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# Tehran Bird Garden, unique in the region



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## Iranica Desk

Tehran Bird Garden is a beautiful and green environment in which you will see rare birds that are not found anywhere else. Some birds are flying freely in a part of the garden, where visitors can communicate with nature directly.

A huge steel structure, with a large net about 50m high, covers the garden.

In the Tehran Bird Garden you can walk alongside the birds and enjoy the beauty of these incredible creatures. The lakes and creeks flowing in this garden, as well as beautiful wooden bridges built over these rivers, have doubled their beauty.

Manager of Tehran Bird Garden Hamid Reza Mahabadi put the total area of Tehran Bird Garden at 86 hectares, of which 23 hectares are used for keeping the birds.

He added that 8,000 birds, from

176 species, are presently kept there.

Cassowary, a type of rare and flightless bird native to Australian forests is among the strangest birds you can see in the garden. The Cassowary is usually considered to be one of the world's most dangerous birds, at least where humans are concerned. Cassowaries are shy and usually hard to spot.

"We have prepared a special atmosphere for this type of bird to not only live freely but not harm themselves and others," he said.

He noted that the Tehran Bird Garden has close cooperation with the Department of the Environment (DoE).

"Sometimes the department gives us birds which are in need of care. We look after them with much attention and prepare them for return to nature."

Some ponds have been built at the entrance of the garden,

which are used to disinfect visitors' shoes. Moreover, the garden's personnel remind people to avoid feeding the birds.

Mahabadi said that the management of the Tehran Bird Garden was handed over to the private sector.

Referring to the financial problems they faced in running the garden, he noted that the spread of COVID-19 in the country led to a two-year closure of the Tehran Bird Garden.

"This helped create many financial problems for the complex; however, it was not possible for us to leave the birds unattended. They needed food, treatments and vaccinations. Our specialized workers were present in the garden all days during the period," he said.

He noted that the garden ranks first in the Middle East in terms of area and the number of birds kept in it. It has been built in two sections, the first of which is al-

located to caged birds.

He noted that in the second section, expanding in an area of 6.5 hectares, the birds are free to fly. He said that some people buy birds, but after some time they can't keep them any more due to certain reasons including living in an apartment, thus, the best solution is to give them to the bird garden.

Mahabadi said that about 150 workers with various tasks are active in the Tehran Bird Garden. Some of them manage the green space of the garden while others are involved in feeding and taking care of the birds.

"Active in the garden is a team of veterinarians who visit various parts of the garden on a daily basis and bring sick birds to the clinic to be treated," he said.

The Tehran Bird Garden, located on East Babaie Expressway, Kouhestan Street, is open to the public in the summer from 10 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. every day.

## Development of Persian Islamic art

Islamic art history was essentially developed from the 19th to the 20th century, and the major discourse of the double-adjective "Persian Islamic," or the more hybrid term "Perso-Islamic," art was thus conducted chiefly by Euro-American scholars. During the formative period of its scholarship, the primary concerns for Persian art among western scholars were given to architecture and "miniature" painting of the great mediaeval dynasties of the Seljuks, Ilkhanids, Timurids and Safavids.

Sculpture, which traditionally ranks highly in western art history, lost its significance after the Muslim conquest when many figurative traditions of the Persian world were dismissed or modified. One category that did not match western art historical concepts but was soon accepted as distinctively "Persian" as well as rightly "Islamic" along with architecture and "miniature" painting, especially among collectors and museums, was carpets. Surviving examples that can be attributed to the pre-Islamic Persian world

were not discovered until the mid-20th century, although mediaeval descriptions of pre-Islamic Persian carpets were already well-known. So-called "minor arts" or "arts and crafts," according to western art-historical traditions, such as metalwork, ceramics and glass, were also viewed as subjects of investigation but more often integrated into the wider category of Islamic art. Other genres of the "minor arts," such as arms and armour, were also collected, but these were rarely viewed distinctively as Persian objects. Euro-American scholarship inevitably Euro-Americanised the approaches to these topics. This is particularly the case with the single Persian "miniature" painting leaf, which was viewed and appreciated as the Persian equivalent to old master's oil painting but not as a book illustration. Persian "miniature" painting was thus sold individually, as well as delicately framed, often with the emphasis on image rather than the entire page with text, and it was predominantly

displayed on the wall in Euro-American museums.

In order further to establish the connoisseurship of Persian "miniature" painting in the West, the role of painters was overemphasised, while calligraphers and other aspects of the art of the book were downplayed. For most westerners of this time, undecipherable Arabic letters must have been viewed as irrelevant for the appreciation of "miniature" painting, and this tendency may have promoted the detachment of image from text both in scholarship and in art dealing.

While calligraphers were rarely featured in the early writing of Persian painting in the West, some identifiable figures of Persian painting, like Reza Abbasi (1565-1635), became "stars" or "masters," following the western art-historical canon. Deriving from pre-existing Persian notions of Kamal al-Din Behzad (1460-1535), this late-Timurid painter became "the Persian Michelangelo (an Italian sculptor, painter, architect, and poet)." These juxtapositions enabled



A miniature by Reza Abbasi  
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European scholarship to build up Europeanised constructs for the discussion of Persian art in which the lonely genius of a Behzad or another painter eclipsed the manuscripts which contained the paintings.

Like the Japanese rediscovery of Ukiyoe prints' painters, the Persian world rediscovered the Persian artists through European assessments. In turn, Iran and Tajikistan would name their new mu-

seums in honour of these rediscovered artists, hence the Reza 'Abbasi Museum in Tehran (opened in 1977) and the Kamal al-Din Behzad Museum in Dushanbe (opened in 1945). Ironically the latter museum does not possess any, even single painting by its denominator, but it has modern, European-inspired, oil paintings, intending to evoke the forgotten, if not mythical, past of the Tajik nation. Such a painter-oriented taste

ultimately set a borderline between art history and philology (text) in Persian manuscript studies. This often resulted in distorted transliterations and misinterpretations of the text in the past. Yet thanks to the rise of codicology in the field of Islamic manuscripts in recent days, it is a right time to declare that every aspect of the physical condition of Persian book painting has nowadays thoroughly been studied.