



Springboard For Survival

A German businessman in Bali has fulfilled his childhood dream, writes **Holli Hollitzer**. With Indonesian assistance he has designed a modern bird park on two hectares. Its generous enclosures house exotic inhabitants from around the globe, photographed here by **Dan Bool**

Before the great flood, Noah built a great ark and filled it with a pair of all the creatures on the planet. With this wise and timely move he ensured the survival of all species.

Since that biblical rescue, however, the world has lost vast numbers of animals—especially during the past 100 years. With man expanding his

territory for comfort and survival, animals are in retreat. Many are threatened, some are endangered and large numbers have become extinct.

In his own way, German businessman Edi Swoboda has followed Noah's example in the wish to ensure the survival of Indonesia's bird population.

This and other environmental con-

cerns led Swoboda to develop Bali Bird Park, or Taman Burung, in a joint venture with an Indonesian and a Swiss company.

Since early childhood Edi has been fascinated by animals, in particular the birds of his native Germany. He recalls that, as a young boy, he spent all his pocket money buying seeds for his feathered friends.

Now a successful businessman and resident of Bali for more than eight years, he has at last been able to fulfil his childhood dream. With Indonesian assistance he has designed a modern bird park on two hectares. Its generous enclosures house exotic inhabitants from around the globe.

Swoboda modelled his project on the world-renowned Walsrode bird park in Germany, although Taman Burung's buildings are in traditional Balinese style. Each is topped by a thatched roof and done in warm, earthy colours.

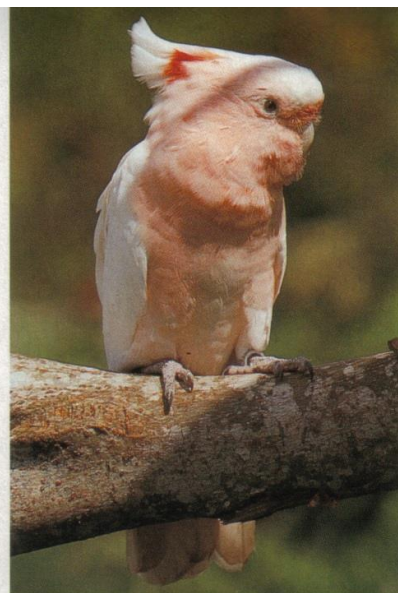
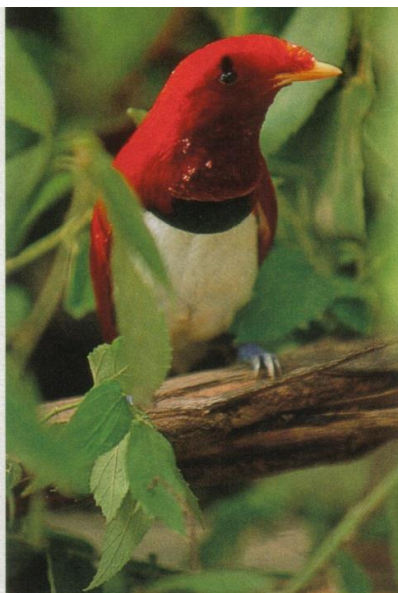
The many bird enclosures have a uniform, almost art-deco look. Their tropical, landscaped surroundings allow free-ranging native water birds to mingle with exotic Tanzanian flamingos. Fish are released daily into the shallow ponds as food for the growing number of water birds.

Great consideration has been given to the comfort of the bird population in the park, where enclosures are more spacious than in most zoos. Some visitors may even find it a challenge to spot the birds in their roomy cages.

Entering the complex from the car park, you are reminded of a luxurious hotel garden rather than a bird park. From the first-class restaurant there is a splendid view of tropical gardens, meandering pathways and shimmering ponds covered with lotus flowers and exotic water lilies. Here and there are small islands and even a waterfall.

South American macaws display their colourful plumes and large beaks while the loud screeches of magnificent Australian cockatoos lure visitors to their enclosure. Three species of hornbills, black palm cockatoos and temperamental cassowaries from Irian Jaya feature among the larger birds in the park.

My favourite display is the 12-metre-high walk-in aviary which houses many species of native Indonesian birds, among them rare birds of paradise from Irian Jaya. This self-contained tropical rainforest, in which dozens of



birds dart by, is an ideal setting for keen nature photographers.

Of the many weekend visitors to the park 70 per cent are Indonesian nationals, though the number of international visitors is rising steadily.

Situated at Singapadu, a kilometre past Batubulan where most tourist coaches stop for the famous Barong Dance, the Bali Bird Park seems likely to become an important attraction.

Its 160-seat restaurant is already a popular place to eat breakfast, in a lush, tropical setting amid the calls of exotic birds.

The park is home to more than a thousand birds of many unusual species—some unique to Bali. Among them is the rare and endangered Bali Mynah, a beautiful white bird with luminous blue masks.

Taman Burung's American curator, Judith Berg, comes with impressive credentials as a former professor and owner of a veterinarian service and a bird breeding farm in Hawaii.

For more than 30 years she has been a committed environmentalist and fierce fighter on behalf of birds threatened with extinction. For the past 15 years she has bred endangered species of Indonesian and South American birds.

A jovial, no-nonsense woman, Judith accepts the difficulties of trying to protect endangered species in a developing country and looks forward to the challenge of trying to breed rare Indonesian birds in Taman Burung. "It's going to be very difficult," she admits.

"Already 93 per cent of all land in Bali is under cultivation and some of the bird numbers are dwindling fast.

Clockwise from above left: male lesser bird of paradise; King bird of paradise; Major Mitchell; Edi Swoboda, developer and Managing Director of the bird park, with a Wreathed Hornbill; an Eclectus Parrot; a rare Bali Mynah—few are left in the wild but the Bali Mynah at the park is incubating fertile eggs



The Bali Mynah is already close to extinction and unless we can come up with a viable breeding programme, I believe this rare bird will be lost forever. We were fortunate to receive a pair, bred in captivity, from the Bronx Zoo. It was donated to us by an Indonesian citizen. With only around 20 birds left in the wild, we now have great hopes that our pair will thrive here in its native environment."

A flock of Tanzanian flamingos roaming nearby in shallow waters did not come from Africa, but was bred in captivity at the Vogelpark at Walsrode

in northern Germany. Breeding flamingos in a bird park is extremely difficult as the birds generally will not mate until the flock has reached more than 14 members.

Judith sees Taman Burung as a springboard for the survival of endangered species.

"Our aim is to try to breed many rare Indonesian birds to safeguard their survival. When numbers have dwindled to only a handful of birds, time has usually run out to save that species with a breeding programme," she says.

"For the survival of any species, we



Taman Burung, Singapadu, Bali

need a larger pool of genes to ensure healthy offspring. Already we have a licence from the Indonesian government to breed unprotected birds as well as 22 endangered species including the bird of paradise and the rare black palm cockatoo.

"Since we opened the park, we have had many offers of bird donations from the locals. Unfortunately, many of the animals brought to us are in an appalling state. Crammed in tiny cages, many arrive malnourished and with other health problems. But, with patience and proper veterinary care, most of these birds do recover and provide excellent breeding stock for our park."

Judith points out some fine hornbills. "You should have seen them when they came here six months ago—without feathers. They were in a dreadful condition. Children had tied string around their legs to try to force them to fly like kites."

The Bali Bird Park has begun extensive breeding programmes for some of Indonesia's endangered species. One of the park's projects—suggested by the Governor of Bali—is a breeding programme for the lesser sulphur-crested cockatoo. It was once prolific in Bali but now only eight are left on Nusa Penida, a small island near Bali.

"Although there are only a handful of pairs left on Nusa Penida, this once-common bird is still not on the protected list," says Judith. "It is likely, though, that there are a number of these birds kept as pets in private homes and we hope we can find some of them

to help us in our breeding programme."

She hopes the park will raise awareness of the plight of many bird species, especially among the local population. Rare birds are still regarded as status symbols in Asia and fetch high prices—often in excess of US\$1000—on the black market.

The beautiful feathers of the male bird of paradise are sought-after by the natives of Irian Jaya and for ceremonial purposes at cremations in Bali. No wonder it is a prime target for poachers.

Edi Swoboda is all smiles when asked about future plans for the Bali Bird Park.

"Shortly, we will be branching out and opening a spacious enclosure for a very special guest, the giant Komodo dragon (from the island of the same name east of Bali), and plans are ready for an even bigger walk-in aviary," he says.

Part of the income generated from the park will pay for the ambitious breeding programme and should save some of the most endangered bird species of Indonesia. The ultimate aim is to avoid extinction.

Says Ed: "If the Bali Bird Park can act like Noah's ark and save a number of rare birds from extinction, then our efforts will have been truly worthwhile." G

Holli Hollitzer and Dan Bool are photojournalists who travel extensively in Indonesia