

## Rare St. Vincent Amazon Parrot Born At Houston Zoo

### Zoo welcomes Vincent, the third of her species born in captivity

By Erin O'Brien

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Photo Courtesy Houston Zoo

At only 49 days old, Vincent exemplifies the colorful look of the St. Vincent Amazon species. The Houston Zoo welcomed the birth of Vincent, a female St. Vincent Amazon parrot, on May 28, 2008. Vincent, named in honor of the zoo's first St. Vincent Amazon, is the third of this rare species to be hatched in captivity at the Houston Zoo.

The St. Vincent Amazon is considered a rare species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature because in the wild, it lives only on the tiny Caribbean island of St. Vincent.

"We're the only zoo in North America that houses the species," said Chris Holmes, the supervisor in the bird department of the Houston Zoo who is hand-raising Vincent. "There are only about 800 [of the birds] left in the world."

The Houston Zoo welcomed the first Vincent, its original St. Vincent Amazon, as a donation in 1967 and housed Kirby, the first captive hatch of the species in the world, in 1972.

"After receiving Vincent, the zoo administration at the time made every effort to ... locate more of this species in zoos and bring them to Houston to initiate a captive-breeding program," Holmes said. "Including Vincent, the zoo was able to bring together five birds. In 1972, the male [named] Awk, on loan from the Bronx Zoo, and Vincent hatched and raised Kirby."

The second captive hatch – the female offspring of Patty and Buccament – took place in 1999. Since Patty and Buccament also parented Vincent, the now 9-year-old St. Vincent Amazon and Vincent are sisters. As Vincent is only the second offspring of Patty and Buccament since the late '90s, this species' particularly slow reproductive rate is apparent.

Vincent, whose brown, green, yellow, blue and orange feathers have already come in, has come a long way since she was initially developed in an incubator, according to Holmes.

"Vincent is doing very well!" Holmes said. "She is flapping a great deal and eating mostly on her own. She is down to one syringe feeding."

Vincent's egg was taken from the nest and placed into an incubator the morning it was laid, since a captive hatching of a St. Vincent Amazon is extremely rare. When Vincent is ready, she will join her parents, her sister and her sister's mate in the Avian Conservation Environment (ACE) building, an off-exhibit site at the Houston Zoo.

"The specific date Vincent will go to live in the off-exhibit area is up to her," Holmes said. "Before she is moved we want to make sure that she is eating well on her own and is progressing in her flight abilities. Most probably we will start doing soft introduction in the next two weeks [by] placing Vincent in the off-exhibit area next to the other birds during the day and bringing her back in at night."

Despite the Houston Zoo's recent confirmation that Vincent, like the original Vincent, is a female, Holmes said the zoo has not considered changing her name.

"We are not thinking of changing the name," Holmes said. "The first Vincent was also a female, and this chick is named in honor of this bird. She came to us in 1967 before the advent of sexing techniques."

Vincent's parents, sister and sister's mate will go back on exhibit at the end of breeding season in August. Vincent, on the other hand, will probably stay off-exhibit for quite a while. Since St. Vincent Amazon parrots typically live between 50 and 60 years, the Houston Zoo is in no hurry.

"Vincent may be on display at a later date," Holmes said, "but for now, we would like to concentrate on getting her socialized with other parrots."



Watch the video from the Houston Chronicle about the Houston Zoo's latest arrival [here](#).