

New Aviary Trustee Diego G. Martinez remembers growing up in Colombia in a big Spanish colonial house with patios and a large fig tree. There were always tropical birds, especially parrots, in the trees around the house. From his father, he also acquired early on a love of trout fishing.

He graduated from college with degrees in chemical and metallurgical engineering as well as management, and went on to work for large American multinational corporations, including Mellon Financial. His job, managing and financing investments in emerging economies, would take him all over the world, particularly to Latin America and Asia.

All of this travel to places such as Colombia, the Amazon, Indonesia, Brazil and Patagonia exposed him to a large variety of birds. Not coincidentally, these were also prime locations for some of the best fishing in the world. For more than twenty-five years, he was what he describes as an “opportunistic tourist” – he carried a fly rod and binoculars, and spent much of his time out of doors.

As his knowledge of the areas grew, he made a sobering observation: “When development arrived, the variety and quantity of fish and birds declined or even disappeared.” In some heavily industrialized regions of Brazil, he saw no birds or fish, not even insects. He recalls seeing picturesque rivers, savannas and forests with no birds at all.

While in Brazil, he was especially impressed by his visits with a friend to the Xingu Indigenous Park in the state of Mato Grosso. Created by the Federal government in 1961, the park is an Indian nation unto itself that covers an area of 10.8 million square miles. The Xingu allow no development or clear-cutting for farming and use no fertilizer or pesticides on their crops. Diego

described it as “nature at its wildest.” The Indians there commonly keep birds as pets, allowing them free range of the villages.

In many ways, Diego said, the vast open areas of Brazil are still like the American West in the 1800s, with huge ranches covering thousands of square miles. Today there are several large ranches that are “no hunt/no kill/no capture,” and there is a growing preservation mentality and eco-tourism industry. “It’s encouraging that some are choosing to preserve the land and natural resources,” Diego said.

beautiful birds in the Amazon filling every ecological niche, their absence will tell us that we have made a place unfit for us to live.”

Diego hopes his interests and contacts in Latin America and Asia will contribute to the possibilities of research partnerships and exchange programs

Diego Martinez makes friends with Gracie, the Aviary’s Chestnut-mandibled Toucan.



## trustee profile: **Diego G. Martinez**

by **Jan Allen**, Development and Communications Associate

When he returned from Brazil in late 2003 with his wife, who was raised in the Pittsburgh area, the National Aviary became a popular place to visit with his nieces and nephews. He describes the summer outdoor bird show as “very professionally done – but unforced and natural.” He’s also impressed with the very advanced facilities of the Avian Hospital. One of his three daughters has worked with parrots and birds of prey, and he hopes soon to have an opportunity to show it off to her. He’s very interested in the medical research programs of Dr. Pilar Fish and, of course, the conservation research projects of Dr. Todd Katzner. “Many times in my life I have been awed by the birds around us,” Diego said, talking about the importance of conservation. “Whether it’s the Atlantic flyway geese and ducks of the Eastern Shore or the incredibly

for the Aviary. He would also offer his assistance with gifts and endowments for research. He’d like to be a “bridge to Latin America and Asia,” and has already met with Dr. Katzner to explore opportunities for the Aviary.

The Aviary is excited to have Diego’s help in expanding the scope of our mission. As he said, “We’re not the City of Pittsburgh Aviary or the Allegheny County Aviary. We’re the *National* Aviary,” representing the best in the country. Our bird population is already truly international, coming from every continent except Antarctica. “Board members such as Diego,” said Board president Mel Rex, “make an important contribution to the Aviary’s national and international reputation for having top-notch people, programs and research, particularly in the fields of conservation and education.”