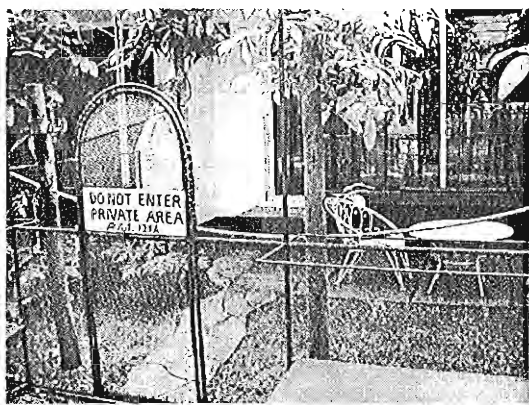


Racso's Woodland

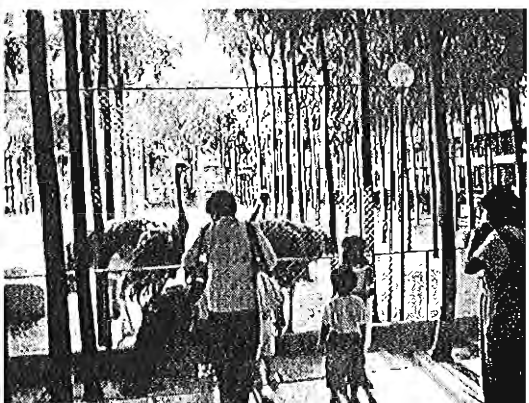
Racso's Woodland is a beach resort on the island of Iloilo in the small town of Guimbal. Although there are probably a number of resorts and restaurants which feature a few fish, birds and other animals in Philippines, Racso's is unique for several reasons. "Racso" is actually Oscar (spelled backwards) Garin, a politician and sometime Congressman, whose family owns much Guimbal and supports a good chunk of its populace. Garin apparently has been a wild animal lover since childhood, turning his penchant for collecting all manner of wild animals into a means of both showing them off to the public and also supporting his hobby. He owns two resorts across the road from one another, a farm which breeds fighting cocks, and perhaps many, many other concerns.



One of the rooms which include a sit-out connecting to the aviary at Racso's Woodland

There are said to be a number of private collections in Philippines. Oscar Garin's may be one of the largest with hundreds of rare and common birds, mammals, reptiles and fish in his two resorts. Garin is fond of saying "Fulfillment comes instantly to a man when a cherished hobby becomes a way of making a living." Having collected so many animals and having people clamouring to see them, Garin hit upon this zoo resort idea as a solution to what had probably become a problem -- feeding and caring for hundreds of animals.

Garin has tried to create a sort of Paradise for his visitors who can either stay at the Resort in one of many types of rooms, or come to see the animals or use the sports facilities (including combat shooting), picnic area on the beach, etc.



Local visitors bring their kids to the resort as a zoo and picnic area. This viewing area for mixed species is a 360 view, which can be stressful for animals

He has put in many interesting features such as guest rooms attached to the open aviary in such a way that the guest can have his morning coffee on his own private enclosed verandha in the presence of many of the aviary birds. There is also a sort of glass enclosed conference room in the middle of the aviary where conferees are surrounded by bird life and vegetation. Surrounding the open aviary are rows of individual cages where more valuable birds and birds of prey are kept.



Uncommonly seen domestic dogs and cats are on view as well as the rarest of the rare Philippines endemic wild animals.

There is also a sort of natural history museum in the form of a cave where visitors can walk through a darkened maze decorated by African cave paintings, dioramas of stuffed animals and also live animals, including bats, leopard cats, civets and other animals. This museum is not good for the live animals but one has to appreciate the creativity behind the facility. Now, these cages will be suitably modified.



Some felid experts at the conference commented that Philippines Leopard cats in all facilities were consistently smaller than those from other countries. Perhaps a different subspecies. Full grown animals are the size of 6-months kittens.

Across from this section is a large open air enclosure where mixed species have been kept, ostrich, kangaroo, giant tortoise, etc. Behind this open air enclosure, around most of which are picnic tables which completely surround the animals, are dozens and dozens more cages where everything from unusual breeds of dogs to the most highly threatened endemic animals of Philippines are kept. Some of these animals are improperly housed, such as the Philippines spotted deer, the Vysan pigs (which, in any case, have been cross bred with Pot-bellied pigs), and many others.

Despite the mistakes and anomalies in Garin's collection, his interest and sincerity were recognised by the South East Asian Zoo Association which agreed to have an important event, their Annual Conference, at Racso's Woodland resort. Philippines zoo persons were on the scene for SEAZA from the beginning but somehow their plan to host an Annual Conference could not materialise until Garin sent his representative, hardworking Edward Cham, to Saigon last year to request the conference venue for the coming year. SEAZA agreed.



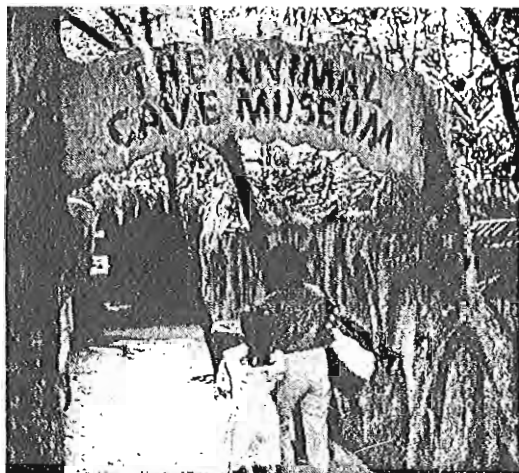
Philippines spotted deer is endemic and threatened. This is one of the enclosures Rasco's should think of improving



Attractive African cave paintings are just one of the many creative and innovative techniques used in the Animal Cave Museum at Rascoe's.

Some of the SEAZA board members toured Rasco's Woodland with the former Congressman and gave him suggestions for how to improve the conditions for the animals in his facility. Garin took the suggestions very graciously and gratefully, guaranteeing that these changes and more would be made. SEAZA President Bernard Harrison gave astute suggestions which required very little in terms of money and resources to make a very big difference to the animals. Once these are done, a more rigorous inspection can be conducted and perhaps a whole new Master Plan can be drawn up. We have to appreciate Harrison's wisdom and vision also in "capturing" Garin for the zoo community, by promoting a position vision, rather than highlighting the flaws.

Although Garin's facility is not our traditional ideal of a good zoo, his interest and sincerity -- and power as a political figure -- cannot be denied. All Philippines zoological institutions to a great extent have been out of the communications loop for some time and need drawing into the international zoo community and the relatively recent progress made towards making zoos better places for animals from a welfare and conservation point of view and for people from an educational point of view. Congressman Garin, as a zoo owner and a political figure, can use his influence and resources to help the whole Philippines zoo

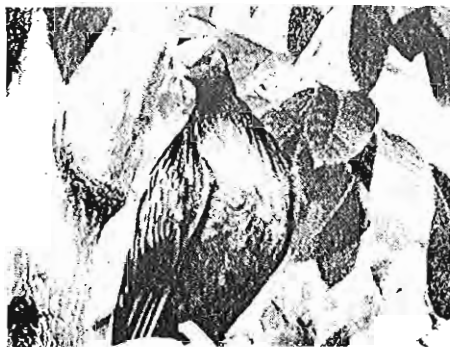


The Animal Cave Museum boasts stalagmites cave paintings and attractive dioramas. The live animal cages need help however.



Another conservation anomaly -- hybrid pot-bellied pig and Philippines Vysyan pig. Instead of freaks, Rascoes could breed many valuable endangered species.

community to become integrated with one another and with the international zoo community. Already there is a proposal and a commitment from Garin to promote the creation of an Association of Philippines zoos. With someone of Garin's stature behind this proposal, some of the sticky bureaucratic difficulties may be avoided and the association can become a working reality with clout and power of its own. Garin and his wife (who is now the Congressman since Garin had served the maximum number of terms) can also stand for additional zoo and captive animal legislation which is badly needed in Philippines.



One of the beautiful pigeons in Oscar's Woodland walk-in aviary.