

# Rebuilding the waterfowl collection at Disney's Animal Kingdom

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PAUL SCHUTZ

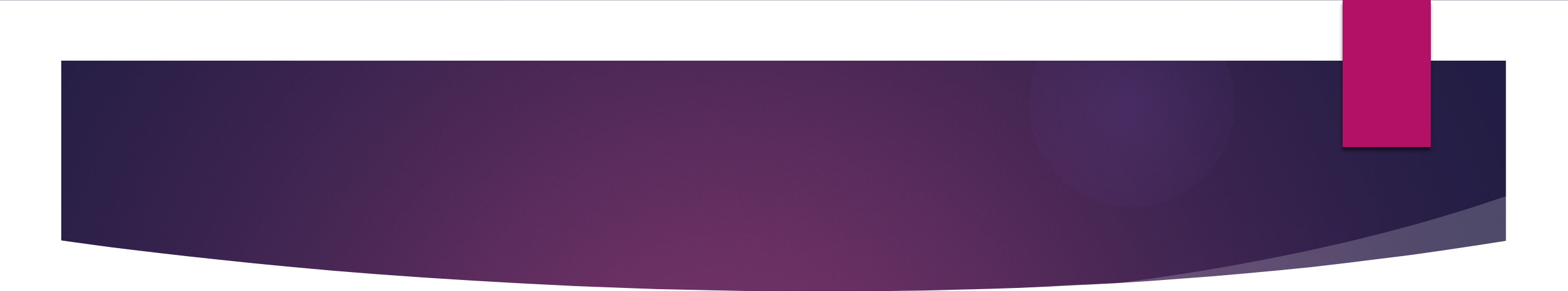
ANIMAL OPERATIONS MANAGER – BIRDS

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*speaker notes in italics*

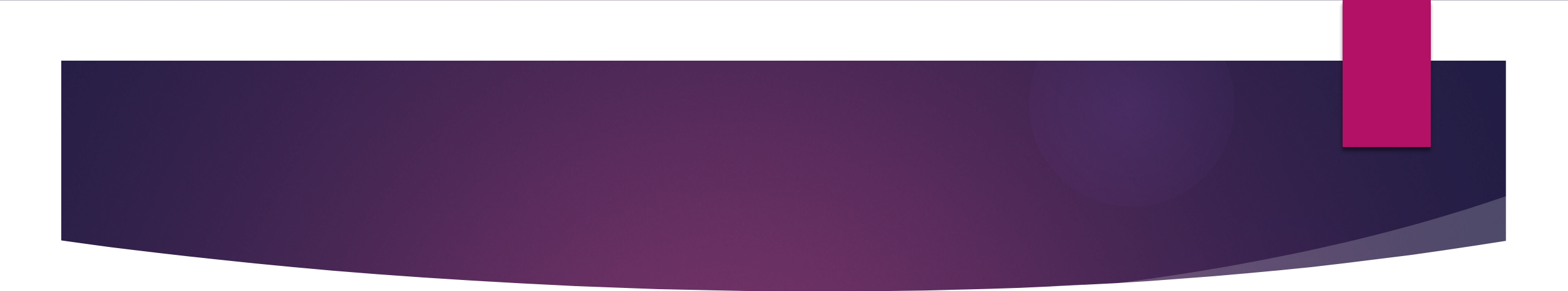
# Our collection



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- *I oversee the bulk of our bird collection, which is in two large walk-through aviaries as well as an off-exhibit breeding/holding facility.*
  - *This collection is heavily soft-bill focused. Some waterfowl located in each aviary, but that portion of collection is relatively limited.*
  - *We have an active breeding program and we're heavily invested in numerous managed populations*
  - *Birds in other areas of the park are managed by other teams and the Birds team has only a consulting relationship*



# Reorganization

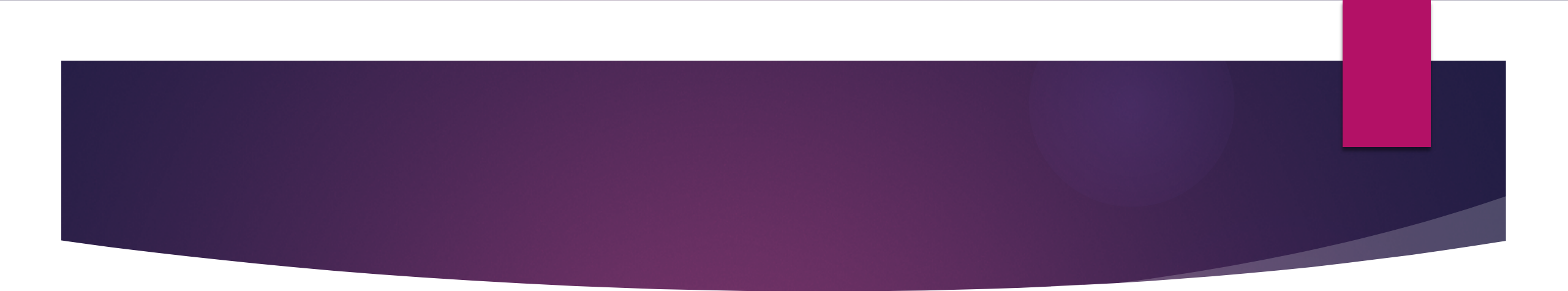
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- *Late 2021 – as part of reorganization of some of the animal care teams, the Birds team gained Oasis waterfowl exhibits.*
  - *The Oasis is the first area guests see as they enter park. It is lushly planted, features multiple water features, and has multiple exhibits with mammals, birds.*
  - *We took control of 5 exhibits which were strictly birds. All had significant land and water space.*
  - *Historically, these exhibits had a large waterfowl collection, but over time that collection had dwindled. At the time of the reorg, the waterfowl collection consisted of 13 species and 32 individuals*
  - *In fact, when I was talking to Keith, I said “Much of what is there is old, not recommended, not particularly interesting or some combination of all 3. I’d like to start changing that”*
  - *So, we began not develop a plan to revamp the waterfowl collection.*

# Goals for revamped collection

Guest Impact

Space for  
managed  
populations

General  
sustainability of  
waterfowl in  
AZA

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- *Our mission was to revamp the waterfowl collection with the aim to improve both our guest impact as well as the collection's AZA and conservation impact*
  - *Basically, we wanted it to align with the rest of our bird collection goals. As part of that, we had 3 main goals:*
    - *Guest impact – it's the first area guests see, so we definitely wanted to add some visually attractive species. We can, however, balance that with some species that need work but perhaps don't stand out as much.*
    - *Provide additional spaces for managed and/or recommended populations*
    - *Contribute to general sustainability of waterfowl populations in AZA*

# Advantages of area

- ▶ Space
- ▶ Flexibility
- ▶ No zoogeographic theme







*Let's talk about some of the advantages of the area.*

- 1. The Enclosures offer a lot of room, water space (including deep water) and land space. There was clearly plenty of potential to add lots of birds.*
- 2. Multiple (5) on-show enclosures allowing flexibility. If some mixes of species don't work, we have plenty of nearby options to move birds into.*
- 3. There 's no Zoogeographic theme (like we have in other places in the park). We are free to try any species that we think will work (in any combination).*

# Challenges

- ▶ Off-exhibit holding space
- ▶ Staff Expertise
- ▶ Wild bird competition
- ▶ Flight restriction
- ▶ Lower fences
- ▶ Heat\*





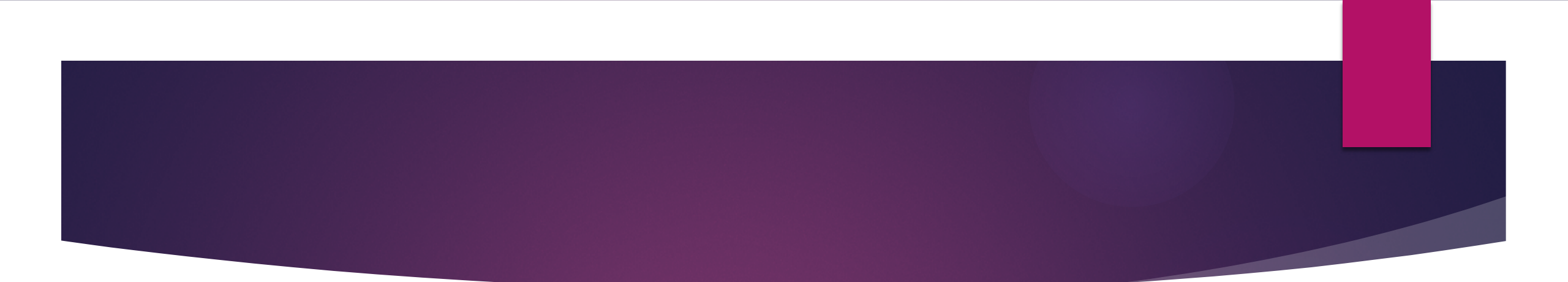
*There were also a few challenges for us to contend with as we grow the collection:*

- We have somewhat limited off-exhibit holding space for waterfowl compared to what we have for aviary species (but we're working on this)*
- Staff expertise (inheriting new staff) – We have relatively limited waterfowl experience on the team. In addition, we inherited some new staff as part of the reorganization. Some had experience in the area, but not in our way of managing things, others had little bird experience. There has been a bit of a learning curve for managing waterfowl, aggression, etc.*
- Wild bird competition – lots of fly-ins (mostly mallards and white ibis) means there's competition for food. In the past, this was dealt with by just feeding more, but we wanted to find some better solutions.*
- All the enclosures are open, so birds need to be flight restricted.*
- Lower fences (3.5 feet in most cases) – probably limiting our ability to try large agile things like screamers and magpie geese.*
- Heat (but shade too) – It's obviously warm in Orlando. So, this does somewhat limit of species selection (probably no Eiders). On the plus side, most of the enclosures are very shady.*
- Of course, not really having to worry about cold weather does make some things easier.*

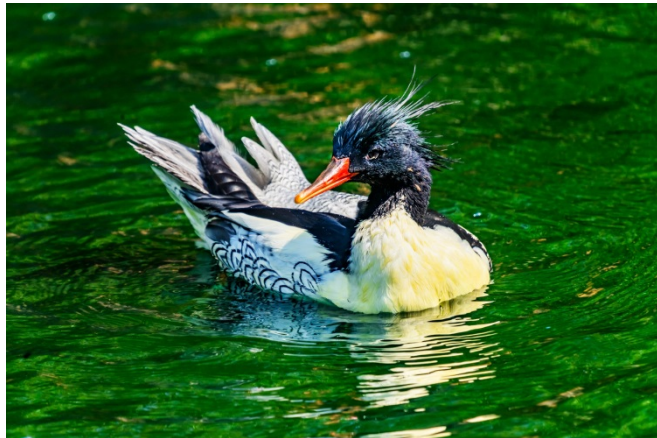
# Collection planning

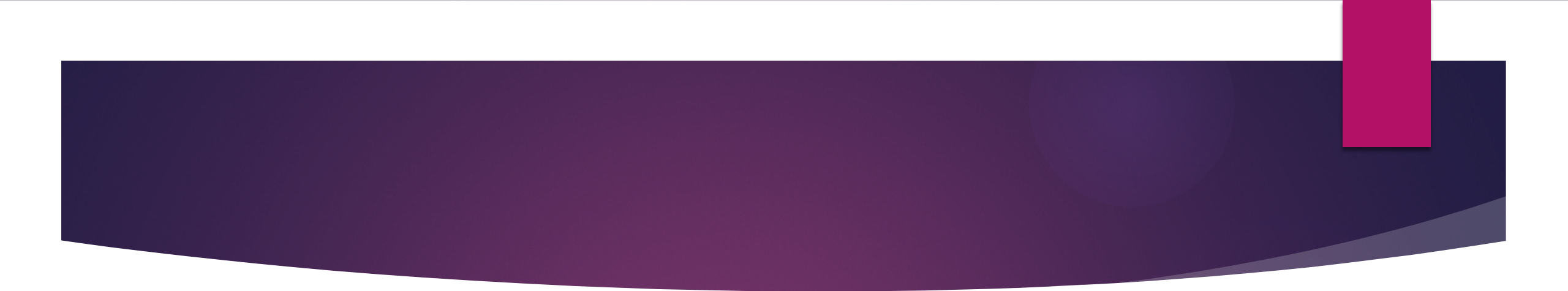
- ▶ RCP
- ▶ Reaching out to more experienced colleagues
- ▶ Internal conversations
- ▶ Diversity/Filling niches



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- *I started by reviewing the Waterfowl RCP. See, someone does read them! We paid special attention to managed programs, Rafts, DERPs, etc. as we wanted to make sure that those were the backbone of our collection*
  - *I had multiple conversations with Keith, Jacob (who had some familiarity with the spaces we were talking about), as well as other colleagues. Conversations included things like species that would work in our climate, what species would get along with others, potential sources for acquisition.*
  - *We also had numerous conversations with our staff (including ZMs and keepers). While our staff expertise with waterfowl is lower compared to some other things, we do have plenty of people with experience. Engaging keepers helps build interest and excitement for direction of the collection.*
  - *Ultimately, we want each exhibit, and the collection, to be well rounded. Ideally, each enclosure should have small, medium and large species, divers, dabblers, more terrestrial species, etc.*

# What we've done so far



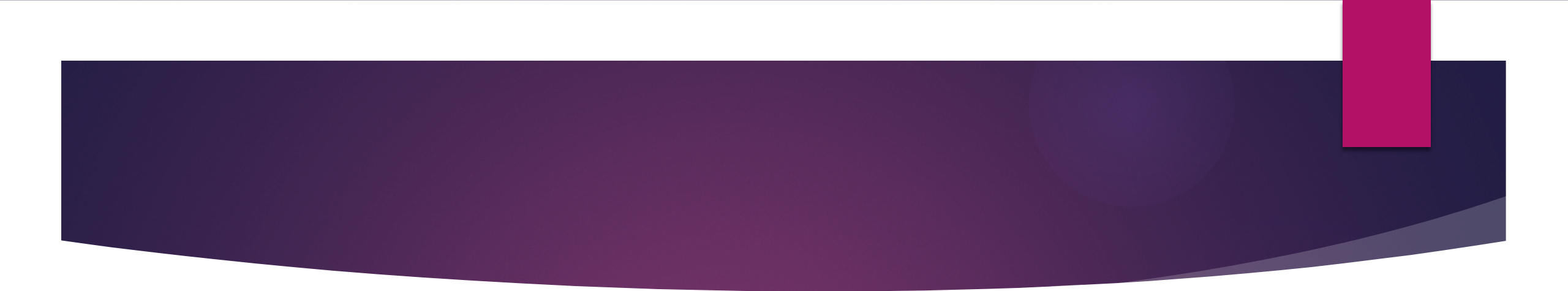
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- *Added (or in the process of adding) several recommended species (scaly-sided mergansers, red-breasted geese, coscoroba swans, lake duck, Baer's pochards)*
  - *Some species that we've wanted to add have been difficult to acquire due to lack of availability. In some cases, finding flight restricted birds has been challenging as well.*
  - *We are currently working on various exclusion feeders to help with mallard/ibis competition. I'm optimistic that we can make a dent in this.*
  - *We haven't really had to deal with any significant aggression so far, but I'm sure that will be something we face as the collection grows*
    - *Barnacle geese vs Coscoroba swans*
    - *Orinoco geese vs BN swans*

# What we're planning

- ▶ New species
- ▶ Adding more individuals of existing species
- ▶ Rearing facilities





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- *Planning to add additional species (smew, falcated teal, American Widgeon, northern shoveler, West Indian whistling duck) as they become available*
  - *We're also planning on adding additional individuals for existing species (like plumed whistling duck, Australian wood duck, rosybill, canvasback, redhead, ferruginous duck)*
  - *Lastly, we're evaluating our hand-rearing facilities and preparing for future breeding and hand-rearing. We currently have the capacity for small amounts of waterfowl breeding but are anticipating expanding this part of our breeding program, so some facility tweaks will likely be needed.*