

Ward Museum showcases the development of conservation efforts

Beginning on July 15 the Ward Museum opened the first of two new exhibits designed to explore the interactions between people and wildfowl in the United States over the last two centuries. Through September 23, "Catching a Glimpse" will present the works of American wildfowl illustrators whose work has given rise to the growing phenomenon of birding in the United States and around the world. From September 30 to January 12, 2012, "Back from the Brink: Stories of Wildfowl Conservation" will show how the efforts of lawmakers, birdwatchers, environmentalists, hunters and everyday citizens have helped to bring some species back from the edge of extinction.

Early masters of American wildfowl illustration, such as Mark Catesby, John James Audubon and Alexander Wilson systematically documented and presented the diversity of birds and their habitats. Later artists like Roger Tory Peterson and David Sibley continued their explorations with the development of field guides, enlightening others to the beauty of the natural world. This exhibit presents a glimpse of the art, artifacts and elements of popular culture that have contributed to this emergence of interest in birds, collectively shaping our perceptions of the natural world for generations to come.

But all bird enthusiasts know that many species have faced challenges. Throughout the United States several species of birds have neared extinction as gunning practices and habitat loss have taken a toll on wildfowl populations. Over the last century, the efforts of many have helped bring some species "Back from the Brink." This second exhibit shares stories of successful conservation efforts, attempts that came too late, and what the fu-



John James Audubon.

ture might hold for currently threatened species and habitats.

The first explorers who touched the shores of North America were astonished by the richness of its bounty, including the vast numbers and wide variety of birds. The early colonists became expert hunters and by the early 1800s most East Coast cities had become centers of commerce with thriving game markets.

The market hunters who supplied them gunned down waterfowl with shocking success in both the fall and spring migrations, providing them with a decent living. The supply seemed endless, and there were few regulations, but as the century wore on the supply of game began to dry up. The causes were variable and not fully understood – industrial pollution and loss of habitat due to agricultural processes certainly played roles – but de-

struction by market hunters was most easily recognizable to the public at the time.

During the mid-1800s, this decline in numbers became a major concern. Theodore Roosevelt, in collaboration with hunters, scientists and explorers, formed the Boone and Crockett club in 1877 in an effort to conserve wildlife populations and habitats. The American Ornithologists Union and the National Association of Audubon Societies convinced him to provide federal protection for dwindling shorebird species, as the commercial demand of the ladies' hat trade for feather plumes had triggered rapid population declines.

By 1900 sportsmen had begun to put pressure on state and federal governments to slow down the devastation. Many of these sportsmen were members of gunning clubs and were witnessing the decreased populations of wildfowl year after year. They passed club rules, including self-imposed bag limits along with curbing unsportsmanlike behavior.

In 1903, Pelican Island in Florida became the first national wildlife refuge to provide protection for wading birds. The National Wildlife Refuge system now includes 553 refuges covering more than 150 million acres. Federal and state agencies, in cooperation with private conservation groups, provide research, management, protection, conservation and preservation for America's diverse wildfowl populations.

The U.S. Congress, in response to a growing demand for the preservation of our natural resources, passed the Migratory Bird Act of 1929 and the Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Act of 1934. Shepherded through Congress by such influential people as J.N. "Ding" Darling, a Pulitzer prize-winning cartoonist and avid conservationist, these two acts led to the creation of the Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps, also known as "Duck Stamps." Created by the U.S. Postal Service for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife, they were used as licenses required for hunting migratory waterfowl. The money raised was allocated to purchase or lease wetland habitat, and since 1934 have generated over \$750 million to preserve more than 5.3 million acres of prime habitat.

While government agencies played an important role, ordinary citizens also did their part. In the late 1800s the Christmas "side-hunt" was an important holiday tradition. Hunters went afield in a competition to bring in the most birds. Frank Chapman, an



Many sports and market hunters shipped their kill to the game markets by railcar.

early Audubon Society officer, proposed a new holiday event, a "Christmas Bird Census," to count birds instead of shooting them.

Such educational, environmental and conservation efforts have brought a number of species back from the edge of extinction; for some, like the passenger pigeon, help arrived too late. Other species still face danger from habitat disruption. "Back from the Brink: Stories of Wildfowl Conservation" explores the efforts being made to ensure their continued survival.

For more information concerning the exhibits contact the Ward Museum at (410) 742-4988 or visit their website at www.wardmuseum.org.

2011 "Old Bird" Antique Decoy Competition categories

The Ward Museum has announced its categories for its 12th annual Antique Decoy Competition, held during the Chesapeake Wildfowl Expo on Saturday, October 8, 2011. This year the competition will feature canvasbacks from ten different regions.

Registration will be held on Saturday morning between 9:30 - 11 a.m. and participants can enter up to four categories. They must be working decoys made prior to 1950 and pairs count as a single entry. The winner will be determined by a vote of the participating owners and a panel of three judges will determine if the entries fit the categories and will vote to break any ties. The winners must agree to display their winning decoys at the Ward Museum immediately following the contest and for a period of up to six months.

The Expo kicks off on Friday morning for a two-day buy, swap and sell meet in the museum parking lot. A pig roast will be held on Friday evening after the show. Admission to the event and the museum galleries is free. For more information contact the museum at (410) 742-4988 or visit their website at www.wardmuseum.org.

2011 Categories

- Best New England Canvasback
- Best Great Lakes Canvasback
- Best Delaware River Canvasback
- Best Upper Chesapeake Bay Canvasback
- Best Crisfield Canvasback
- Best Virginia Canvasback
- Best North Carolina Canvasback
- Best Illinois Canvasback
- Best Louisiana Canvasback
- Best West Coast Canvasback



Guides setting out decoys on Great South Bay, ca. 1900.

Revisiting Long Island's elite hunt clubs

The Suffolk County Historical Society in Riverhead, New York is presently featuring a new exhibition: "Private Places/Public Spaces: Suffolk County's Elite Hunt Clubs & Regional Decoys." The display features photographs, historical documents, art, artifacts and regional decoys from the gilded age of Long Island's private hunt clubs.

By the late 19th and early 20th century millionaire robber barons, made rich by the Industrial Revolution, were building their Long Island estates as retreats from the metropolitan scene. Leaving their elite men's clubs of New York behind, these wealthy gentlemen founded rural counterparts in exclusive, private hunt clubs and lodges that dotted the shorelines of Suffolk County and encompassed hundreds of acres of wetlands.

The lodges they built provided food, comfort, camaraderie and a wealthy man's view of country living. The waterfront locations also provided an abundance of waterfowl, perfect for the gentlemen's shooting pleasure. Local residents were hired as guides, gamekeepers and staff for the clubs; many supplied them with decoys. The tradition of decoy making, already long-established on the island, flourished with this new demand.

What began as gentleman's exclusive enclaves has led to conservation and preservation of large tracts of land, thousands of acres retained in their natural state, as many of these famous hunt clubs were acquired by both New York State and Suffolk County as public parklands. Some of those include The Flanders Gun Club, Black Duck Lodge, The Suffolk Club, Southside Sportsman's Club and the Wyandach Club. A series of lectures on the history of each private club was held throughout the summer.

Also accompanying the exhibit is a display on the Pattersquash Gunning Club organized by Dick Richardson, a past president of the club. Founded in Bellport in 1922, it is an active hunting club with 60 members on Great South Bay. Many of the private clubs went out of business because they were individually owned, whereas the town of Brookhaven owns the Pattersquash club and lease the shooting rights.

For more information on this temporary exhibit, scheduled for display until August 27, 2011, contact the Suffolk County Historical Society at (631) 727-2881 or visit their website at www.suffolkcountyhistoricalociety.org.



Bud Corwin (L) and Dick Richardson with curator Cathy Curran at the Suffolk County Historical Society.