

Toledo Zoo's Expertise Helps Hatch Chicks of One of the World's Rarest Birds

Three blue-eyed ground dove chicks mark a major milestone in international conservation effort guided in part by the Toledo Zoo

OH, UNITED STATES, June 18, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In a significant breakthrough for global bird conservation, three blue-eyed ground dove chicks — members of one of the world's rarest bird species — have successfully hatched in Brazil. The event is a major step forward for the international initiative to save the species and reflects years of planning, training and collaboration, with the Toledo Zoo playing a critical leadership role.

After 75 years, the blue-eyed ground dove (*Columbina cyanopis*) was rediscovered in 2015 in Brazil's Cerrado biome. The most recent count showed that 11 adult individuals remain in the wild. In response, an international network of partners formed to protect and recover the species through the creation of a managed population under human care.

Partners include Parque das Aves, SAVE Brasil (BirdLife International in Brazil), Chester Zoo in the United Kingdom, Bronx Zoo and the Toledo Zoo, whose contributions were key to the success of the recent hatchings.



Blue-eyed ground dove chicks. Photo credit: SAVE Brasil

Toledo Zoo's role: leading with expertise

Joe Wood, manager of international conservation programs at the Toledo Zoo and co-chair of the IUCN SSC Pigeon and Dove Specialist Group, developed the successful hand-rearing protocol that contributed to the current achievement. In 2019, Wood joined early field efforts in Brazil and, during the COVID-19 pandemic, created an aviary in Australia to test and refine artificial incubation techniques for small dove species.

"Our team at the Toledo Zoo provided guidance and technical leadership that helped make this success possible," Wood said. "The hatching of these chicks gives us hope that the species still has a chance, and it shows what's possible when international partners come together with the right tools and expertise."

Wood was supported by the Toledo Zoo's bird department, whose experience hand-rearing fruit doves helped form the foundation for the techniques used with blue-eyed ground doves.

"The Toledo Zoo bird staff is excited to lend their expertise to this project," said Staci Bekker, area manager of the bird department at the Toledo Zoo. "Our team developed a successful hand-rearing protocol for fruit doves, which helped shape the techniques now used with blue-eyed ground doves. It's rewarding to see our work in Toledo directly support efforts to save this highly threatened species."

In 2023, Wood returned to Brazil to assist directly with the first successful attempt to hand-rear blue-eyed ground doves. Since then, the Brazilian team has continued applying and refining his methods with growing success. This year's three chicks bring the managed population to six individuals now under the care of Parque das Aves.

An international effort with local roots

While the Toledo Zoo and other international partners have provided strategic guidance, Brazilian institutions have led field-based conservation. SAVE Brasil and Parque das Aves have overseen nest monitoring, habitat protection and community outreach around Botumirim, where the wild population persists.

The hatchlings came from eggs carefully collected from wild nests early in the breeding season. The goal is to minimize disruption in the wild while maximizing survival rates through artificial incubation. The young doves are not on public display and will reach breeding age in 2026.

"This is science-based conservation at its best," Wood said. "It's about combining field knowledge, genetics, animal care and international cooperation to give this species a future."

More details about this conservation project, including videos and photos, can be accessed here: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1EnyLImunRbmwvZCsPG9NPt7iL9TwVQxE?usp=drive_link

Learn more about the Toledo Zoo's global wildlife conservation at toledozoo.org/mission.

About partners in the Blue-eyed Ground Dove project

The full list of partners and organisations supporting the project is as follows:

SAVE Brasil (BirdLife International in Brazil), Parque das Aves, Toledo Zoo, Chester Zoo, Bronx Zoo, The National Centre for Bird Conservation (CEMAVE), of the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio), the Centre for Species Survival Brazil, part of the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Instituto Claravis, the Grande Sertão Institute, BirdLife International, the Municipality of Botumirim, the Minas Gerais State Forestry Institute (IEF), Durrell Wildlife, Vogelpark Marlow, the University of Brasília, Laboratory of Genetics and Molecular Evolution of Birds (LGEMA) and Luiz de Queiroz College of Agriculture at the University of São Paulo. Financial support is provided by the American Bird Conservancy, BirdLife International Species Champion - Bruce Peterjohn, the Brazilian Ministry of the Environment, the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, Keidanren Nature Conservation Fund/BirdLife International Tokyo and Neotropical Birding and Conservation.

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About the Toledo Zoo

The Toledo Zoo & Aquarium, situated in Toledo, Ohio, proudly holds membership in the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums and accreditation from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Boasting a diverse collection, the Toledo Zoo & Aquarium is home to more than 16,000 individual animals spanning 680+ species. Actively engaged in conservation efforts, the Zoo participates in over 80 species survival programs. With a robust community of over 78,000 active membership households, the Toledo Zoo & Aquarium welcomes about 1.1 million visitors annually.

About "Honoring our past. Envisioning our future."

"Honoring our past. Envisioning our future." is the 125th-anniversary campaign for the Toledo Zoo, commemorating 125 years of conservation, education and community connection. Since its inception in 1900, the Toledo Zoo has grown from a modest collection of animals into a world-renowned zoological institution.

Throughout the 2025 calendar year, the Toledo Zoo will host a series of special events, exhibits, and programs to honor this remarkable milestone. These celebrations will highlight the Zoo's historic achievements, ongoing conservation efforts and ambitious plans for the future. Visitors can look forward to engaging experiences that connect them to the Zoo's mission of inspiring people to care about wildlife and natural environments.

Join us in 2025 to celebrate this extraordinary milestone and help shape the next chapter of the Toledo Zoo's incredible legacy.

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