

ST. AUGUSTINE

# Alligator Farm

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ZOOLOGICAL • PARK

NEWSLETTER

JUNE ~ 2005



*Young Tomistomas In Thailand*



# John's Journal

## Tomistomas In Thailand

John Brueggen  
Deputy Director

In November of 2004, I traveled to Thailand with David Drysdale (the owner of the Alligator Farm) and Kent Vliet (the Scientific Advisor for the Alligator Farm). We were in search of a very rare crocodile called *Tomistoma schlegelii*. You may have heard this animal called the False Gaviel, or Malayan Gharial. We tend to refer to them as Tomistoma. These are unusual looking crocodiles with very long, slender snouts. Of course, most of you know that the St. Augustine Alligator Farm Zoological Park is the only zoo in the world to display all of the known crocodylian species. In fact, we have three Tomistoma in our collection already, one of them a 13' male that weighs over 600 pounds.

So, why did we travel all the way around the world to see another one? We heard that there was a crocodile farm in Thailand that not only has Tomistoma on display, but is successfully breeding them. Tomistoma are on the US Fish and Wildlife list of Endangered Species. They are also listed as Critically Endangered with CITES and are listed as an Appendix I species. They are becoming increasingly rare in the wild and very few zoos know how to breed them. There have only been three successful reproductions of Tomistoma in US zoos in the last 50 years. It was our hope to be able to visit a facility that is successfully breeding these animals and learn what their secret is.



John and a young *Tomistoma*

In addition to the scientific benefits, we heard that there were several very large specimens at this farm, over 15 feet long! Of course, we couldn't pass up an opportunity to see that.

We traveled to Bangkok, Thailand and met with Uthen Youngprapakorn, who runs three crocodile parks in Thailand. One of the parks is open to the public, one is a private breeding facility, and one will soon be open to the public. We were able to take a tour of all three facilities. The park that is in development is a fascinating concept. There are thousands of crocodiles in a huge enclosure. The enclosure has high fencing to keep the crocodiles in, which would normally impede your view, but not to worry. Viewing the crocodiles is easily done over the top of the fence from the back of an Asian elephant.

Every visitor will mount his/her own elephant and ride it around the zoo! It was an amazing experience. We were some of the first to do this, so the elephants and crocodiles were both a little nervous around each other, but I'm sure they will get used to one another soon enough.

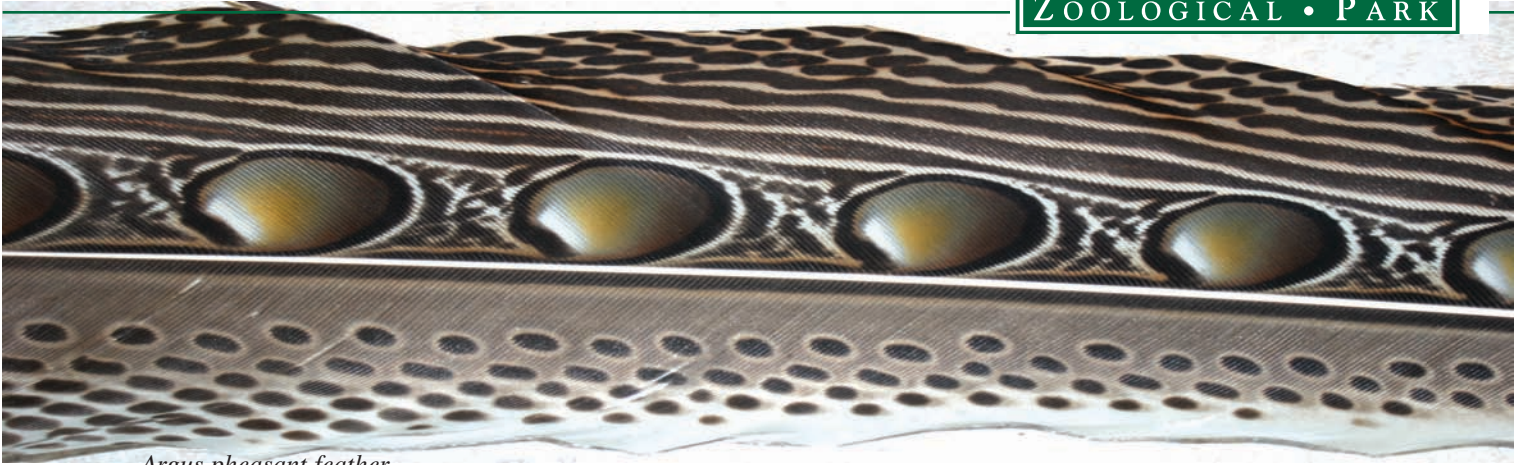
Uthen also showed us a pen of his very large breeding Tomistoma. In fact, there were several animals over 17' long! We were so impressed that we discussed the opportunity to purchase several animals to help increase the potential breeding stock in the United States. However, we ran into problems obtaining the proper permits, and we are still not sure if it will be possible to import the animals we wanted.

We learned a lot on this trip and are in the process of expanding the Tomistoma exhibit in our park. We hope to be able to stimulate our animals to breed based on some of the things we learned in Thailand.



Kent at the new crocodile park





*Argus pheasant feather*

# BIRDS OF A FEATHER

*Amanda Whitaker*

*Bird and Mammal Curator*

Although all birds have feathers, not all feathers are alike. They come in many different shapes and sizes and serve several different functions. Feathers not only give a bird its color, they also provide insulation, a means of flight, and protection for the skin.

The structure of a feather consists of a main shaft with a wider, usually colored part called the vane. The vane is composed of numerous barbs which “zip” together to hold the feather’s shape and form a strong, flat surface. There are two main types of feathers that serve two distinct purposes. The contour feathers include the feathers that cover the body and the flight feathers of the wings and tail. The body feathers vary greatly in size, shape, and color but are symmetrical and provide a protective surface. The flight feathers tend to be asymmetrical

and provide the lift and propulsive force necessary for powered flight. The second type of feather is down feathers, the kind that is used to stuff pillows and coats. They are small and lack the interlocking feature so they appear fluffy. Chicks hatch covered in down feathers and don’t develop contour feathers until a later age. Adults keep some of their down feathers close to their skin to provide insulation to keep them warm.

Probably the most striking feature of birds is their diversity in plumage colors and patterns. The coloration of a feather may be due to the presence of pigments (chemical coloration) or due to physical properties of the feather (structural coloration), or both. For many birds, it is necessary to ingest certain pigments in order to retain their optimal color. Feather colors that are structural in

nature are a result of selective light reflection and refraction. They are not really colored, but only appear so as long as the integrity of the feather remains intact.

Feathers are so complex that they often produce entirely opposite effects. Bright showy birds, like the male peacock, use their feathers to attract a mate, whereas small shore birds like sandpipers rely on sand colored feathers to camouflage them from predators on the beach. Owls have specialized feathers that enable them to fly silently, whereas some birds, such as the snipe and woodcock, use their feathers to make sounds. Next time you look at a bird consider the shape, structure, and function of the feathers and realize how complex they really are.



*Pesquet parrot feather*

# Polly Want A Corn Dog?

by: David Minshall, Bird & Mammal Department

That may sound silly, but you might be surprised to know some of the items we have seen some of our guests offer to the animals here at the St. Augustine Alligator Farm.

One of the most important responsibilities that the members of our Animal Department have is to make sure that our furry, scaly, or feathered friends residing here remain healthy. Our various species of parrots displayed on perches within the park, for example, are observed daily and weighed weekly. The Bird Department is constantly modifying the animal's diets to keep them in their optimal weight range. Plus, while some foods are wonderful for people, they may not be suitable for other creatures. Chocolate, for instance, may have medicinal qualities for us, but for birds it is toxic!

One of the many opportunities to interact with our stars here at the park is guests can feed swans, ducks, turtles, and even juvenile alligators. Food that is appropriate for these animals is available from vending machines placed in front of their respective exhibits. Another chance to get involved is at the "Photo Hut" located next to the Reptile Theater. Here you can not only touch an alligator, but you can take the experience home by purchasing a photograph professionally snapped of you doing it,



so friends and family will believe you!

So, on behalf of all of us here at the St. Augustine Alligator Farm, we appreciate you enjoying your visit with us and not leaning on the "Do not feed the animals" signs to give "Polly" a bite of your cotton candy.

## "TOOLS OF THE TRADE"

### Word Search

Look For The Message In The Leftover Letters

By Amanda Davisson/Bird and Mammal Department

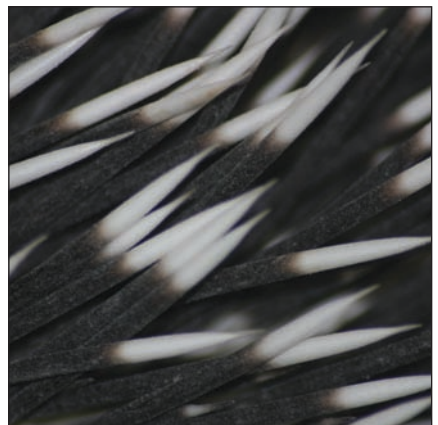
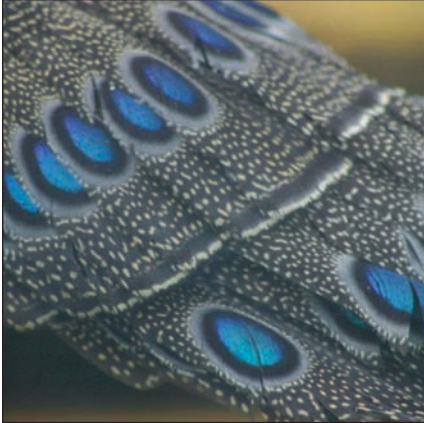
- |         |            |           |
|---------|------------|-----------|
| Hook    | Bucket     | Catchpole |
| Rake    | Tongs      | Shovel    |
| Tape    | Microphone | Rope      |
| Shields | Towel      | Bamboo    |
| Scale   | Microchip  | Food      |

C O M E A N D V T O N G S  
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 A R Y O C A T C H P O L E  
 R U E N O H P O R C I M L



# FUR, FEATHERS, SKIN, AND SCALES

Can you match up the animal with the photo?



Parrot  
 Alligator  
 Monkey

Snake  
 Pheasant  
 Human

Toucan  
 Tortoise  
 Porcupine

Answers: 1. Pheasant 2. Monkey 3. Snake 4. Alligator 5. Toucan 6. Parrot 7. Human 8. Tortoise 9. Porcupine



## New African Dwarf Crocodile Exhibit

Once again we have successfully opened a new exhibit in time for the newsletter. This time around it was the African Dwarf Crocodiles that benefited from our labors. This new enclosure allows visitors to get eye to eye with a unique crocodile.



Last Issues Cross word Answers

### NEWS

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William E. Puckett .....Director  
 Amanda Whitaker .....Editor

### Contributors

John Brueggen .....Deputy Director  
 David Minshall .....Senior Keeper  
 Amanda Davisson .....Animal Keeper

999 Anastasia Blvd.  
 St. Augustine, Florida 32080

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