

ORNITHEA 2007 - A SHOW OF SUPERLATIVES

by Tony Pittman

The beginning of November each year is for me Ornitheia time. This unique show organised by the aviculturists' club in Cologne, Germany, never ceases to amaze me and this year's show - open to the public from Thursday, November 1st-Sunday, November 4th - was no exception; in fact the club members surpassed themselves.

The club was formed in 1961 and has some 50 members. It has a clubhouse in a suburb of Cologne and the members meet there regularly to exchange information on keeping and breeding all types of birds, have a communal meal and drink the popular local beer. Sometimes they invite a speaker, which is how I got to know about the club and later became a member.

The show is held in the hall of a local secondary school, which the club takes over for two weeks for a peppercorn rent. The lay-out is carefully planned and all the members are involved in the build-up to the show and help clear everything away at the end.

This year, some 500 birds of 182 species and subspecies, bred locally and in perfect condition, were displayed in 123 decorated aviaries for larger birds and large exhibition cages for smaller birds. All the cages and aviaries were planted and some had water features and rock formations. Also, every cage and aviary had detailed information about the occupants.

The centrepiece of this year's show was an astonishing swamp landscape with a painted background, rock face, waterfall, pool, shrubs, grasses, boulders and a large tree. Housed in it were seven species of birds, including egrets, avocets, plovers, gulls and two species of ibis, with no wire netting or any other form of barrier between the birds and the public.

Ornithea 2007 attracted some 6,000 visitors, including many from neighbouring countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland. Among them were many children, who were thrilled to have such a great opportunity to see close-up in naturalistic settings, native birds such as the Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, Robin *Erithacus rubecula*, Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrelli*, Grey Wagtail *M. cinerea*, Hoopoe *Upupa epops*, Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*.

There were 57 species of parrots, ranging from hanging parrots through to conures and lorries, Amazons, cockatoos, macaws and the Kea *Nestor notabilis*. There were 10 species of owls, as well as a wide range of finches and softbills. Bali Starlings *Leucopsar rothschildi* were on show again this

year in a large, beautifully planted aviary with lush vegetation and tropical flowers.

On the Saturday there was a well attended all-day symposium. Bernd Marcordes, formerly of Walsrode Birdpark and now Curator of Birds at Cologne Zoo, spoke on cockatoos, Lars Lepperhoff from Switzerland described his recent expedition to the Congo to see Grey Parrots *Psittacus erithacus* and Norbert Hebel spoke about keeping and breeding Amazon parrots. Other speakers included Jos Hubers, who gave a presentation on lorries and Simon Bruslund Jensen, formerly of Al Wabra Wildlife Preservation and now at Walsrode, who spoke about his experiences at Al Wabra and Walsrode Birdpark. I gave a presentation on the Slender-billed Conure *Enicognathus leptorhynchus* in the wild and in aviaries. At the end of the symposium I was very pleased to be invited to accept from Norbert Hebel organiser of the symposium and Walter Grau, chairman of the club, a donation of 1,000 Euros (approx. £750 or US\$1,500) for the Hyacinth Macaw *Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus* project in Brazil.

On the Sunday morning the local special interest group held a meeting on breeding conures, at which Thomas Arndt gave an illustrated presentation on the many recent changes to the taxonomy of the conures.

In addition to the show, there was an area where the work of bird artists was displayed and there was an informative display by the customs authorities. There was a bookshop in the hall and a tombola. Food and drink, organised by the club members, was available throughout the day in a side-room and there was a barbecue just outside.

The airport at Cologne is very close to the suburb where the show takes place and several low-cost carriers fly to it.

Tony has the website: www.bluemacaws.org

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LONG-LIVED GLOSSY STARLING

Chris Brack has sent news from Germany of a long-lived Greater Blue-eared Glossy Starling *Lamprolornis chalybaeus* (Hohes Alter eines Grünschwanz-Glanzstaars, *Gefiederte Welt* August 8/2007, p.226). The bird lived in a private aviary for 24 years and eight months. As it was an adult when purchased, they estimate it may have been 27 or 28 years old.

THE SOCIETY'S VISIT TO WALSRODE BIRDPARK, GERMANY

by Andrew Owen

Early in October, 44 members and guests spent three highly enjoyable days at the world-famous Walsrode Birdpark in northern Germany. The visit was made an even more memorable experience, thanks to the wonderful hospitality of the park's Curator Simon Bruslund Jensen. Simon took us on an extremely thorough tour of the park, which included a look behind the scenes at all the off-show facilities. Walsrode has one of the finest bird collections in the world, and the skill and dedication of Simon and his staff were clear for all to see.

The park covers approximately 30 hectares (74 acres) and is beautifully landscaped with mature trees, shrubs and manicured lawns. There are some 5,000 birds of approximately 600 species, so the full three days of our visit were needed to try to see everything. All the aviaries and enclosures were immaculately maintained and spotlessly clean, something for which the park has become well-known.

It is difficult to pick out favourite birds and areas of the park, but one of the highlights for me was the collection of Madagascan birds, many of which must be unique in aviculture. The Blue Couas *Coua caerulea*, Crested Couas *C. cristata* and Giant Couas *C. gigas* (non-parasitic members of the cuckoo family) were a wonderful sight, with the first two species breeding well. The Madagascar Blue Pigeon *Alectroenas madagascariensis*, Madagascar Crested Ibis *Lophotibis cristata*, Long-tailed Ground-Roller *Uratelornis chimaera*, Cuckoo-Roller *Leptosomus discolor* and the lovely Pitta-like Ground-Roller *Atelornis pittoides* are all spectacular birds. We visited the hand-rearing room and were privileged to see the first Blue-eyed Ibis *Threskiornis bernieri* ever hatched in captivity. This is a Critically Endangered species, yet Simon told us that the original birds were found on sale in a meat market in Madagascar and were bought by the kilo - and saved from the cooking pot! Conservation clearly plays an important role in the work being done at Walsrode with species from Madagascar being the focal point of this, although Walsrode also works with numerous other threatened species from around the world.

There are two most impressive tropical facilities, the first of which has a range of indoor aviaries housing a multitude of wonderful avian gems including Andean Cock-of-the-Rock *Rupicola peruvianus*, Golden-headed Quetzal *Pharomachrus auriceps*, Hooded Pitta *Pitta sordida*, Banded Pitta *P. guajana*, Spangled Cotinga *Cotinga cayana*, Carmine Bee-eater *Merops*



Walsrode Birdpark Archive
Horned Guan.



Karen Heath
Christopher Marler, Andrew Owen, Simon Brusland Jensen and Raymond Sawyer.



Walsrode Birdpark Archive

Blue Coua.



Andrew Owen

Shoebill.

nubicus and a number of fruit doves, such as the Beautiful *Ptilinopus pulchellus* and Pink-headed *P. porphyreus*, to name but a few.

Pigeons and doves are something of a speciality at Walsrode, which must have one of the most impressive collections of these birds. They are one of the main groups housed in the other tropical house - the Indonesian exhibit. Victoria *Goura victoria* and Southern Crowned Pigeons *G. scheepmakeri* were an impressive sight strolling along the paths amongst the visitors in the company of Pheasant Pigeons *Otidiphaps noblis*, Sulawesi Ground-Doves *Gallicolumba tristigmata*, Emerald Doves *Chalcophaps indica* and Thick-billed Ground-Pigeons *Trugon terrestris*. This tropical house is huge and we saw different species each time we visited it during the three days. A female Giant Pitta *P. caerulea* sitting quietly in the undergrowth, a Black-capped Babbler *Pellorneum capistratum* with its unusual walking gait, a noisy flock of Chestnut-backed Scimitar Babblers *Pomatorhinus montanus* and a Banded Pitta digging in the soil by my feet were among the highlights for me.

Cranes, pelicans, ibises and storks are among other groups well represented in the collection, with the amazing Shoebill *Balaeniceps rex* vying for the title of strangest looking bird on the planet! Impressive birds of prey included Harpy Eagle *Harpia harpya*, Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*, Steller's Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus*, Great Grey Owl *Strix nebulosa* and Hawk Owl *Surnia ulula* and, in their off-show aviary, Secretary Birds *Sagittarius serpentarius* with a well-grown youngster.

It was nice to see European birds displayed in really well thought-out aviaries, one of which has Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*, Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* and Corncrake *Crex crex*. There is a comprehensive display of parrots, of which the highlights for me were the Horned Parakeet *Eunymphicus cornutus*, (Tahiti) Blue Lorikeet *Vini peruviana* and Desmarest's Fig Parrot *Psittaculirostris desmarestii*.

I would recommend a visit to Walsrode to everyone with an interest in keeping birds. There is so much to see and learn and, where else can you see Kagu *Rhynochetos jubatus*, Horned Guan *Oreophasis derbianus*, Greater Bird of Paradise *Paradisaea apoda*, Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*, Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus* and Roadrunner *Geococcyx californianus*, together with some 594 other species, all in the same place?

Meeting new friends and catching up with old ones (some of them very old!), sharing thoughts and ideas with like-minded bird keepers and seeing one of the best collections of birds anywhere in the world, was a great experience. A big thank you must go to Mike Curzon for organising everything and helping to make this Avicultural Society visit such an enjoyable one.

LETTER TO EDITOR

Prof. J. R. (Bob) Hodges has long had a special interest in the Orange-bellied Parrot or Parakeet *Neophema pulchella* and recent developments have prompted the following letter from him:

I had almost forgotten the exciting day on which I flew from Hobart to their breeding area in virtually unexplored south-west Tasmania where I was able to see and photograph several specimens and their nests. They were extraordinarily beautiful with grass-green plumage and a large bright orange patch on the abdomen, contrasting with a few I had seen some years previously when Australian parrots were being smuggled into the UK. These were pale and unattractive looking like faded Elegant Parrots or Parakeets *N. elegans*.

Apparently several attempts have been made to reintroduce and re-establish the species in its normal habitat by liberating small numbers of aviary-bred birds that have not been successful and the species is still listed as Critically Endangered with fewer than 150 birds in the wild. Biologists in the Environment Departments of Tasmania and Victoria blame the situation on the loss of habitat in Victoria where they spend their non-breeding season. Anyone who has visited at intervals, as I have, this particular area of 'countryside' around Melbourne will have noticed that during the last 40 years much of the 'pastoral area' has changed to large industrial estates and their supporting towns. I cannot imagine that the parrots will adapt their behaviour and adopt this new habitat.

In October this year (2007) about 80 birds, reared in Hobart, Adelaide Zoo and at Healesville, were released in their Tasmanian breeding area. I hope that this major effort to re-establish the species in the wild will be successful but I am not optimistic. I consider that an enormous amount of money and effort has been wasted. I think that the organisers of this effort will be very disappointed, and should have involved the cooperation of well-known aviculturists who would almost undoubtedly have established them in their aviaries. Healthy specimens in appropriate aviaries are far more attractive than lifeless, stuffed and withering creatures in museums.

BOOK REVIEWS

PEKIN ROBINS AND SMALL SOFTBILLS

Peter Karsten was born in Germany and, following the completion of his formal education in Germany and Sweden, emigrated to Canada in 1962. After a 30-year career with Calgary Zoo, for 20 years of which he held the positions of Zoo Director and Executive Director, he retired in 1994 and turned his attention to small softbills, keeping and breeding Pekin Robins *Leiothrix lutea* for the past 10 years. (An article by Peter Karsten on keeping and breeding the European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* will appear in a future issue of the *Avicultural Magazine*. - Ed.) His professionalism and hands-on avicultural skills shine through in his delightful book, *Pekin Robins and Small Softbills - Management and Breeding*.

There is a dearth of good quality, up-to-date books on bird husbandry, particularly relating to softbills, so this well thought-out personal account of managing these charming birds will be welcomed by bird keepers. The 17 colour plates, 60 high quality photographs and numerous line drawings by the author help make this book even more endearing.

It is clear that Peter Karsten has a real passion for these birds and he covers in fine detail every aspect of their husbandry. A really practical and useful book, it has chapters covering biology, housing, general care, acquisition, breeding, hand-rearing, feeding and health care, as well as cultivating livefood.

Packed with information gathered through personal experience, Peter Karsten's book is a mine of information for beginners and experienced aviculturists alike. The section on the determination of sex is of particular interest. Although the Pekin Robin (or Red-billed *Leiothrix*) is frequently kept, it continues to surprise me how many aviculturists are unable to sex their birds accurately. This no longer needs to be the case, as the author resolves this tricky problem.

I am very impressed by his coverage of subjects such as aviary design, predator prevention, health care and cultivating livefood, with his line drawings, used throughout the book, enhancing his coverage of each subject. Although the author lives in Canada, all of the techniques described are applicable here in the UK and probably elsewhere as well. The climate is similar to that of the UK and northern Europe and, although the predators may be different, the methods of keeping them out of our aviaries are much the same wherever we live.

There is a chapter on other softbill species, which gives brief descriptions and useful management tips. The Pekin Robin is the main focus of the



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