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## **Waddesdon Manor Aviary celebrates breeding success with extinct-in-the-wild Socorro dove**

The Aviary team at Waddesdon Manor, a National Trust property in Buckinghamshire, is pleased to announce a significant milestone: the successful breeding of the Socorro dove (*Zenaida graysoni*), a species that disappeared from the wild over 50 years ago.

In an exciting development, two squabs (chicks) hatched at the Aviary in August 2024, marking the first time the birds have been successfully bred at the site. The Socorro dove, once native to Socorro Island off the coast of Mexico, has been extinct in the wild since the 1970s and now survives only in human care. With only 30 Socorro Doves in captivity across UK zoos, 113 in Europe (including the UK) and 186 worldwide, they are a key focus of global conservation efforts, and each successful hatching is a significant step toward the species' survival.

Breeding Socorro doves is notoriously challenging due to short reproductive windows (females often stop laying viable eggs around the age of five) and their reluctance to incubate eggs. However, in early 2024, signs of progress emerged at Waddesdon Manor Aviary when the breeding pair—a young female from Bristol Zoo and an eight-year-old male originally from Edinburgh Zoo—began laying eggs. Unfortunately, the pair failed to incubate them, abandoning their nests and building others elsewhere, and subsequent efforts to foster the eggs under other dove species in the Aviary—an approach that has worked in some zoos—also proved unsuccessful.

Given the importance of the breeding pair and the Aviary team's extensive experience with hand-rearing difficult species, it was decided to try this approach with the next viable eggs. There has been little precedent and success for hand-rearing Socorro doves due in large part to their unique dietary requirements, but, on 31 August 2024, two squabs successfully hatched weighing just six grams each.

The Aviary team then carefully fed the chicks a special liquid diet using a syringe and tube to mimic crop milk—a highly nutritious substance produced in the parents' crop, a pouch in their throat where food is stored. Parent doves then bring up this milk-like fluid to feed their chicks, giving them the essential nutrients they need to grow. Crop milk is fairly rare in the bird world, produced by only a small number of species including doves, pigeons, flamingos and penguins.

Thanks to the team's efforts, the hand-rearing approach proved successful, and by day 15, the squabs were fully feathered, had reached a healthy weight of 100 grams and were fledging the nest. Both chicks have since been identified as male and the team plan to introduce them to Waddesdon's historic Rococo-style aviary for public viewing in the near future. There are also hopes of pairing one of them to establish a second breeding pair.



Gavin Harrison, Assistant Curator at Waddesdon Manor Aviary, said: *“Given that the Socorro dove is extinct in the wild, the species is a high priority for our collection. Efforts are ongoing to get this species back into the wild, and being a part of that effort prompts a lot of what we do here at Waddesdon. We are very pleased to have reared two Socorro doves; breeding the species has been a goal since we started working with them”.*

## **NOTES FOR EDITORS**

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- Socorro dove squabs, day 2 © Waddesdon Image Library
- Socorro dove squabs, day 6 © Waddesdon Image Library
- Socorro dove squabs, day 11 © Waddesdon Image Library

**Waddesdon Manor Aviary** is home to around 200 birds representing 37 species, many of which are threatened with extinction. Many are housed in the beautifully restored cast-iron aviary that was built in the grounds of Waddesdon Manor by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild in 1889. Additional off-display aviaries further support breeding programs and house young birds until they are transferred to other institutions as part of coordinated conservation efforts.

To find out more about the Aviary at Waddesdon Manor and the work that they do, visit [www.waddesdon.org.uk/aviary](http://www.waddesdon.org.uk/aviary)

**Waddesdon Manor** was built at the end of the 19th century by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild in the style of a French early 16th-century château. Baron Ferdinand was an inspired collector, and the house was designed to showcase his exceptional collection of English and Dutch paintings, French 18th-century furniture, Sèvres porcelain, and other decorative arts. When Ferdinand died in 1898, he left Waddesdon to his sister, Alice, who was also a great collector. Upon her death the house passed to her great-nephew, James de Rothschild, who inherited a substantial part of his father Baron Edmond’s great collection. In 1957, to ensure its future in perpetuity, Waddesdon was bequeathed to the National Trust. The Rothschild family continues to run the property through a family charitable trust, the Rothschild Foundation. Until February 2024, it was under the chairmanship of Jacob, 4th Lord Rothschild. His eldest daughter, Hannah Rothschild, is now the chair. [More here.](#)

For more information on Waddesdon, visit [www.waddesdon.org.uk](http://www.waddesdon.org.uk), like @WaddesdonManor on Facebook, follow @WaddesdonManor on Twitter and @waddesdonmanor\_nt on Instagram.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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