

The Philadelphia Zoo's new \$17.5 million McNeil Avian Center incorporates lush walk-through habitats where visitors can discover over 100 spectacular birds from around the world, many of them rare and endangered. The exhibit immerses visitors in exotic landscapes full of color and sound, with birds including fantastic rhinoceros hornbills, striking Victoria crowned pigeons and nest-crazy hammerkops. Closer to home, in the multi-sensory 4-D Migration Theater, viewers follow Otis the oriole on his first migration south from where he hatched in Fairmount Park.





For more information, call



Exhibit Facts

African Savanna

Birds will flit up-close to visit their observers in this open-air exhibit, which will transport guests into the open grasslands of Africa. The habitat will feature blue-breasted kingfishers, golden-breasted starlings, sacred ibis, hammerkops and other African species. One of the most unusual inhabitants, hammerkops are long-legged wading birds which build one of the largest nests in the world, continuously adding sticks and leaves to their ever growing homes. Visitors to the African Savanna exhibit can crawl inside a replica of a hammerkop nest to experience it first hand.



Pacific Islands

Islands are home to some of the world's most beautiful birds, but many of them are endangered, in large part due to the introduction of non-native species. This three-exhibit sequence focuses on this issue on different Pacific islands and the Philadelphia Zoo's conservation actions for endangered island birds. On the island of Guam, introduced brown tree snakes have wiped out almost all native birds. The Philadelphia Zoo helped lead an effort to rescue the last remaining Guam rails and Micronesian kingfishers, to initiate zoo breeding programs. On the Hawaiian islands, many non-native birds have been introduced, and disease-carrying mosquitoes have also hitchhiked their way onto the islands. This combination has had a devastating impact on Hawaii's birds, and the exhibit will actually feature mostly the non-native species a visitor to Hawaii would be more likely to see. Finally, the Indonesia exhibit describes the impact of feral pigs on the habitat, food sources and nests of native birds including the beautiful Bali mynah.









In this walk-through experience featuring birds from throughout the world's rainforests, the human and avian share the same space. Enormous Victoria crowned pigeons may be strolling the pathways when a visitor enters and a fairy bluebird, a metallic starling or a blue-faced honeyeater might come swooping by. Peer into the trees to see a spectacularly colorful violaceous turaco and cross a stream to view a jambu fruit dove building a nest.



Victoria crowned pigeon Photo by Jeff Chapman

Central American Shade Coffee Plantation

Many birds familiar to us from backyards and parks spend the winter far south in Central and South America. Shade coffee plantations provide habitat for these migrants as well as tropical species that live there year-round. This exhibit, which focuses on how our consumer choices can help birds, will include tropical species such as the sunbittern and the guira cuckoo, and may also include some of our local migrants.



Unique Features

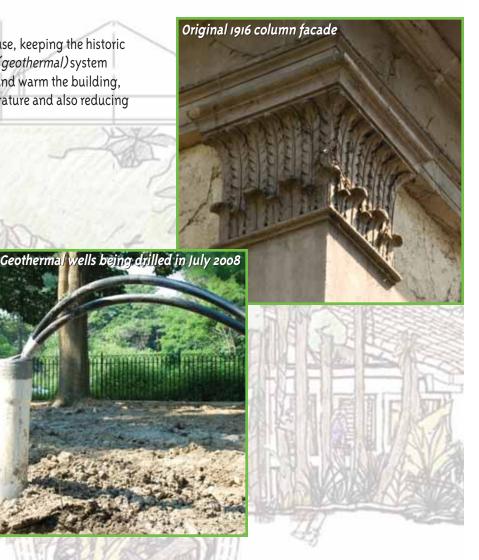
Keeper Experiences

Our bird keepers do more than just feed their charges — they work closely with many of the birds to train behaviors that help us take better care of them — stepping on a scale voluntarily so we can monitor weight, for example. But using the same principles, keepers can cue birds to show off their fascinating natural behaviors. A hammerkop might add a stick to its giant nest or you might be there when a hornbill catches insects or a grape out of the air.



A "green" building

The Zoo "recycled" the neoclassical 1916 Bird House, keeping the historic façade and internal structures. A geoexchange (geothermal) system will use the Earth's natural temperature to cool and warm the building, reducing the energy needed to maintain temperature and also reducing the building's overall carbon footprint.





Thrilling Guest Experiences

4-D Migration Theater

A fantastic multi-sensory experience awaits visitors as they follow Otis the oriole on his first migration south. Otis hatches right here in Fairmount Park and learns that he must travel all the way to Central America for the winter. Through the use of multiple screens and special effects, visitors fly along with Otis and his friends and experience some of their hardships, including confusing city lights and windy, wet storms with lightning and thunder. Otis eventually reaches a shade coffee plantation in Central America,

where he learns that he must do the reverse trip the next spring.

Otis's story highlights the Delaware Valley as a critical stop-over for migrating birds and brings an engaging look at this amazing feat of endurance, navigation and instinct.



Migration theater



Guest Involvement

Foot Prints

Guests will have a chance to get involved in saving bird species by participating in the Zoo's carbon offset program, Footprints. Footprints allows individuals to address global climate change by offsetting their own carbon footprints through an investment in three reforestation projects — Borneo's Kinabatangan Forest Restoration, Fairmount Park's Greenland Woods and several planting

areas in the Zoo. The project in Borneo will develop habitats for the rhinoceros hornbills that guests can see in the entry way of McNeil Avian Center, while the local projects will help regional and migratory birds.

MSNeil Avian Center will feature information about the Footprints program, but visitors can participate by logging on to www.philadelphiazoo.org. While on the Zoo's website, visitors can learn two ways they can help: by changing their behavior (e.g., reducing commuting costs, recycling, turning down their thermostat) and by contributing money to offset their own carbon footprints via reforestation projects. Web visitors can calculate their carbon footprint and decide how much of their footprint they wish to offset at \$10 per ton (U.S.A. average is about 27 tons annually). 100% of contributions minus the Zoo's project-related costs, will go toward the projects to purchase and plant trees. Contributors will receive tax benefits and an e-certificate acknowledging their contribution, and will be recognized in an issue of the Zoo's online conservation newsletter, Wildlife Matters.



Conservation

McNeil Avian Center highlights the Zoo's involvement in two significant field conservation projects that protect birds here and abroad.

Guam Bird Rescue Project

After an alarming drop in bird numbers on the Pacific island of Guam, an ambitious effort was mounted to rescue the remaining survivors, with the Philadelphia Zoo in a lead role. In 1984, Philadelphia Zoo staff working with others located and rescued 29 Micronesian kingfishers and 21 Guam rails. Shortly after the removal of the birds, biologists identified the brown tree snake, as the likely cause of Guam's avian decline. This snake

reached Guam sometime before 1952, most likely as a stowaway on cargo ships from its native home in other regions of the South Pacific. Guam's birds, having evolved in a snake-free environment, were easy prey for the exploding snake population. Efforts to eradicate brown tree snakes have succeeded in reducing their numbers, but the snakes continue to threaten wildlife on the island.

Since 1984, both the kingfishers and rails have reproduced successfully in U.S. zoos. The Philadelphia Zoo continues to spearhead the kingfisher breeding program and has also bred

on the Pacific Island of Cuam, sue the remaining survivors, In 1984, Philadelphia Zoo staff d 29 Micronesian kingfishers and of the birds, biologists identified of Guam's avian decline. This snake

Guam rail Photo by Jessie Cohen

The rescued from extinction, the Micronesian kingfisher and the Guam rail have both returned.

Micronesian kingfisher Photo by Mike McAtee

the rail. Now, 25 years after the birds were rescued from extinction, the Micronesian kingfisher and the Guam rail have both returned to Guam. Zoo-hatched rails have been released in snake-free zones on Guam and on the snake-free neighboring island of Rota.

While kingfishers have not been released in the wild yet, several pairs are living in aviaries on Guam.

Bird Banding

Each spring and fall, the Atlantic Flyway is used by migratory birds to travel thousands of miles between their temperate breeding grounds and tropical wintering grounds. Because this major flight path overlaps with one of the most urbanized regions of North America, urban parks, like our own Fairmount Park, often represent important stopover habitat for migrating birds. Fairmount Park is one of the nation's largest urban parks and was recently named as an Important Bird Area by Audubon Pennsylvania due to its "outstanding value to bird conservation."

Since the spring of 2007, The Philadelphia Zoo and Audubon Pennsylvania have partnered with researchers at Wildlife Conservation Society/Bronx Zoo to assess the ecological value of habitat in Fairmount Park as a suitable migrant stopover site. This is done by capturing birds in mist nets to determine age, gender, fat storage and other information before banding them with a federal serial number and releasing them. The data collected will be used to correlate the nutritional condition of migrant birds with the ecological value of the habitat surrounding Fairmount Park.



