

keeps bird friends in feed, feathers

But when Ronald Kimbell tells Tornado the swan to straighten up and fly, the creature lifts his graceful head to the sky and croons like a folk

Gossips at the Fort Worth Zoo have long maintained that Cookie the Cockatoo is madly in love with

in the neighborhood.

Kimbell has a way with birds. As supervisor of the zoo's bird department, he is responsible for keeping nearly 400 birds well-fed and feath-

It's a job that has changed markedly since Kimbell joined the zoo as a high school graduate more

than 20 years ago.
"I was looking for a temporary job," Kimbell said. Except for a two-year stint in the Army, the Fort Worth Zoo has been his only employer. He is a bachelor and has devoted his life to the art.

"But when I started I'd never learn about birds.'

There have been many changes in the way birds are cared for since Kimbell started at the zoo.

The techniques have changed,' he said. "We have better foods and medical care. Also many of the birds used to be so easy to get, we didn't worry when one of them died. Now some birds are so rare, you'd better really take care of them.

1983 when the birdhouse at the zoo burned down. Some of them were rare and some on the endangered species list.
"We had 10 Bali mynas in the

birdhouse that we hoped to release back into the wilds of Bali," Kimbell The endangered mynas were part of a breeding program at the

the Fort Worth Zoo regards propagation of rare and endangered species as one of its major functions.

"Zoos working together may be the best hope some of these animals have," Kimbell said,. "A lot of our purpose is to propogate and release back into the wild. Unfortunately, in some cases, there is no wild to re-lease back into, so zoos are trying to help some of these species survive in captivity at least.

Many birds were housed in other cages or in the large outdoor aviary.

Right now, we have 44 roseate spoonbills, and we just shipped 12 to Walt Disney World," he said. "Normally, zoos breed the ones they're

swap around with each other. W be getting some scarlet ibis back our spoonbills."

The spoonbill breeding programmer has been so successful that it is nered a Silver Propagation Awa given by the American Association for Zoological Parks and Aqua in recognition of 25 successful

"Our spoonbills are really in mand," Kimbell said.
But for Fort Worth's zoo to

Vol. 80

come one of the leaders in the fi of bird propogation, a new many aviary is vital, he added. Plans we being drawn for one before their The projected aviary would more than \$3 million, said I

Turner, director of the zoo ing has been sought from s Fort Worth's major foundation "Right now we don't know we stand," Turner said. "We

told that no funding was ava last year, but we were asked ton ply this year. That's what we did, we haven't heard anything yet." As envisioned by Turner

Kimbell, the new aviary would be state-of-the-art facility that we make Fort Worth one of the thr leading zoo's in the country when comes to birds. The other two are San Diego and Bronx zoos.

The new facility would have to major exhibit areas represent four climatic zones: tropics, swam pine and savannah. Birds indig nous to each area would be show But the facility also would overon some of the propagation obstate now faced by Kimbell and his seen person staff.

"Some birds need a natural la itat setting in which to breed," Kin bell explained. "For example, son tropical birds need a certain amo of humidity before they'll mate. the tropics, the rainy season indicates to them that there will enough food for their young."

Thanks to much research, ax have a far better understanding a how to get birds to breed than the did 20 years ago, Kimbell said.
"It used to be that zoos didn

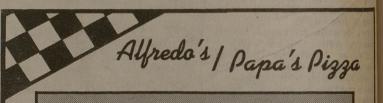
want birds raised in captivity, & cause they didn't think they would breed," Kimbell said. "Now we know that these birds often are bette breeders because they are calment a zoo setting."

Imprinting is another problem that has been overcome. Imprinting is the tendency of a young animal decide that it is the species that first sees, and birds are particular prone to it. If a newly hatched bird first lays eyes on a human, up reaching adulthood, it's likely to play mating behavior toward as vorite zookeeper while ignorm those of its own kind. Obviously, the

can thwart most breeding programs
"The Bronx Zoo has developed a
effective way to deal with imprinting in those cases where the adult bit can't or won't take care of the young," Kimball said. "They us hand puppets of birds when working with the babies."

"It's a problem because we're trying to get her to mate, but wheneve I'm around, all she wants is for met scratch her tongue.

Kimbell deals with this misplace love by avoiding the cockatoo most



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FORT WORTH — Not everyone can talk to a swan or a cockatoo and

Kimbell and shamelessly ignores her mate to flirt with him whenever he's

These days, a person would have a hard time getting a job at the zoo without a college degree in the field, Kimbell said.

worked with birds before and I'd never studied them," he said. "I've taught myself as I went along and learned from experience. Some-times experience is the best way to

Kimbell still mourns the loss of 177 birds that died Christmas Eve in

Along with many other zoos in this country and around the world,

Fortunately, not all the Fort Worth Zoo's breeding programs were damaged severely by the fire.

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