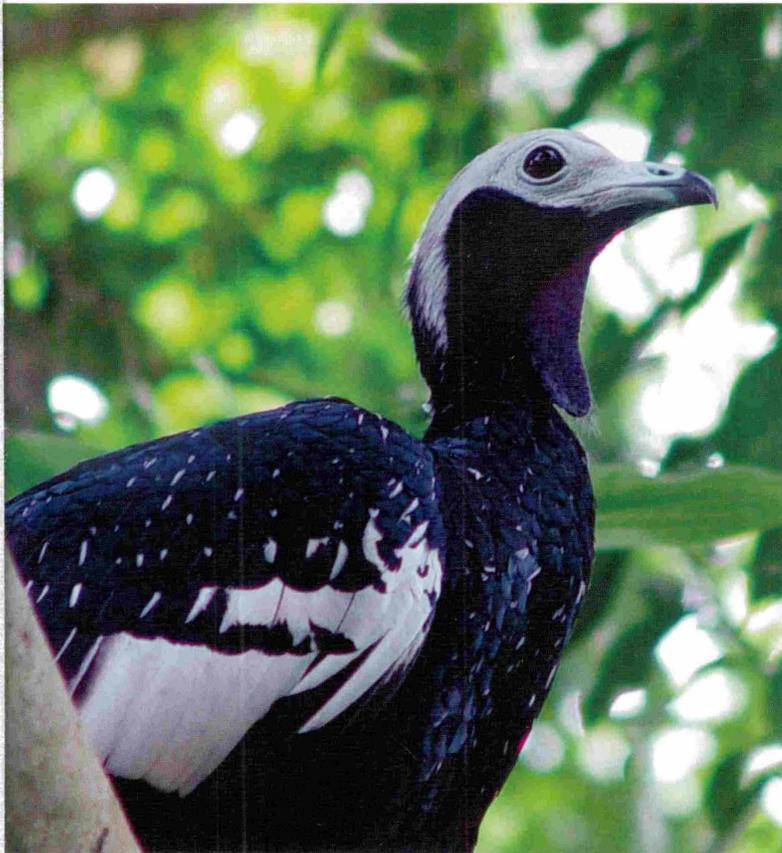
Moody Gardens

About an hour's drive from Houston, Moody Gardens, on Galveston Island, now boasts two imposing animal exhibits. The ten story Rainforest Pyramid opened ten years ago, while the Aquarium opened in 1999. Today, Moody Gardens maintains about eighty species of birds.

The Rainforest showcases an enormous collection of tropical plants, as well as free flying butterflies from various parts of the world. For this reason, the initial bird collection was confined largely to finches, pigeons and doves. Since then the avicultural staff have grown more venture-some. At large in this amazing building are Fairy Bluebirds, a Livingstone's Touraco and Violet Plantain-eaters. White-headed Piping Guans, Palawan Peacock Pheasants, and Scarlet Ibis all breed here. There is still



Since its opening in 1993, doves and pigeons have been well represented at Moody Garden's Rain forest Pyramid. The bird on the left-hand side is a mystery. It appears most like a Red-eyed Dove (*Streptopelia semitorquata*), but does not entirely match up. Of course the bird in the background is a Domestic Barbary Dove, while the one to the right is the distinctive South African subspecies of the Speckled Pigeon (*Columba guinea phaenota*)



A relative of curassows, the White-headed Piping Guan is a rather common bird in American zoos, but infrequently bred. Moody Gardens hatched two in 2003.



Below: This male Fairy Bluebird, at large in Moody Garden's Rain forest Pyramid, has been trained, following the instructions of Barbara Heidenreich, to enter a crate for scheduled examinations!

quite a series of pigeons: South African Speckled Pigeons, Mauritius Pink Pigeons, Common Bronze-wing Doves, Wonga Wonga Pigeons, Nicobar Pigeons, Sulawesi Ground Doves, Luzon Bleeding-heart Pigeons, and, most remarkably, a Moluccan Nutmeg Pigeon (*Ducula perspicillata*), a startlingly large bird, and the only one on public exhibit, according to ISIS.

Flocks of seed-eating birds continue to be maintained in the Rainforest and include Orange-cheeked, Black-rumped and Black-crowned Waxbills, Spice Finches, Pin-tailed Whydahs, Green Singing Finches, and Saffron Finches. I've never seen the Madagascar Hemipodes, but Baikal Teal are very visible. More waterfowl are displayed with some Caribbean Flamingos in a large sunny atrium near the Rainforest. Coscoraba Swans stand out particularly.

The exhibits in the Aquarium Pyramid are dramatically arranged around several very large multi-story tanks, one of which contains a remarkable flock of nearly forty Chinstrap Penguins, constantly in motion many feet under the surface. They share their display with a breeding colony of more than thirty King Penguins, specially collected in South Georgia in 1998. The Kings are far more sedate birds, usually assembled on the shore of their naturalistic habitat.

Texas Zoo

Located in Victoria, southwest of Houston, the Texas Zoo exhibits only animals native to Texas, or those (such as Zebras, Tapirs, and Lemurs) resembling those that once existed there. Among its thirty-or-so species of birds, White-fronted and Giant Canada Geese, a Long-billed Curlew, and a White-tailed Hawk stand out.

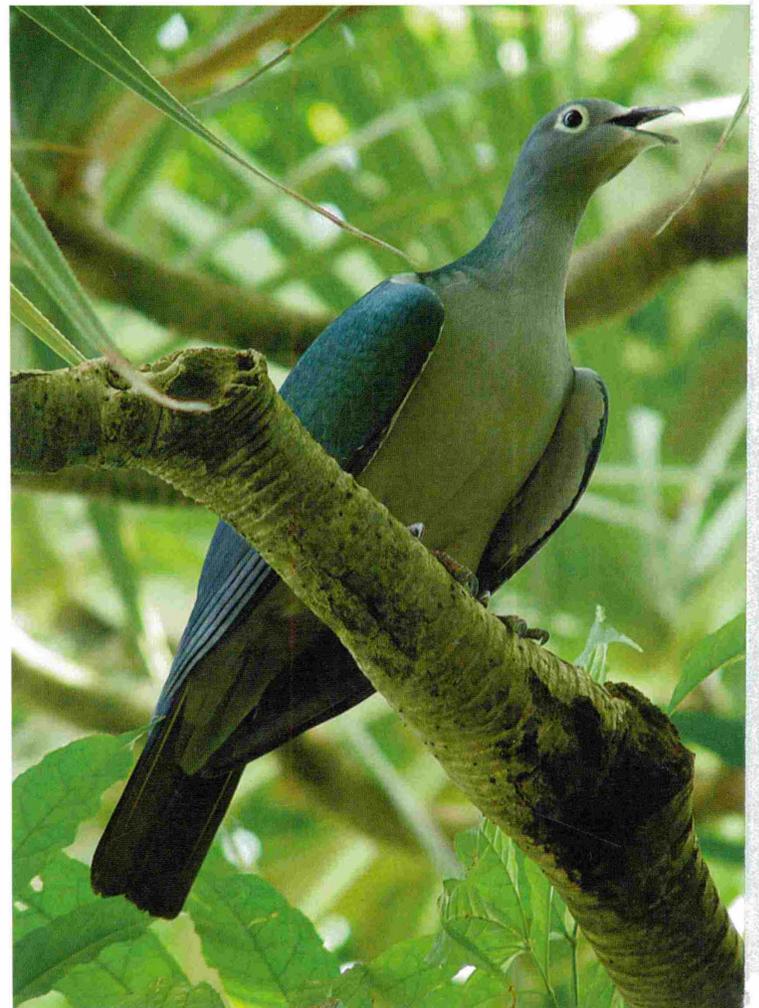
Texas State Aquarium

Opened in 1990 in the Gulf Coast city of Corpus Christi, the Texas State Aquarium showcases Texas wildlife. It is also the site of a bird rehabilitation center, so

*As of the end of 2003, this bird at Moody Gardens is the only specimen of the imposing Moluccan or White-eyed Imperial Pigeon (*Duculaperspicillata*) listed by the International Species Inventory System (ISIS).*



A close relative of the bleeding heart pigeons, the Sulawesi Ground Dove was nonexistent in American collections until the late 1980's, but now appears to be fairly well established in both private and zoo aviculture. This is one of several at Moody Gardens.



its bird collection of nearly 20 species includes some particularly impressive nonreleasable specimens. In the United States, the beautiful White-tailed Hawk occurs only along the coast of Texas. The aquarium's specimen cannot be released because of impaired depth perception. It shares an exhibit with Red-tailed Hawks, Common Caracaras, a Turkey Vulture, a Barn Owl, and a great Horned Owl. In an indoor shore exhibit, shared with an abundance of shallow water fishes, are a White Ibis, a Roseate Spoonbill, a Green Heron, an American Oyster Catcher, a Royal Tern, and a Caspian Tern. North American Terns are uncommon in aviculture, but Erin Erben, a Senior Keeper at the Aquarium, informed me the Royal Tern has lived there since 1992, and the Caspian since 1997.

Rio Grande Valley Bird and Butterfly Paradise

South Padre Island is a major resort area, especially around the Infamous Spring Break. This little facility, however, is less of a tourist attraction than a working butterfly farm, in the business of supplying living subtropical Texas butterflies, such as Zebras and Julias, to exhibitors. Visitors receive tours through greenhouses full of Passion Vines and other plants the butterflies depend on, and encounter flocks of free-breeding Zebra Finches. They are also shown a film on butterflies – While sitting in an aviary with a flock of Peach-faced, Masked and Fischer's Lovebirds.

Gladys Porter Zoo

Located several miles from the Mexican border, this geographically arranged zoo's tropical atmosphere is enhanced by the resacas (isolated channels) that run through it, and help define its different continental areas. Opened in 1971, it has long been one of the most well-known zoos in the country, especially for its mammal and reptile collections. Its collection of about 115 species of birds is especially rich in aquatic species and psittacines. Flocks of about a dozen each of Military and Blue-and-Gold Macaws are featured in "Macaw Canyon", a 56,000 square foot replica of a canyon in Tamaulipas famous for its Militaries. This exhibit is shared with pairs of Scarlet Macaws, King Vultures, and Common Caracaras. Both Military and Blue-and-Gold Macaws produced offspring in 2003. Most of the Blue-and-Gold's were confiscated when someone attempted to smuggle them in to Mexico! All four of the zoo's Green Conures (*Aratinga holochlora*) were brought in by the public after having been found on the Texas side of the border. While some people have proposed the presence of this species around Brownsville is a result of natural range expansion, others, more plausibly I think, putulate botched smuggling attempt, with the sudden release of incriminating evidence just before apprehension.

This zoo's tropical atmosphere is enhanced by flocks of nearly 30 Chilean Flamingoes, and nearly 50 Caribbean Flamingoes, the later reproducing in 2003. The unusually

large series of ducks, geese, and swans includes a flock of Magpie Geese, Mute Swans, Cereopsis Geese (breeding in 2003), Old World Comb Ducks, and Southern Spur-winged Geese. Other aquatic birds include three Giant Coots (which can be compared with the one American Coot in the collection), a non-flighted Reddish Egret at Brownsville more than twenty years, the last Greater Adjutant in North America, pairs of Saddle-billed and Magauri Storks, and prolific Scarlet Ibises.

Dispersed among a variety of enclosures, one may find seven Double-wattled Cassowaries, Plain Chachalacas, a flock of Greater Curassows (which Gladys Porter Zoo has been unusually successful at breeding), a flock of Vulturine Guineafowl, a Gold-fronted Woodpecker, Northern and Southern Ground Hornbills, Blue-crowned Motmots, White-cheeked Touracos, Pink Pigeons, a San Blas Jay, and a flock of Collie's Magpie Jays, confiscated as they were being illegally imported. It appears this spectacular jay has suffered severe recent population declines, and captive reproduction (especially in Texas, where three zoos have so far been successful) may become an important component in its conservation. ❖

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