

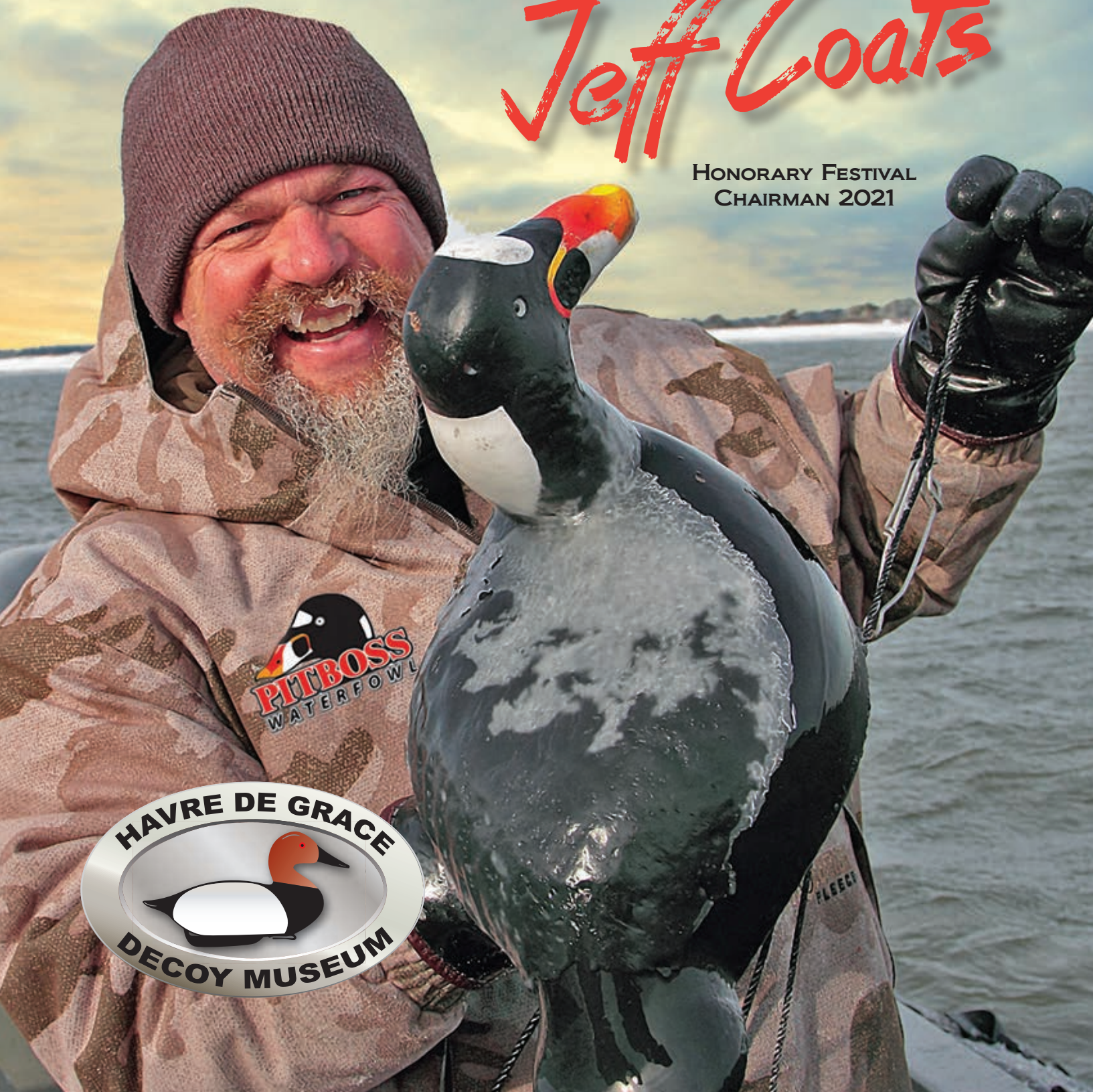
The Canvasback

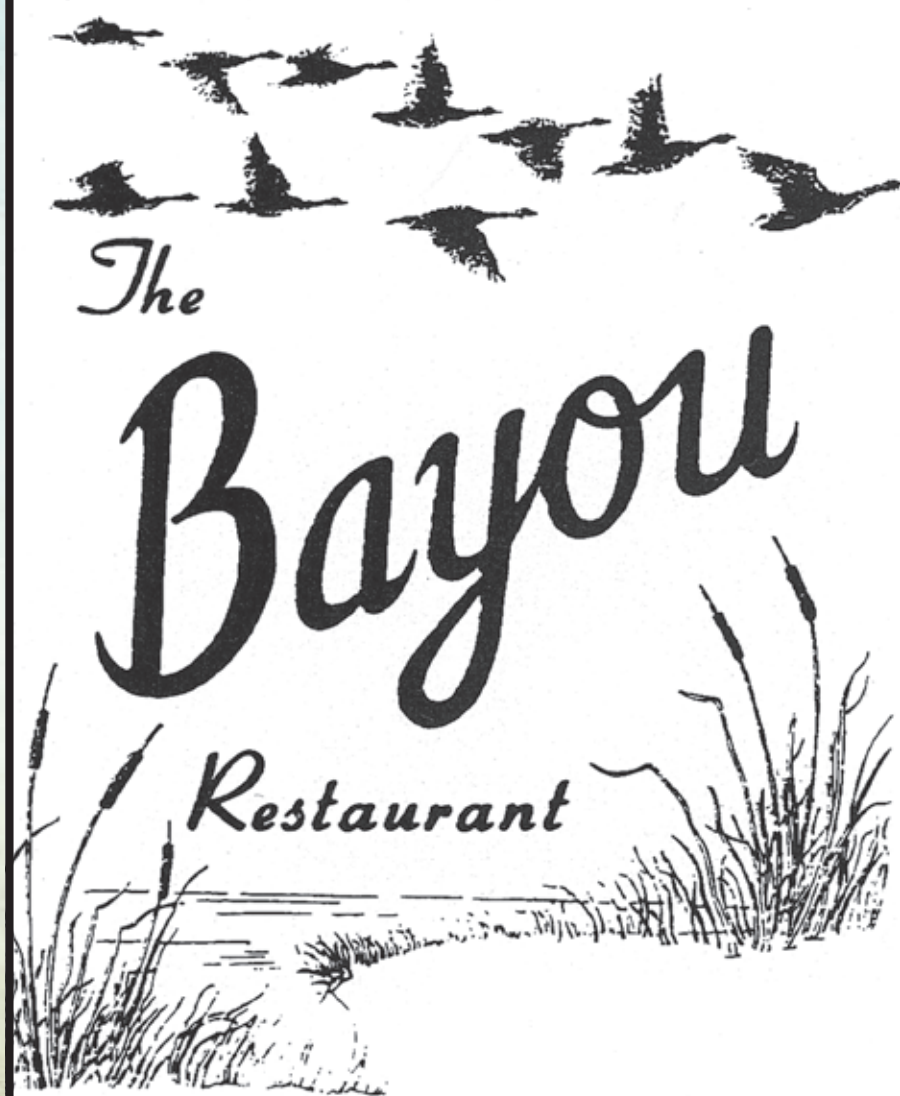
HAVRE DE GRACE DECOY MUSEUM

Spring 2021
Vol. 31 No. 1

Jeff Coats

HONORARY FESTIVAL
CHAIRMAN 2021





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can•vas•back

(kan'ves bak'), n., pl. -backs, (esp. collectively) — back.

1. a north american wild duck, the male of which has a whitish back and a reddish-brown head and neck.
2. a style of decoy made famous by carvers of the Susquehanna Flats region.
3. a quarterly publication of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum.

THE MUSEUM WAS INCORPORATED IN 1981 AS A 501(c)(3) TAX-EXEMPT ORGANIZATION TO COLLECT, DOCUMENT, PRESERVE, AND INTERPRET WATERFOWL DECOYS AS A UNIQUE FORM OF FOLK ART.

FUNDED IN PART BY



The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum is supported in part by the Maryland State Arts Council (msac.org)

ON THE COVER

The cover features Captain Jeff Coats of Pitboss Waterfowl on the water gathering up one of his Surf Scoter decoys during a hunting experience. Jeff made the switch from factory produced decoys to using those that he creates. Jeff says, "I satisfy my need for thrills by luring wild birds into a hunting rig using decoys that I have made by hand".



Contents

Features

- 4 Festival Announcement
- 5 Obituary: John Thomas Case
- 7 George David Blackiston
- 14 Shots from the Wild
- 18 48th Annual Candlelight Tour 2020
- 19 Captain Jeff Coats - Honorary Festival Chairman
- 24 Waterfowling on the Susquehanna Flats by Michael Daley
- 30 Canvasback Naturalist: Wood Ducks
- 35 The Ice Duck Cometh, Part II
- 39 Picnic on the Promenade

Departments

- 3 From the President
- 38 Museum Members
- ibc Museum News

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From the President...

With Spring in the forecast, we cannot refrain from thinking about getting out of our houses and enjoying the outdoors once again. This past winter brought us some cold and icy weather and forced us to again hunker down as the COVID virus made a resurgence. With warmer weather coming, COVID positivity numbers dropping, and approved vaccines being administered, the promise of better days ahead seems certain.



For the Decoy Museum, this means a renewed focus on the 39th Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival. Although the museum is planning to have this year's event, it will take on a different look for 2021. With public schools trying to re-establish in-classroom learning and not allowing usage of indoor school facilities, we have had to re-imagine our Festival weekend (see page 4) for 2021. All activities will take place on the museum grounds on Saturday, May 1. Captain Jeff Coats has again graciously accepted our invitation to be the Honorary Chairman of the Festival. We are closely following CDC, State, County, and City guidance in the hopes of not having to make any additional revisions. **Next year's 40th Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival (2022) will return to the normal format and take place at the new Havre de Grace Middle / High School.**

Planning efforts are underway to enhance the visitor experience to the Decoy Museum by capturing the viewpoints of subject matter experts in the various aspects of decoy carving, gunning the Susquehanna Flats and life inside the R. Madison Mitchell Shop. It is envisioned that these viewpoints will be available to our visitors through touch screen monitors located throughout the museum. Although this project is at a very early stage, the museum has submitted a proposal to the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA) for funding. MHAA provides dollar-for-dollar matching grants to nonprofit organizations for capital and non-capital projects located within a Heritage Area. Grants can support projects involving historical, cultural, or natural resources, sites, events, or facilities.

In addition to enhancing our visitor experience within our current galleries, we have formally approached the City of Havre de Grace regarding the expansion of our museum footprint. We have exceeded our capacity to tastefully present the items in our current collection and require additional space to support our projected growth. Although we are at the very beginning stages of our planned expansion, we are excited by the possibilities that will open-up with such a project. The initial concept for the expansion will be to encapsulate the R. Madison Mitchell Shop, removing it from the adverse effects of the weather, and making it part of the interior of the museum. Going forward, we will work with subject matter experts to develop an architectural plan to achieve our goals. From that plan, we will be able to better estimate costs and develop a time line for fund raising and completion of the project.

A museum as significant as the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum depends on the work of many volunteers as well as the dedication of our staff. As we continue to operate without an Executive Director, every member of our staff has stepped up to make this transition period as painless as possible. Volunteers Ginny Sanders and C. John Sullivan continue to refresh our exhibits to provide our patrons with new and exciting things to experience. Last, and certainly not least, Scott Moody has provided countless hours of IT support and guidance that has allowed the museum to take a quantum leap in technology. Not only has Scott guided our normal IT development, but he works closely with our projects that require audio/visual recording and photography. Thanks to all.

Mike Tarquini
Board President

39TH ANNUAL DECOY & WILDLIFE Art Festival

COVID precautions have resulted in the postponement of the scheduled activities at the Havre de Grace High / Middle School. Despite this setback, the Decoy Museum has decided to move ahead with the activities below on the museum property:

HONORARY CHAIRMAN
CAPT. JEFF COATS



FRIDAY, APRIL 30, 2021

7:00 PM – 10:00 PM

Welcoming Cocktail Party *

Greet Honorary Chairman, Captain Jeff Coats

Dedication of the Outdoor Artwork at the Museum (*Front of Museum*)

Congratulate Harford Living Treasure Award Winners - Allen Fair & Jim Pierce
(*Carvers Gallery*)

Opening of the David Blackiston Exhibit - Greet David Blackiston
(*Library Area, Carvers Gallery*)

SATURDAY, MAY 1, 2021

8:00 AM – 10:00 AM

Registration for Waterfront Decoy Competition (*Museum Grounds*)

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Registration for J. Evans McKinney Old Decoy Contest (*Carvers Gallery*)*

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Registration for the Carving Competition (*Carvers Gallery*)*

10:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Waterfront Decoy Competition (*Waterfront*)

8:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Tailgate Event (*Museum Grounds*)

1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

J. Evans McKinney Old Decoy Contest Public Viewing (*Carvers Gallery*)*

1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Carving Competition (*Carvers Gallery*)*

*Face covering must be worn when inside the Decoy Museum and outside when social distancing is not possible.



Surf Scoter
By Jeff Coats

JOHN THOMAS CASE

John Thomas Case spent his life enjoying the love of family and friends, the respect of colleagues and the beauty of dozens and dozens and dozens of ducks.

Mr. Case, 81, died Oct. 29 at Heritage Hills in Forest Hill, of complications of Parkinson's Disease.

Raised in Rodgers Forge, in Towson, MD, Mr. Case became a lifelong Harford County booster when he began his career as a history teacher at Havre de Grace High School in 1963. He became assistant supervisor of public relations for the county's public school system in 1970 and served as Chapter One Coordinator from 1982 to 1991. He was active in the North Harford Choral Parents Association and served as a chaperone on overseas trips for the group.

Mr. Case served as President of the Maryland chapter of the Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) from 1987-1988 and 2004-2005 and received the Paul Bell Award for demonstrating exemplary commitment to schools, children, and taxpayers.

Mr. Case retired from the school system in 1990 to spend more time assisting in raising his two young children and to focus on his desktop publishing company, Upper Case Letters. His retirement also gave him time to focus on his much beloved hobby, collecting waterfowl decoys created by various carvers within the Susquehanna Flats region.

His fascination with waterfowl began as a child watching the ducks and geese on the Wye River where his family had a summer home and grew into a serious hobby of collecting locally carved decoys. His collection included work done by the Ward Brothers, Madison Mitchell, Cigar Daisey Don Briddel, James Currier, Jim Pierce, James Holly, Ed Pierson, and Pat Vincenti. Besides decoys, Mr. Case's waterfowl collection included artworks by Louis Frisino and others.

An amateur photographer, Mr. Case's favorite subject was always canvasback ducks and he spent hours patiently waiting for the right picture to present itself.



Mr. Case was a board member of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum and editor of its quarterly membership publication, *The Canvasback*. Much of his collection has been donated to the Museum.

Mr. Case graduated University of Michigan with a bachelor's degree in history. He was a member of the school's glee club and rifle team. As a loyal Wolverine, Mr. Case frequently attended football games in Ann Arbor. He received a master's degree in education from Towson University.

Known for his love of diverse social gatherings with family and friends, Mr. Case had a reputation for making the perfect Black Russian using homemade Kahlua. He was an avid concert and live theatre goer throughout his life.

Mr. Case is survived by his son John Whitney Case (Amanda) of Fawn Grove, PA; daughter Emily Elizabeth Hoene (Travis) of Airville, PA; grandchildren Anna, Jackson and Abigail Case; Otto and Elliott Hoene; brother Charles Case (Patricia) of Annapolis; and sister Carolyn Wnuck (Frank) of Peoria, AZ.

His first wife, Patricia Baker Case, died in an automobile accident shortly after they were married. And while his marriage to his second wife, Colleen O'Meara Case, ended in divorce they continued to be close friends.

A memorial service will be held on May 22, 2021 at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. Memorial donations can be made in John Case's name to Johns Hopkins University c/o Fund for Johns Hopkins Medicine, the Pacing for Parkinson's Fund, 550 North Broadway, Suite 724A, Baltimore, MD 21205 or at <https://secure.jhu.edu/form/neuro>

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A photograph of an elderly man, George David Blackiston, sitting in a workshop. He is wearing a green jacket, a blue shirt, and a camouflage cap. He is holding a realistic sculpture of a mallard duck. The workshop is filled with various tools and materials, including paint containers, brushes, and a workbench. The background is a blue wooden wall.

George David *Blackiston*

By Mike Tarquini

Personal Background

George David Blackiston was born on August 18, 1928, in Chestertown, MD, where he has remained a lifelong resident. David was the youngest of four siblings, having an older brother (Vernon Blackiston) and two sisters (Katherine Blackiston and Rose Elmore).

David was married for fifty-nine years to Mildred Arlene Blackiston, whom he met in Nashville, TN, while stationed there during his military service. David was a military policeman in Nashville and met Arlene in 1952 after she was involved in an unfortunate vehicular accident which he investigated. Together, David and Arlene raised two children Thomas George Blackiston (Church Hill, MD) and Brenda Bea Sproates (Kennedyville, MD). Serving as a linotype operator in the composing room of Kent News (later purchased by Whitney Corporation) provided David with a career and a means to support his family for thirty-nine years.

Outside Interests

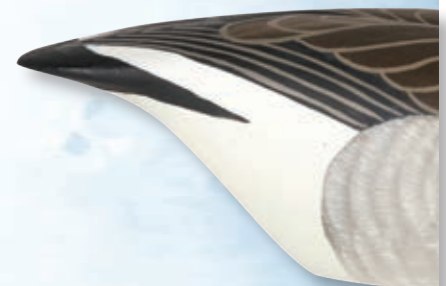
David enjoyed trap shooting and playing golf for many years and excelled at both. He honed his trap shooting skills well enough to win the Senior State Championship. David's passion for golf did not lag far behind his love of trap shooting. In his youth he worked as a greenskeeper at the Chester River Yacht and Country Club, which allowed him to practice his game nearly every evening after working at the course. David maintained a seven handicap during his prime golfing days and boasted a best round of seventy-five. He is very proud of attaining three holes-in-one.



*Green Wing Teal
Drake & Hen*



Canada Goose



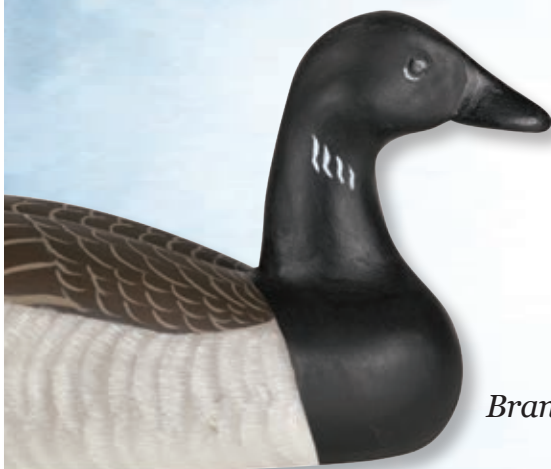
Like many Eastern Shoremen, trapping muskrats in marshes allowed David to make some extra money at times. David's love of waterfowl hunting began at age eleven. He hunted both the Kent and Queen Anne's County shores of the Chester River. In Kent County, he frequented the waterfront property of Colonel Hiram Brown in Quaker Neck to hunt black ducks. In Queen Anne's County, the Gibbons-Neff property near Rolph's Wharf gave David the opportunity to often hunt diving ducks with his close friend Ed Robinson and members of the Gibbons-Neff family. In 1955, Charlie Porter persuaded David to go to renowned carver Charlie "Speed" Joiner's decoy shop in Betterton, MD to make a few cork black duck decoys to support his hunting efforts, launching David Blackiston into what would become a very prolific waterfowl decoy franchise.

Waterfowl Decoys

Once David understood the respiratory risks of shaping cork blocks into ducks, he transitioned to using wood as the sole medium for his decoys. At first, the driver to make additional waterfowl decoys was to economically produce them to support his hunting appetite. David's first wooden decoy was a green-winged teal using a pattern given to him by his old friend Speed. The body was band-sawed, shaped with a hatchet, draw-knifed, spoke-shaved and sanded. When asked who influenced his style, David credits Charlie Joiner who was "like a



Redhead Drake & Hen



*Goldeneye
Drake & Hen*



Brant



*Early Black
Duck Decoy*

**At 92 years young, David says
with a grin, “I had a good run at
decoys and, I have never seen
as many \$100 bills in my life.
My wife Arlene sure enjoyed
putting them away for us.”**



*Ruddy Duck
Drake & Hen*



*Wood Duck
Drake & Hen*

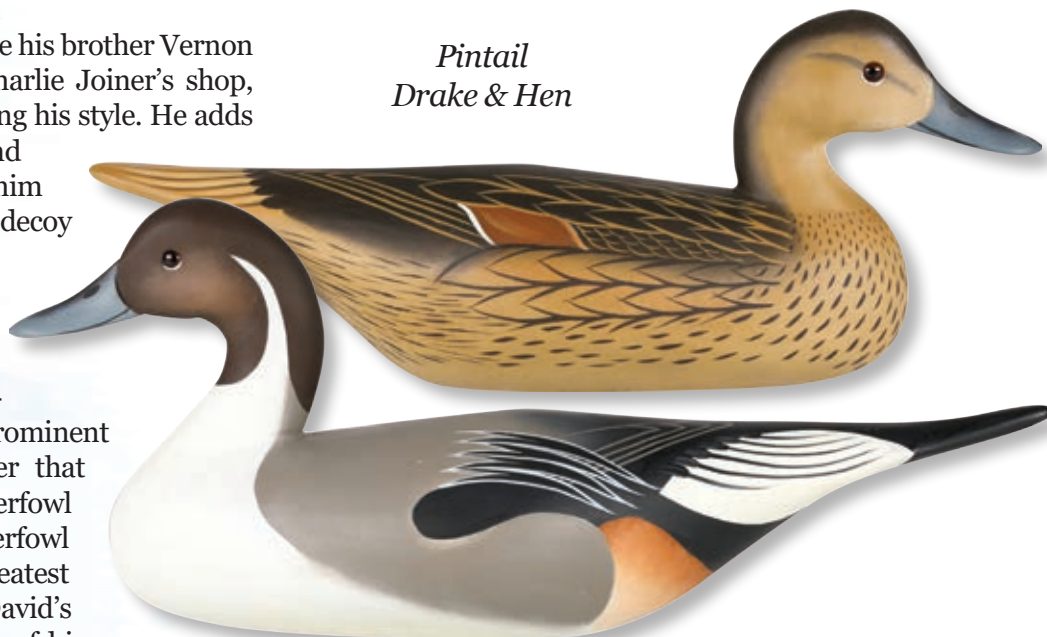


brother to me.” David is quick to give his brother Vernon Blackiston, who also worked in Charlie Joiner’s shop, some additional credit for influencing his style. He adds that Gilmore “Butch” Wagoner and David Walker have supported him in various ways throughout his decoy making days.

David Blackiston produced both round-bottom and flat-bottom waterfowl decoys during his thirty-four year (1983–2017) run as a prominent carver. He approximates that over that period he produced 3,800 waterfowl decoys. It was at the Easton Waterfowl Festival that David received his greatest compliment. While visiting David’s table, Charlie Joiner looked at one of his decoys and said, “I can’t tell if I made this bird or if it’s yours.” David realized with that statement he had arrived as a decoy maker. David also recalls receiving compliments from legendary carver and instructor Bill Veasey regarding a pair of redheads that he had recently completed. David was approached by his friend Bobby Coleman who encouraged him to consider differentiating his work from that of his close friend Charlie Joiner.

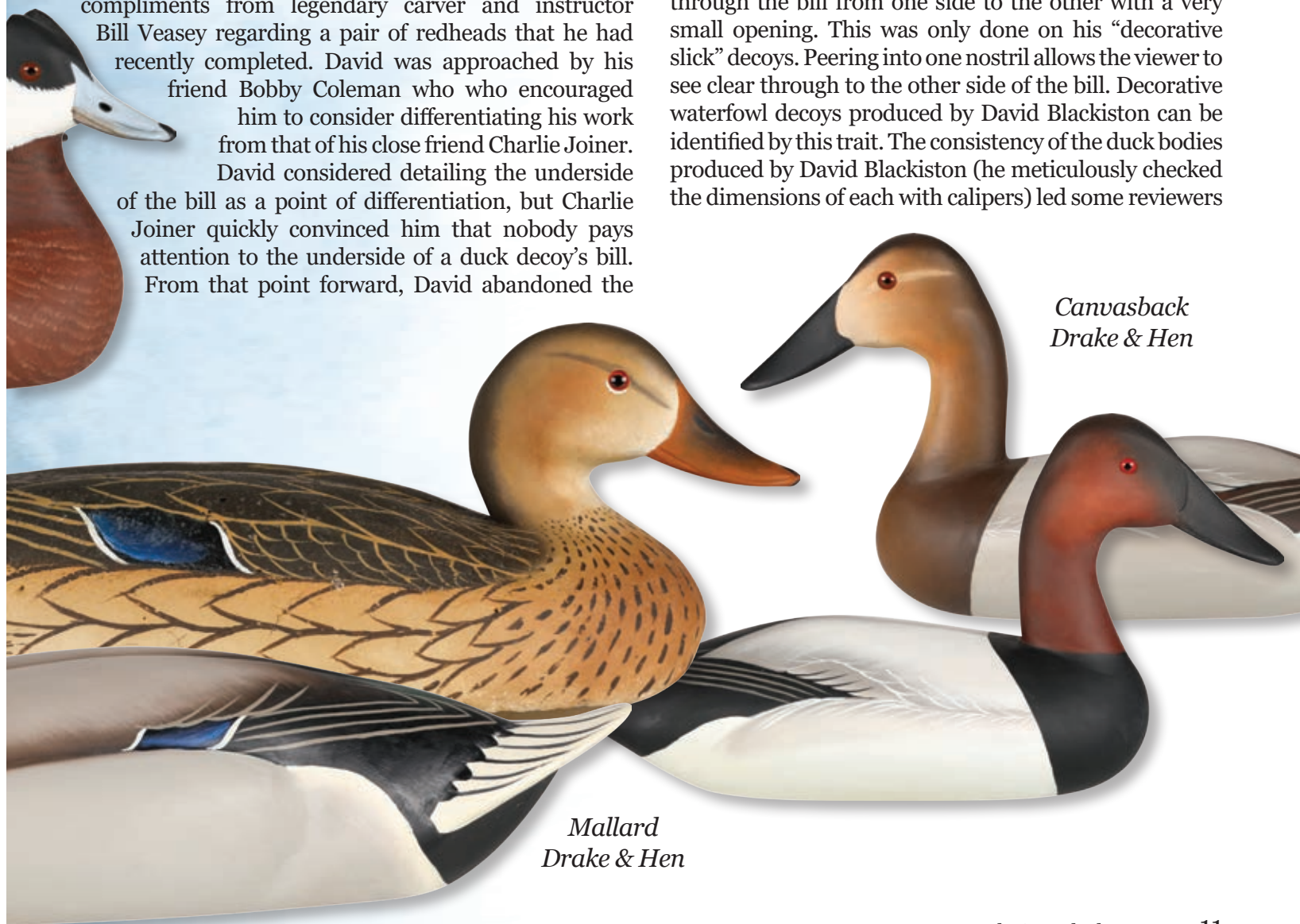
David considered detailing the underside of the bill as a point of differentiation, but Charlie Joiner quickly convinced him that nobody pays attention to the underside of a duck decoy’s bill. From that point forward, David abandoned the

*Pintail
Drake & Hen*



bill underside idea and chose to differentiate his birds in the mandible area. He whittled the nostrils completely through the bill from one side to the other with a very small opening. This was only done on his “decorative slick” decoys. Peering into one nostril allows the viewer to see clear through to the other side of the bill. Decorative waterfowl decoys produced by David Blackiston can be identified by this trait. The consistency of the duck bodies produced by David Blackiston (he meticulously checked the dimensions of each with calipers) led some reviewers

*Canvasback
Drake & Hen*



*Mallard
Drake & Hen*

to question whether they had been made in a factory, and his exquisite painting style left some to wonder if he used an air brushing technique. He did not use either.

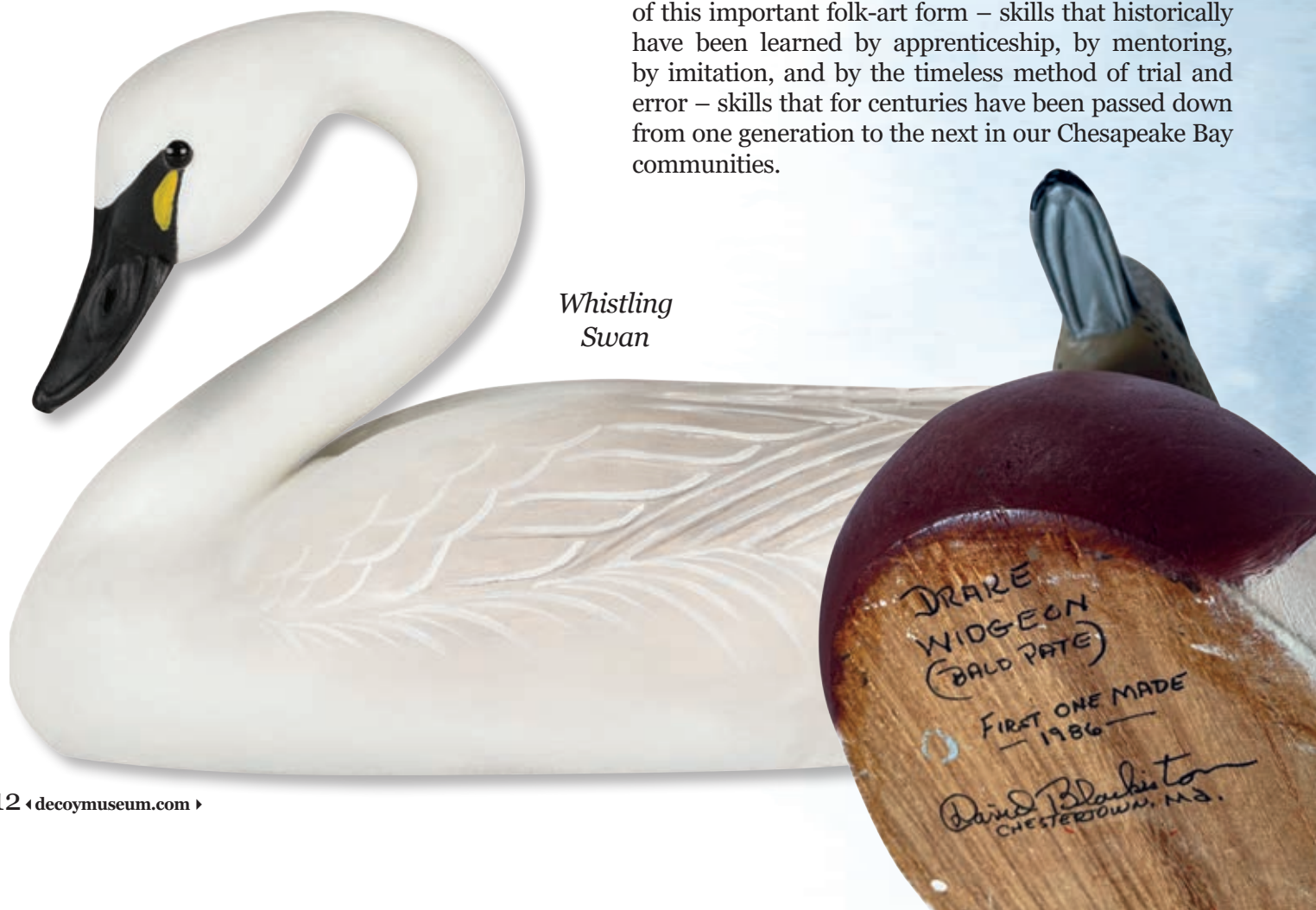
David's favorite duck decoy is the blackhead (bluebill). His least favorite is the shoveler, which he describes as "ugly and hard to make." David Blackiston's green-winged teal has been recognized as best of species, best of marsh duck, and best in show during his prime. He recalls an experience where his differentiated nostril hole cost him winning a "best in show" award one year at the Havre de Grace Decoy & Wildlife Festival. Judges maintained that the hole could potentially fill up with mud, cause rot, and weaken the bill. Despite that experience, David never abandoned the practice of whittling the nostril hole.

In 1986, David Blackiston was first invited to participate in the Easton Waterfowl Festival and did so for seventeen years. He also participated in shows in Chestertown and Havre de Grace. He stopped going to shows altogether when he realized that he just could not keep up with the demand for his waterfowl creations, and he focused on fulfilling the many orders he received relying on a word-of-mouth marketing strategy. During our visit with David Blackiston, he shared many handwritten journals containing countless numbers of orders that kept him busy throughout his decoy making career.

A visit to David Blackiston's decoy shop finds everything right in its proper place despite seeing limited action in recent times. David proudly shows visitors the very spot where he hand-chopped the decoy bodies. His paint table contains an assortment of brushes of every kind as well as numerous clam shells in which he mixed his different paint colors, a clever technique also used by the Ward brothers in Crisfield, MD. While visiting his shop, David presents his visitors with that very first cork black duck that he made in 1955. The walls are adorned with numerous certificates and plaques acknowledging his contributions and donations to various organizations. In the corner of the shop sits a cardboard box rather poignantly filled with unfinished cinnamon teal decoys that David was never able to complete.

At 92 years young, David says with a grin, "I had a good run at decoys and, I have never seen as many \$100 bills in my life. My wife Arlene sure enjoyed putting them away for us." David stopped making waterfowl decoys in 2017, but his work continues to sell at auctions throughout the industry. David still receives calls from all over the United States and Canada looking for his works of art.

Today, David Blackiston keeps his hand in the decoy game by working with his son-in-law David Sproates, acting as a teacher and mentor. And that is the essence of this important folk-art form – skills that historically have been learned by apprenticeship, by mentoring, by imitation, and by the timeless method of trial and error – skills that for centuries have been passed down from one generation to the next in our Chesapeake Bay communities.



*Whistling
Swan*

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Chapter of
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Annual Banquet

**September 18, 2021
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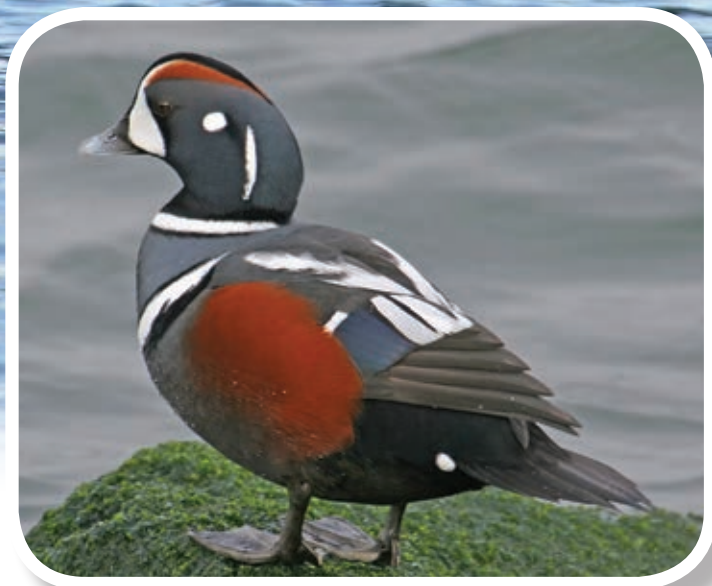
Call either (410) 688-9832
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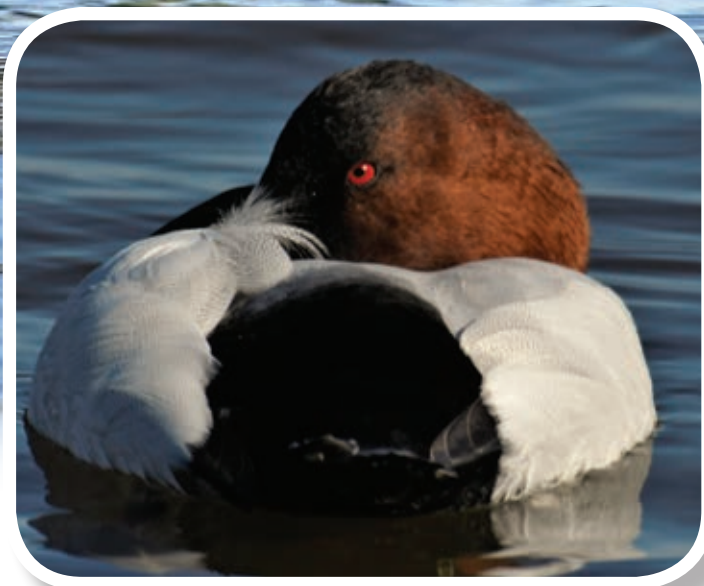
Join us to make a difference!



Canada Geese by Jeff Coats



Drake Harlequin Duck by Jeff Coats



Drake Canvasback by Ralph Hockman

SHOTS

From the Wild

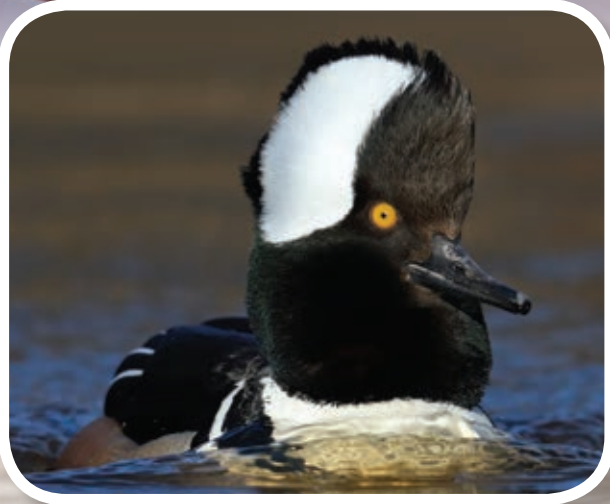
Are you a photography enthusiast who loves snapping pictures of the local wildlife?

If so, submit your shots from the wild to wildlifephotography@decoymuseum.com.

Only high resolution photos will be accepted. (i.e. at least 2,500 pixels wide)



Snow Geese by Ralph Hockman



Drake Hooded Merganser by Scott Moody



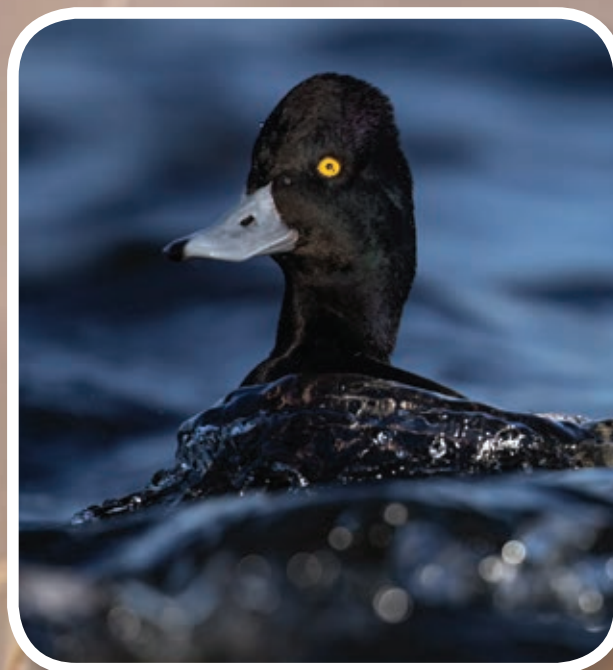
Drake Redhead by Ralph Hockman

Drake Pintail by Nick Merrill



Drake Canvasback (background) and Drake Wigeon (foreground) by Ralph Hockman

Drake Bluebill by Nick Merrill

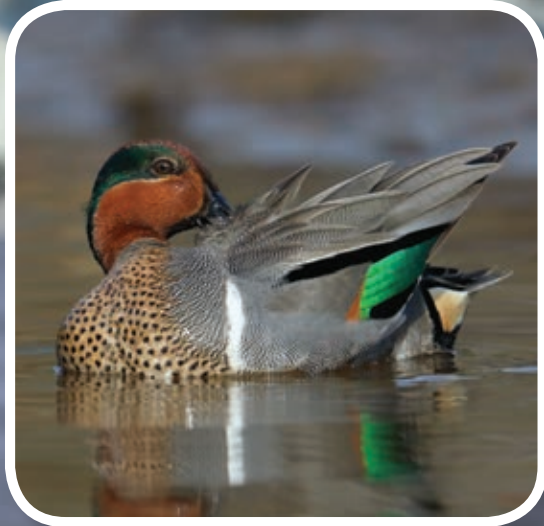


Drake Mallard by Scott Moody



Snow Goose by Scott Moody

Drake Green Wing Teal by Scott Moody



Hen Canvasback by Ralph Hockman



Oldsquaw (Long-tailed Duck) pair by Scott Moody



Candlelight Tour 2020



C Havre de Grace tradition was able to take place despite the resurgence of the COVID virus in December. The Annual Candlelight Tour sponsored by the Susquehanna Lock House Museum was transformed into essentially an outdoor event with all but a few of the tour stops utilizing porches, patios, and other exterior areas. The weather was perfect that evening despite an ominous forecast which made event coordinator Julie Ruhnke very happy after all the hard work that went into the many weeks of planning the event. All in all, the Lock House event entertained over four-hundred participants throughout the City of Havre de Grace.

Organizers of the event encouraged musicians, actors, and other forms of live entertainment to focus visitors on the Christmas spirit and not the resurging COVID pandemic. The Decoy Museum participated in the tour but guests at our location toured the Museum as opposed to an outdoor gathering. All CDC guidelines were followed, and every participant had their temperature measured and provided contact tracing information before gaining entry. "Duke Thompson and Friends" from the Maryland Conservatory of Music were scheduled to entertain the Museum's guests that evening, but that plan unfortunately fell victim to the COVID resurgence. Despite having to make last minute adjustments, the Decoy Museum welcomed over one-hundred visitors throughout the course of the evening.

The staff at the Museum did a remarkable job at readying the facility for the event. Dorene Dorney, our Membership Coordinator, spearheaded all the Museum decorating and worked with other members of our staff to set the mood. All in all, the Museum had another successful year of supporting our friends at the Lock House Museum.



Jeff Coats

**CAPT. JEFF COATS,
HONORARY CHAIRMAN OF THE 39TH
ANNUAL DECOY & WILDLIFE ART FESTIVAL**

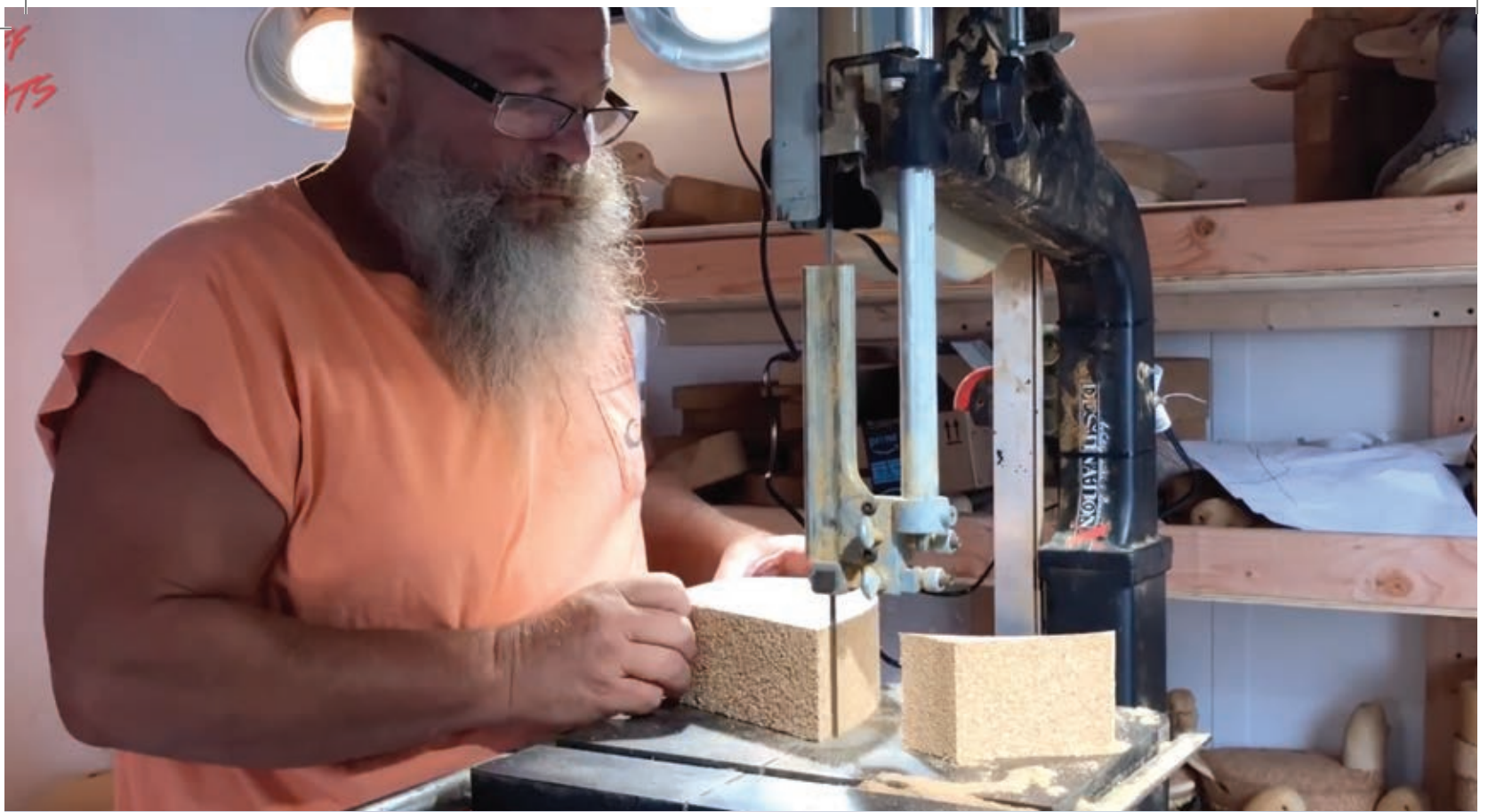
By Mike Tarquini

Jeffrey Turner Coats was born in Havre de Grace, Maryland on May 4, 1965 and lived in Harford County most of his young adult life. His family resided in Darlington and later Fountain Green. Jeff currently lives in Berlin, on Maryland's Eastern Shore with his wife, Karen.

Jeff has always been a man of adventure, a "thrill seeker" of sorts. In his adolescence, Jeff became fond of high-performance cars. He built them, and then he raced them at nearby venues. As with all "thrill seeking" types, Jeff looks to achieve a goal and then grabs ahold of another opportunity to quench his thirst for a new adventure.

Jeff worked for a good while restoring furniture, but waterfowl hunting later became his next great adventure. His hunting experiences gave rise to his early interest in producing his own waterfowl decoys.

Jeff fondly remembers receiving a gift of a hand carved Pat Vincenti decoy from his mom in the early nineties. Intrigued by his gift, Jeff spent much of his free time around the shop at Vincenti Decoys in nearby Churchville, Maryland. It was during those times that the influence of Pat and Jeannie Vincenti, as well as Bill Collins, served to provide Jeff with yet another great adventure to pursue, the art of decoy making.



In the mid-nineties, Jeff created a rig of hand carved black ducks. The black duck bodies were made from Chesapeake tan cork, and like many carvers he chose basswood for the heads. The rig of black ducks was produced using equipment in the Vincenti decoy shop, and he adopted the scratch painting technique used by Pat Vincenti and Bill Collins. Jeff was proud of his initial creations, so much so that he satisfied his need to compete by entering them into the Waterfront Gunning Competition at the Havre de Grace Decoy and Wildlife Festival. Unfortunately, the only recognition Jeff's black ducks received that day was harsh criticism from one of the judges who had a very authoritative style.

Despite that experience, Jeff was not discouraged and entered additional decoy competitions, eventually winning "Best in Show" designation at a subsequent Havre de Grace Decoy and Wildlife Festival competition. In an interesting twist of fate, Jeff's harsh critic at that initial competition, became one of his mentors as he further developed his decoy painting skills. In true Jeff Coats fashion, his mission was accomplished, and he set out to find the next adventure.

Jeff, having obtained his USCG Captain's license (50-ton Masters) in the late nineties, parlayed that accomplishment into the development of his waterfowl hunting guide business. Jeff's newest adventure, Pitboss Waterfowl focused on sea duck hunting. According to Sea Duck Joint Venture (a Conservation Partnership



under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan), there are 15 species of sea ducks in several groups including eiders, scoters, goldeneyes, mergansers, the harlequin, old squaws (long-tailed ducks) and buffleheads. Initially, Jeff utilized factory made plastic decoys for his rig, but he eventually transitioned into using his own creations.

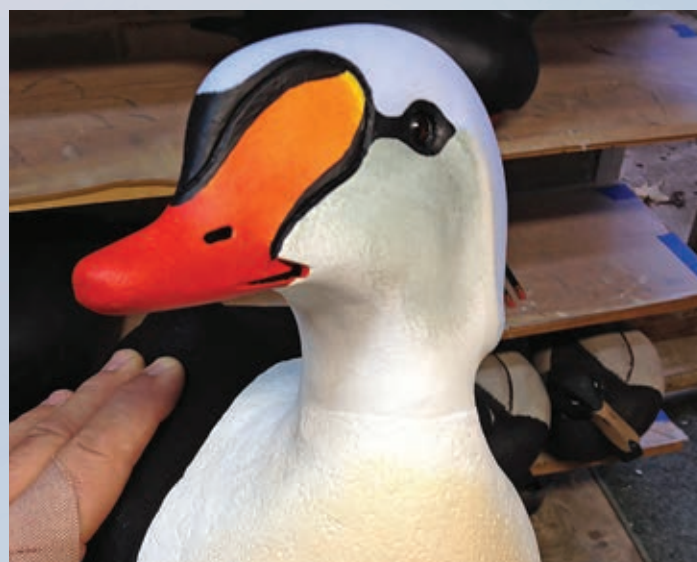
In 1994, Jeff met a blogger named Donald Hughes, a waterfowler from Dorchester County, Maryland. With Hughes' mentorship, Jeff developed a video series in 2006 called Ducks, Dogs and Decoys. The D3TV series, as it also known, chronicles all aspects of hunting waterfowl. Jeff says, "if I didn't meet him, there would have been no Ducks, Dogs and Decoys." Eager fan Brian Lynn (Outdoor Life, 2010) says, "Seriously. I finish watching his DVDs and just want to shoot every duck I see, and sometimes I just pretend I am in a blind and shoot at the wall. The footage is up-close and personal . . . in your face stuff!" Judge for yourself at the D3TV channel on YouTube. The D3TV series of DVDs is also available online at major outlets such as Amazon and eBay.





In speaking to Jeff, he reveals that he continues to satisfy his need for thrills by “luring wild birds into a hunting rig using decoys that he made by hand.” With an eye on creating decoys to support his guide business, Jeff focuses on sea ducks. Jeff will say that he enjoys making decoys that look to have an “angry attitude”, imitating the style of Ned Mayne. He differentiates his decoys by hollowing out the bodies and branding the bottom with the Pitboss Waterfowl trademark. He uses a leather loop and attaches the lead weight to the bottom of the decoy with brass screws instead of nails.

Sea duck hunting in the winter waters of the Atlantic off the coast of Worcester County, Maryland is not for the faint of heart and presents many different perils. Jeff tells of the cringe-worthy moment when he lifted his dog over the transom into the safety of his boat after a successful retrieval only to be horrified to see a tiger shark surface nearby. His dogs no longer venture into ocean waters.



Jeff has a passion for dogs. In fact, he met his wife Karen (a veterinary tech) while visiting her office with his five Labrador retrievers in tow in 2013. In 2015, Jeff and Karen relocated to Berlin, Maryland. They like the limited number of people in the area and the proximity to the sea duck hunting sites. Jeff and Karen started an adjacent business to Pitboss Waterfowl called Pitboss Fishing which allows them the opportunity to utilize Jeff's USCG Captain's license when sea ducks are not in season. Karen works side by side with Jeff in his businesses.

Today, Jeff continues Pitboss Waterfowl and Pitboss Fishing and has seen those businesses grow significantly over time. In his spare time, Jeff promotes not only his businesses, but others over social media and radio. Jeff Coats has now emerged as a radio advertising celebrity with his high energy radio spots promoting Molly's Place, a sporting goods store in Kennedyville, Maryland for all things hunting and fishing. Much like Brian Lynn states above, the author concurs that after hearing a Molly's Place radio spot, one wants to immediately make the trip to Kennedyville to check them out.

Jeff says he will never retire. When asked what is next for this high energy personality, Jeff says "I want to be a rock star in whatever I do. Decoys and hunting give me that



opportunity." Jeff anticipates sea duck hunting declining as the industry becomes more heavily regulated. The number of allowed hunting days and the daily bag limit is already diminishing. Despite that decline, Jeff and Karen have already defined their next great adventure, 3.3 acres in Whaleyville, Maryland that will house a 4,800 square foot building that will serve as the Global Headquarters for Pitboss Waterfowl. Jeff envisions holding carving classes there and has already booked his first student, master carver Tom Mates.

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Waterfowling on the Susquehanna Flats

Decoys, Decoy Makers & Duck Hunters of the Upper Chesapeake Bay

By Michael Daley

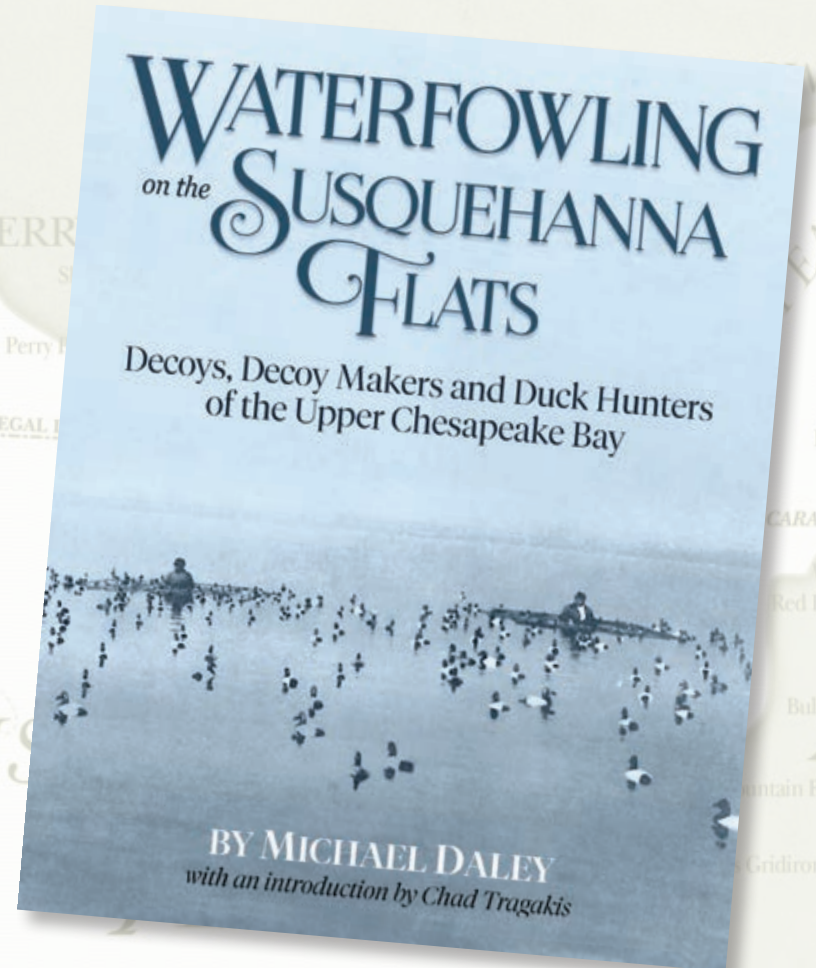
Published by Decoy Magazine in 2021.

Since the days of the first Indigenous Americans, families living in Maryland along the mouth of the Susquehanna and several other rivers at the top of the Chesapeake Bay have hunted wild waterfowl. Until the 1950's, an abundance of feathered game wintered within those sheltered rivers while they enjoyed the wild celery and other grasses that grew in the silt laden shallow waters at the top of the Bay. That shallow brackish watershed is the Susquehanna Flats.

On the west is Maryland's Harford County and on the east is Cecil County. They were very closely knit economically and quite potent politically during the peak period of gunning on the Chesapeake Bay. From roughly 1850 to 1950, the Susquehanna Flats provided local Upper Bay families with both income and food for their tables. At the same time, this watershed provided both the very wealthy and other sportsmen with both game and accommodations.

Historically, American families enter and then stay within certain enterprises. Up and down the Bay, decoy making, market gunning and the guiding of sports were seasonal enterprises passed on from parents to children. The locals in this line of work all generally had other jobs and sources of income. They were farmers, fishermen, canners, laborers, or railroad workers. This dual job life-style was lived by many generations within several Upper Bay families.

During this golden period of ducking, the decoys made and used on the Susquehanna Flats came from many hands. Across decades, the art of making decoys evolved as electricity, power tool, paint and plastic technologies advanced. Also, within each of the two counties, certain similarities; yet, with differing styles, remained within the construction of their decoys on each side. Today, collectors covet the antique decoys made in this northeastern area of Maryland.



Mr. Daley's history book starts with a comprehensive 16-page introduction by author Chad Tragakis. Chad solidly sets the stage with an easy-to-read and visual tutorial on the history of Upper Bay waterfowling. Next, comes 53 chapters that introduce readers to a cast of nearly 90 notable characters from as many families with many of them interrelated. Some of these folks made decoys and others used them. Most characters covered in this book did both.

Mr. Daley brings 53 families back to life. His enlightening essays include tales of love, gains, losses, wins, happiness, grief, failures, and successes. His book's 336 pages contain stories of home invasions, murders, brawls, slaves, bounty hunters, villains, wars, and heroes. There

are presidents, pecks of politicians and even pardons in this journey back to the lives lived by these families during the 100 years the Flats' area residents and their decoys hunted waterfowl.

The individuals detailed in this book were hard workers and all but one of them were devoted to providing for their families. Some enforced the laws while others helped make, bent, obeyed and even broke them. While they were a rough and tumble bunch, readers will see the high-quality folk art of these talented men and women in the book's outstanding collection of color photos. You will also find that several of this same group of gregarious gunners were world-class artists, conservationists, dog lovers, gardeners, poets, environmentalists, yachtsmen and even ice skaters.

The primary characters found in this book were born between 1818 and 1937. Only three born during that 120-year period remain alive today. In addition to the stories of the 53 featured families, this book offers readers an extensive index and vivid color photos of about 475 decoys and over 150 additional photos and illustrations of the carvers, gunners, their families, and the lives they lived. Many taken by the author's wife June Daley.

This book provides information on both Upper Bay museums in the back. Of note are the maps located on the book's endsheets. You can view the exact legal definition of Maryland's "Susquehanna Flats" and these two most northern Chesapeake Bay counties' landmarks, tributaries, islands, rivers, and creeks used by the thousands of gunners who hunted there these past 200 years. The bibliography lists Mr. Daley's more than 100 reference resources.

Purchases of this book are available at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum Gift Shop for the retail price of \$60. Call (410) 939-3739 or email membership@decoymuseum.com to reserve your copy today. Author Michael Daley will be on hand at the 39th Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival on May 1, 2021, to promote the book.

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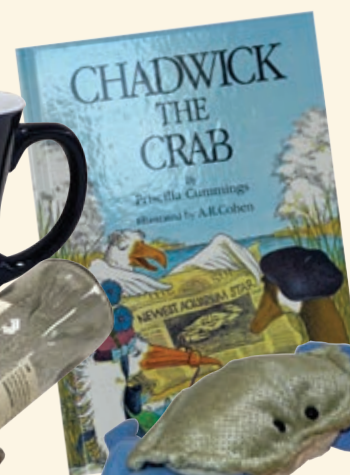




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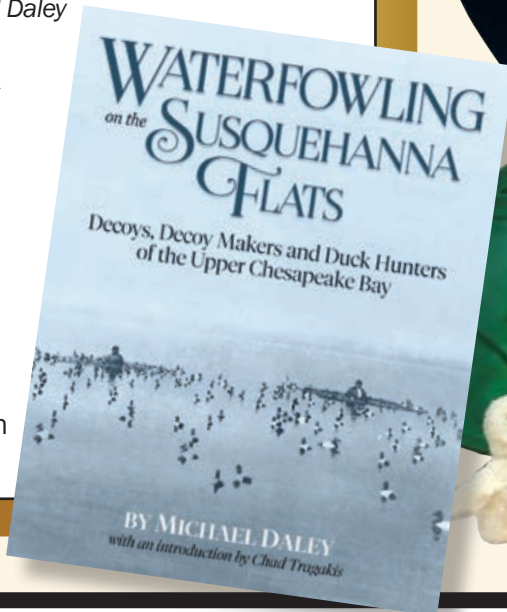
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J. Evans McKinney Old Decoy Contest

The 18th annual J. Evans McKinney Old Decoy Contest will be held on Saturday, May 1 at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum in conjunction with the 2021 Havre de Grace Decoy and Wildlife Art Festival. Joe Engers, Editor and Publisher of Decoy Magazine, will head up a three-member judge's panel. Entries will be accepted at the stage area from 10:00 a.m. until judging commences at noon. Competition decoys will be kept in a highly visible roped-off secure area and will not be handled by the public. At approximately 1:00p.m., the public will be invited to review the roped-off and secured tables once the judges have made their selections. A blue ribbon will be awarded for each of the following ten category winners, and the judges will also select a best-in-show winner. Winners will be requested to display their decoys and ribbons at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum for six months following the Festival.

- 1 **Best Harry Jobes** (age restriction waived)
- 2 **Best High-head Decoy**
- 3 **Best Susquehanna Flats Green Wing Teal Decoy**
- 4 **Best Virginia Black Duck**
- 5 **Best New England Decoy**
- 6 **Best Crisfield Diving Decoy**
- 7 **Best Talbot County Decoy**
- 8 **Best Potomac River Decoy**
- 9 **Best Shorebird**
- 10 **Best Unknown**



Rules: There is a competition ban, regardless of category, on 2019's winning birds. Participants must make their best efforts to ensure that all decoy entries were made prior to 1960. Matched pairs entered in other than a Matched Pair category will be considered as one entry. There will be no restrictions as to those who can participate or number of categories entered; however, each decoy will be limited to only one competition category and participants are restricted to no more than three birds per category. Competition issues will be resolved at the sole discretion of the competition chairman and/or competition chief judge. Any questions, please contact contest chairman **Chad Tragakis at 703-593-3024 or chad.tragakis@gmail.com.**

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WOOD DUCK

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CANVASBACK NATURALIST

Each edition will feature a natural history topic relating to the mission of the museum. The author, **John Hughes** is a retired science teacher from the John Carroll School (1972-2015). His subject areas included Chesapeake Bay Studies, Ecology (freshwater and marine) and Environmental Science. As a naturalist, John helped to develop natural history programs for a myriad of environmental organizations and schools. As a field educator and canoe guide, he led trips throughout the Eastern United States (especially the Southeast), Central America and the Caribbean. He presently serves as a member of the Museum's Board.

Photo by Joe Subolefsky

*Since that time, I
have had many
sightings of Wood
Ducks. Each
one continues
to inspire an
incredible sense
of wonder,
excitement, and
beauty.*

*Photo by
Scott Moody*



Early American naturalists like Alexander Wilson and John James Audubon saw the Wood Duck as North America's most beautiful duck. Henry David Thoreau went so far as to say "What an ornament to a river to see the glowing gem floating in contact with its waters... Like dipping a glowing coal in water!" These thoughts and images are still applied to this species today by contemporary birders, hunters, and general nature observers. Wood Ducks are also prized as most favored status by artists, photographers, taxidermists, and decoy carvers.

When I was about four or five years old, my grandmother surprised me with a present of four books. They were the Red, Blue, Green, and Yellow Guides to bird study and identification for young people. This gift enabled me early on to discover the amazing and myriad world of birds. Grandma commented that the birds would become a window to understanding all about nature and the world I lived in. She proved to be right as grandmothers so often are. I remember that one of my favorite pictured birds was the "exotic" Wood Duck. Although I had never really seen one in the wild, the incredibly beautiful color and feather patterns of this duck created an intense desire to find one in the out-of-doors.

I do not really remember my first sighting, but I recall that I was probably about six or so years old, doing my exploring on my grandparents' property in flooded woodlands. It was at that time the most beautifully observed bird that I had seen.

Since that time, I have had many sightings of Wood Ducks. Each one continues to inspire an incredible sense of wonder, excitement, and beauty.

Cases in point:

I'm leading a canoe trip through the heart of Okefenokee, Georgia's 500,000 acre wilderness of Cypress Swamp. We are paddling down Minnie's Lake Run toward Stephen Foster State Park through mid-November's orange needles still on display on the cypress trees. Around a meander a loud wee-e-e-k, wee-e-e-k, was heard by the lead canoes. I told the students to keep an eye out for Wood Ducks. Around the next bend in the flow, there sat a drake and hen Wood Duck on a burnt cypress stump. The students were thrilled by the amazing beauty of the ducks even though it was such a brief encounter within the backdrop of "the land of trembling earth". That night's campfire discussion centered on those beautiful ducks in that mysterious swamp.

Several years later with nearly the same circumstances, I'm on Nassawango Creek, a major tributary to Maryland's bald-cypressed Potomac River. This time it is late Spring and the Cypress needles are soft green as we paddle from Red House Road to Golf Course Drive and the same loud call is heard in the distance by my students and me. Later the Woodies reveal themselves about two miles downstream. Evening campfire turns to the secrets of the Swamp, sore muscles, and the magnificent beauty of those ducks.

Now as I reflect in retirement on the many trips over the years in myriad settings ranging from the Everglades to Big Cypress and Fishing Creek, to Adirondacks Lakes, to the Chesapeake Bay Rivers and creeks such as the Chickahominy, the Patuxent, the Gunpowder, the Pocomoke, Deer Creek, and so many others, I remember how often the sights and sounds of Wood Ducks brought so much joy and excitement to me, my students, and other observers. Hopefully, these experiences helped them to develop a sense of wonder for nature and an appreciation of its beauty as well as the Wood Ducks' ability to present the hues for meshing it all together.

In trying to capture a more lasting image of Wood Ducks, this time I turned to art. I remember the occasion of trading a Mad River Canoe for a pair of Dan Carson's gorgeous Wood Duck decoys. Dan, a former student, and explorer has the ability not only to capture Wood Duck beauty but also reveal the magnificent essence and vitality of this bird through a painted block of sculpted wood. The birds sit on my fireplace mantle

where they remind me of past experiences and good times associated with Woodies every time I enter my living room.

In yet another memory, I am sitting at my desk in my study when Frazier, my young yellow lab, comes bounding into the room with my museum-quality Drake Wood Duck mount in his mouth. As he violently shakes his head, feathers fly and its head breaks off. Frazier is so proud with a smile so big from his dismantling of my precious bird. With that smile, how can he be held accountable for my loss! Beauty for a lab is quite different than that of his owner.

In short, until writing this article, I never realized just how much Wood Ducks, their beauty and presence have been a part of my last 65 years of life. I hope that in your reading of these short reminiscences, you will decide to get out into the out-of-doors to search and encounter the wonder and awe which can be gained by "Wondrous Woodies" - the most beautiful duck in North America.

*Photo by
Joe Subolefsky*

*I remember how often the sights and sounds of
Wood Ducks brought so much joy and excitement to
me, my students, and other observers.*

Description

The Wood Duck is a medium-sized long-toed perching duck which exhibits characteristics of both a dabbling and diver duck on occasion. Wood Ducks are noted for their crested heads, long and large rudder-like tails, broad wings, large eyes, and amazing iridescent coloring. In the water, Wood Ducks sit lightly with their tails well above the water surface. Adult drakes measure 20 inches and females are slightly shorter at 19.5 inches (Bellrose, Ducks, Geese, and Swans of North America, 1976.) The average male weighs in at 1.5 pounds, while the female is lighter at 1.48 pounds (Bellrose, 1976.) The Wood Duck bill is shorter and narrower than most ducks and is brightly colored with a small hook on the end. Wood Ducks also possess strong senses of smell and hearing.

Drakes are noted for their colorful plumage which attracts the hens' attention during courtship. Colors are a blending of white, green, purple, maroon, and blues which can all shimmer in an iridescent fusion in the sunlight. Legs and feet are a yellowish-grey-orange blending depending on season and conditions. The hen is a drabber grey with iridescent sheen and is noted for the white teardrop pattern on her head. She is quite a handsome bird but in a more subtle fashion. Precocial ducklings are a dark greyish-brown with yellow striping, ideal for camouflage from some potential predators. Adults both exhibit a white belly in flight.

Biology

Wood Ducks reach maturity at about one year. Pair bonding is renewed yearly and males stay with their mate until deserting them at incubation. The hens rear the young alone (Johnsgard, The North American Perching and Dabbling Ducks, 2017.) Clutch size is 11 – 13 eggs unless nest dumping or brood parasitism occurs which could leave the nest with as many as 40 eggs. The farther south Wood Ducks nest, the greater the potential for double clutching due to added length of day and season. Incubation period is approximately thirty days. The young, within twenty-four hours, climb the interior of the nest, launch themselves through the cavity into the air, and land near their chipping mother at the surface. The drop can be as much as fifty feet for ducklings but rarely lead to injury. Predation on eggs and ducklings is high. Egg predators include raccoons, squirrels, starlings, woodpeckers and snakes especially the Black Rat snake. Ducklings fall victim to snapping turtles, largemouth bass and pike, great blue herons, bullfrogs, and hawks. Success obviously varies but recruitment is about 50 per cent. Few Wood Ducks reach old age (Hoch, With Wings Extended: A leap into the Wood Duck's World, 2020.)

*Photo by
Scott Moody*



*Photo by
Joe Subolefsky*



Photo by
Scott Moody



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Scott Moody



Range

Wood Ducks are distributed throughout North America. In the East, their range extends from Nova Scotia in the north to south Florida and Cuba in the south. Wood Ducks are abundant in the Chesapeake Bay region and very abundant throughout the Carolinas and Georgia. Along the Central Flyway, they are found from Canada to the Gulf coast especially along the Mississippi River basin. Limited populations are found in the Great Plains region and Rocky Mountains. In the West, Pacific coast populations can be found from the Vancouver Island area in the north to the California Central Valley and areas farther south. This is true for historic as well as contemporary population distribution (Bellrose.)

Habitat

The key habitat requirements for Wood Ducks are still or slow-moving waters, adequate cover, tree cavities in forests containing trees at least 16 inches in diameter (and/or artificial nesting boxes), and a good supply of food. Wood Duck habitat is not easy to classify but can be referred to as Wooded wetlands, Swampland, Buttonbush Shrub Swamp, flooded river bottomland, lakes, ponds, beaver-dam ponds, etc. These areas are generally freshwater but can be slightly brackish. Wooded nesting habitat can be dominated by tree species such as willows, cottonwoods, cypress, and oaks. Tree cavities should be 3.5 inches at entrance and interiors at least 8 inches in diameter (Johnsgard.) Cover and perching opportunities are vital for Wood Duck success. Water in general should be shallow and have abundant wetland vegetation including both emergent and floating species.

Diet

Wood Ducks eat a variety of plant foods and are very opportunistic as to what is available. Acorns are the favored foods of more Wood Ducks in more places than any other plant foods (Bellrose.) Seeds of Bald cypress, Hickories, Oaks, and Buttonbush are choice selections of the duck for feeding. Emergent vegetation of wetland marshes such as arrow arum and burr reed are consumed with Duckweed and other floating plants. Wood Ducks also can be found grazing on corn or other crop waste in grain fields. Ducklings feed mostly on animal life, switching to plant foods with age. Aquatic insects and their larvae are chief food choices for the first 6 weeks of life (Bellrose.) Wood Ducks will forage on land as a grazer, and have been known to dive and dabble for vegetation.

Note: The next edition of the Canvasback will continue with Wood Duck studies which will include Population Status (Historic and Contemporary), Management efforts, and Citizen activism. It will include what you can do to for Wood Duck's population maintenance.



The Ice Duck Cometh...Part II

By: Chad Tragakis

Author's Note: Part One of this article appeared in the Fall / Winter 2020 issue of The Canvasback. Among the areas examined and discussed were: Ice hole shooting; ice gorges and the devastating impact they could have on the Susquehanna Flats' waterfront communities; the early ice industry and ice harvesting on the Upper Chesapeake Bay; ice box shooting and ice duck decoys, and decoy maker Jim Pierce's recollections of Jim Currier and his trusty ice box used for winter gunning.

Collector and historian Henry Fleckenstein once shared a wonderful story of ice box shooting gleaned from his early conversations with gunner and decoy maker Earle "Dick" Hipple (1891-1980). Hipple worked aboard his father-in-law's gunning yacht, the Jennie F. Moore. Captain Harry Moore would sail his "down the Bay sharpie" through a path cleared by the famed sidewheel icebreaker S.S. Annapolis, built in 1889 and berthed in Baltimore, getting as close as possible to where the ducks were gathered and feeding. From this point, Hipple and other members of the crew would disembark, strap on ice skates and get out and actually push one of their 16-foot bushwhacking boats that had been specially fitted with brass runners, across the ice. They used boat hooks and ice poles to help them push, pull, shove and guide the small craft along, which contained a rig of between 75 and 100 canvasback decoys and their well-built ice box.

When ice flows into shore, the ice buckles and rises upwards under the incredible pressure. Hipple and company would skate to where the tide buckles had broken up the ice and would further clear a small area, large enough in which to place their rig of decoys. Nearby, they cut a hole into the ice in which to place the ice box. The shooting was excellent, but Hipple joked to Henry that after spending an hour or two gunning from the device, you'd understand just why it was called an ice box.

A March 29 letter to the editor in the "Game Bag and Gun" section of the April 9, 1885 edition of Forest and Stream, illustrates the possible danger of late season duck hunting on the Upper Chesapeake Bay. Sink box shooting already came with inherent risks to the gunner, but the letter, written by an unnamed Susquehanna Flats market hunter and guide, underscores the additional risks ice could pose to life and property: "There have been but few ducks killed here this spring, owing to there being so much ice, and even at this late day it is dangerous to put out your decoys, for there is always a floe around ready to sweep everything away."

In a 1993 interview with Larry Ortt, hunter and waterman Morrison Watson, brother of decoy maker Milton Watson, noted the icy hardship that accompanied the rewards of duck shooting. "Those were long days too, leaving Chesapeake City at 3:00 a.m. to be on the Flats by daybreak, not returning until after dark that night. The weather had to be endured as well, with freezing water coating and sinking the decoys before we could wrap the icy strings around them with freezing-numb fingers and hands." From sink box shooting to bushwhacking to body-booting, regardless of the method employed, ice could always play a factor in waterfowling.

In addition to the iceboxes and “ice duck” decoys, duck shooting in frozen conditions required a variety of specialized equipment. Flats hunters adopted and adapted some of the ice harvesters’ tools to aid them in their wintry waterfowl pursuits. These included ice saws, ice poles, ice skates and ice creepers, devices in a variety of styles and types that attached to boots or shoes, with sharp metal spikes to pierce and grip even the slickest of ice. Using a large ice saw, the gunners would cut a hole in the ice large enough to accommodate a dozen or so decoys and a bit more room into which their wild counterparts could alight. Ice poles or boat hooks were another important tool used in ice box shooting, used to collect decoy strings, retrieve dead ducks and in some cases, assist in pulling the icebox and other equipment across the ice.

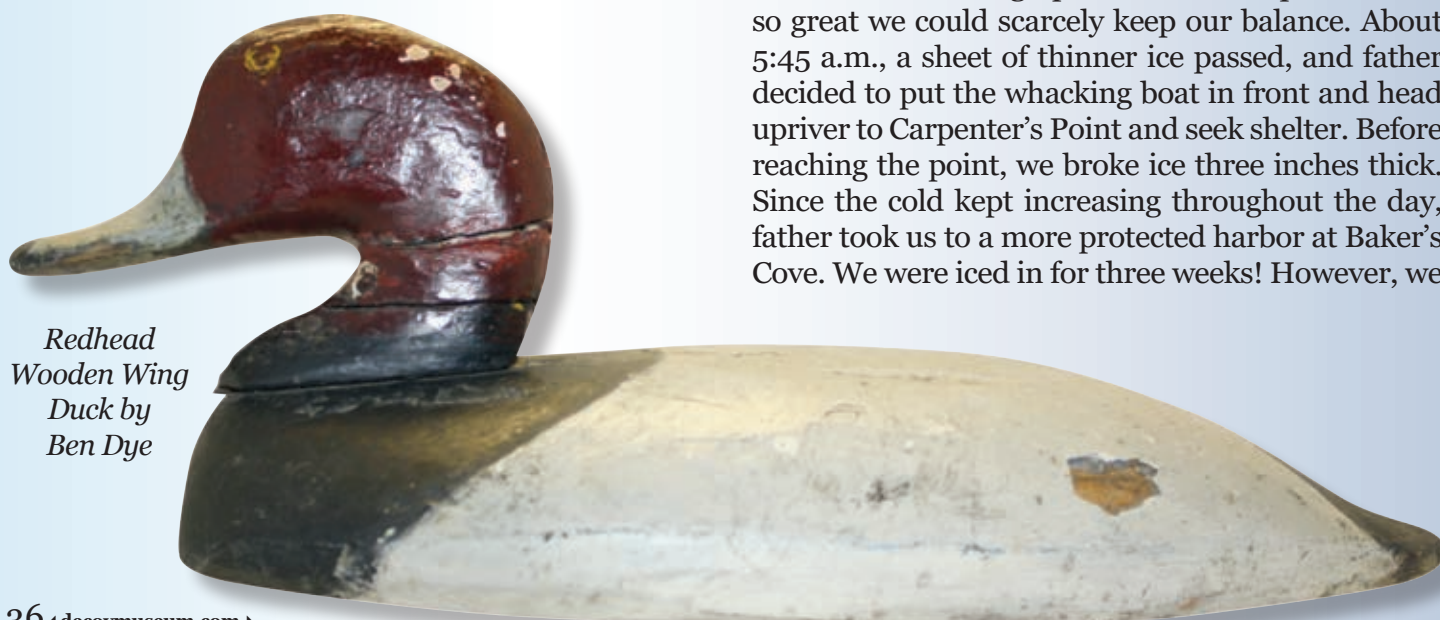
Gunning skiffs and other small boats used on or in the ice also had to be modified. As with iceboxes, metal runners or skids were sometimes attached to the bottoms of these bushwhack boats allowing them to glide, so they could more easily be pushed across the ice. Boats exposed to the ice also needed to be strengthened. Chesapeake City businessman and duck hunter John Schaefer commissioned John Thompson of Havre de Grace to build several bushwhack boats for him over the years. One of these was specially “tinned” for use in the late season shell ice at Cara Cove on the North East River, where he leased gunning rights for his offshore float blind from the 1930s up through mid-1950s.

Shell ice forms when rain or sleet falls onto an existing ice surface. When the precipitation is warmer than

the ice surface itself and the air temperature is particularly cold, it does not have an opportunity to bond with the existing ice. Instead, it creates a new layer or “shell” of ice. This ice could easily damage a wooden boat, so sheet tin was plated along the boat’s waterline to afford it an additional layer of strength and protection. The tinned example along with another Thompson built bushwhack boat from Schaefer’s rig are currently in the collection of the Upper Bay Museum in North East, Maryland.

Winter ice could also damage the larger sloops and cabin boats used for gunning parties, and it would sometimes freeze these boats in place completely. During the coldest weeks of the year, they would typically be sailed to sections of the Flats and surrounding rivers that did not freeze over. Each season, decoy maker Joe Coudon allowed the Della B., the sporting yacht owned by Perryville’s Howard Dennison Jackson and captained by Joe “Buck” Boyd, to be sailed into a sheltered cove on his vast property.

North East, Maryland gunner and guide Vernon “Curley” Reynolds (1912-1992) shared his experiences with ice in “Chesapeake Bay Decoys: The Men Who Made and Used Them.” Writing about gunning the Upper Bay in the 1920s, he reflects that: “Some of the hours were not exactly pleasant. Once, in the first part of December, we noticed thin ice as the tide started to ebb. As we lay at anchor, the ice kept getting thicker and thicker. My father [Andrew “Buddy” Reynolds] and Mr. [John] Fuddy decided to drop the heavy anchor with the chain line since we expected to remain there until daylight. In the cabin, we could hear the ice running up the chain. The pull became so great we could scarcely keep our balance. About 5:45 a.m., a sheet of thinner ice passed, and father decided to put the whacking boat in front and head upriver to Carpenter’s Point and seek shelter. Before reaching the point, we broke ice three inches thick. Since the cold kept increasing throughout the day, father took us to a more protected harbor at Baker’s Cove. We were iced in for three weeks! However, we



*Redhead
Wooden Wing
Duck by
Ben Dye*



had contact with home since we could walk to Wild Duck Cove where some hunters maintained cabins. Since someone from there went into town daily, we kept in contact. We stayed on the boat in shifts; first, [my brother] Clarence with a man or two while father and I went home, then it was their turn to leave.”

For local children, winter meant a variety of recreational activities out on the frozen Flats. When the ice was strong enough to be deemed safe, typically when it was at least 8-inches thick, ice skating on the bay was among the most enjoyable of seasonal pastimes. Throughout the winter months, local kids could also earn extra money helping with the ice harvest. Kids as young as 7 or 8 would help guide the ice cutters into place and even helped haul the ice blocks back to the ice houses.

Locals remembered with great joy and even some town pride the popular ice boat races, an annual winter spectacle out on the frozen Susquehanna River. This exciting event boasted competitors and large crowds of dedicated spectators from both sides of the Flats, with races typically starting at the Pennsylvania Railroad bridge and traveling some set distance to a designated point below Havre de Grace. The small, modified boats of various sizes and styles were installed with iron or metal runners, which would “sail” across the ice. The metal runners mimicked the same basic method as that used by local gunners to transport their small boats, laden with decoy rigs, across the frozen Flats.

When the wind was blowing just right and the brave crews took full advantage of nature’s force, the boats went incredibly fast. When the wind wasn’t blowing as favorably, however, competitors were forced to tack and resorted to other means of carefully and

Susquehanna Ice Bridge

In the early decades of waterfowling’s “golden age,” significantly colder temperatures meant that it was not uncommon for the fresher, shallower waters of the Susquehanna Flats and its surrounding rivers and streams to completely freeze over for days or weeks at a time. In fact, the ice on the Susquehanna River became so thick in the winter of 1852 that, famously, the world’s first and perhaps only railroad ice bridge was established.

The Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad, later purchased by the Pennsylvania Railroad, operated the routes within the Upper Chesapeake corridor. At this point, no bridges had yet been built between Perryville and Havre de Grace, so passengers and baggage would be transferred to a steam ferry, the Susquehanna, and then to a train on the opposite shore. However, with the river frozen solid, the ferry was useless and traffic and freight quickly backed up.

By mid-December 1851, the temperature had been below freezing for several straight weeks. The ice was solid as a rock; in some places, it was 12 feet thick. It’s hard to believe, but the P. W. & B.’s chief engineer devised a plan to lay ties and tracks right across the river’s frozen surface, over which rail cars could be hauled by teams of horses. Once they were close enough to shore, a waiting locomotive would haul the cars the rest of the way up over the banks on an inclined trestle that had been specially built. Horse-drawn sleighs carried the passengers across the frozen river alongside the tracks.

The ice bridge opened on January 15, 1852 and was in use every day through February 24, when a thaw began coming on. All told, more than 1,378 cars were moved across the bridge before the ferry was able to resume its trips across the river on March 3. The Susquehanna River ice bridge made national headlines and was memorialized in a popular lithograph printed by Thomas S. Sinclair of Philadelphia titled, “Railroad Track Across the Susquehanna at Havre de Grace, Maryland On the Ice.”

strategically maneuvering the sails. The talented and experienced watermen ably and expertly performed these gambits and had an awful lot of fun in the process. Several notable Flats gunners were active in the ice boating circuit, among them Harry Barnes, brother of the decoy maker George “Wash” Barnes and famed gunner Perry K. Barnes and stepbrother to William Heverin.

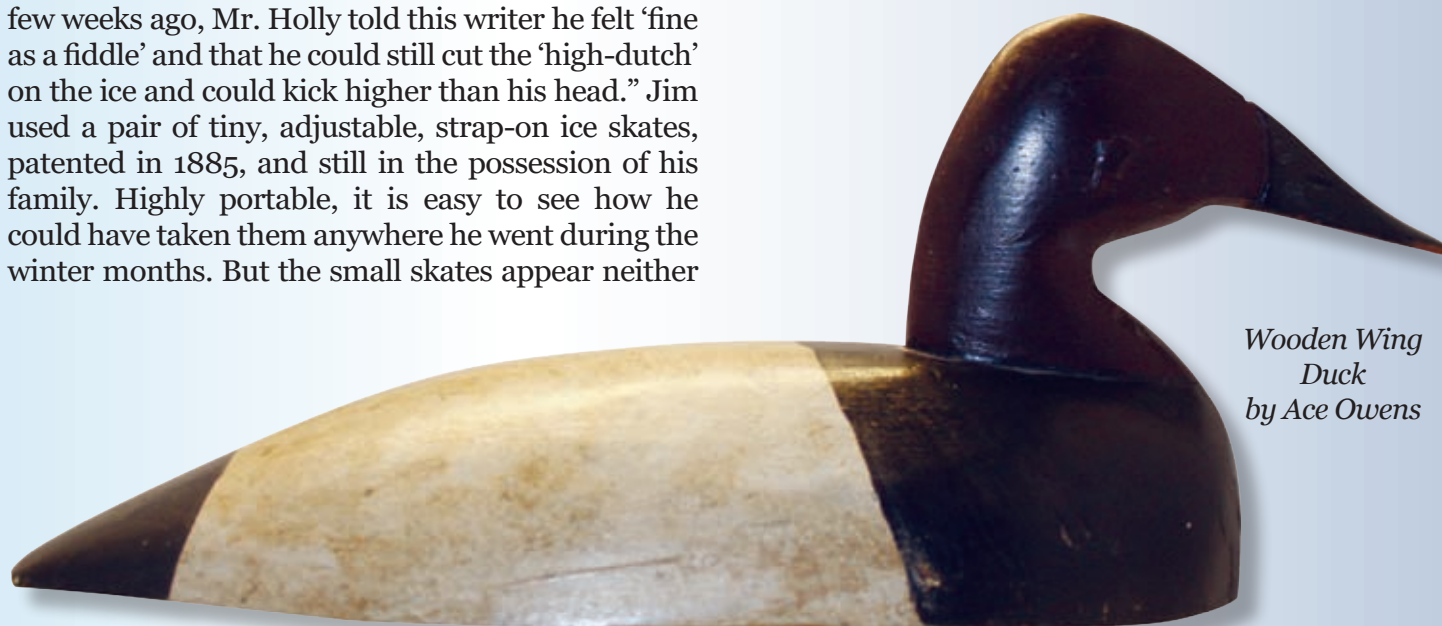
James T. Holly was perhaps the most accomplished ice skater among all Upper Chesapeake Bay waterfowlers and decoy makers, a fact to which many old-timers in Havre de Grace who saw him in action could attest. Jim especially enjoyed skating with his daughters out on the Flats. “He was a great fancy skater,” his grandson and namesake James Holly Drennen (1908-2001) recalled in a 1999 interview. “He could do a lot of things on skates – all kinds of tricks, and he drew a crowd too! The last time I saw him skate was in Washington, D.C. – on the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool. He was visiting his daughter, my mother’s sister, Rachel – and he and I went down to the pool, which was frozen. He really drew a crowd that day. By this time [the late 1920s], he was in his late seventies or early eighties.”

His 1935 obituary further states that: “He was an expert ice skater and even at an advanced age could perform better on the ice than the average skater... When he celebrated his eighty-sixth birthday only a few weeks ago, Mr. Holly told this writer he felt ‘fine as a fiddle’ and that he could still cut the ‘high-dutch’ on the ice and could kick higher than his head.” Jim used a pair of tiny, adjustable, strap-on ice skates, patented in 1885, and still in the possession of his family. Highly portable, it is easy to see how he could have taken them anywhere he went during the winter months. But the small skates appear neither

comfortable nor forgiving, making his legendary feats upon them even more remarkable.

Locals remember Jim Currier was also a particularly fine ice skater, gracefully zipping and zooming across the frozen Havre de Grace Yacht Basin each winter, doing figure eights and other tricks. He gladly shared his expertise with others, particularly the neighborhood children, who incidentally, were always welcome to visit his decoy shop and try their hand at painting the eyes on one of his decoys. It is likely that Holly, Currier and others put these ice-skating skills to good use during the late winter duck shooting season, as they glided alongside their ice boxes, pushing them out to open water and into position.

Eventually, as with all of nature’s seasonal cycles, the ice melts. Temperatures slowly rise, snowbanks begin to recede, and the ice floes melt back into the clear, cold water that fills the Chesapeake Bay’s 200 miles stretching from Havre de Grace to Virginia Beach. The ducks move on, the fish begin their spring runs and life in the shoreline villages dotting the Susquehanna Flats returns to normal. Until, of course, that first sudden cold snap gives way to a freeze, beginning the whole thing all over again.



*Wooden Wing
Duck
by Ace Owens*

With special thanks to the late Evans McKinney, Allen Purner, Dr. Harry Walsh, Henry Fleckenstein, Uncle Holly Drennen, Ms. Bea Owens, Bill Weaver, Moke Boyd and Cran Henry; and, to Jim Pierce, Jack Manning, Larry Ortt, John and Cindy Currier, Ms. Jane Currier, Dick McIntyre, Bill Cordrey, Rod Wittstadt and cecilcountydecoys.com, Dave and Joan Hagan, Jim Trimble and David Farrow.

“Picnic on the Promenade” . . .

Harford District’s Scout Recruitment Day



November 27, 2020 – In an effort to boost local scouting registrations, Claire Yoritomo, Scouting Executive for Harford District, Baltimore Area Council, Boy Scouts of America approached The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum to partner with them in a recruitment event. The event promoted as “Picnic on the Promenade” featured an opportunity for prospective Scouts to meet some of the local Scouting units within Harford County. All guests were treated to a tour of the Decoy Museum as part of their agenda.

Four Harford District Scouting units participated in the event. **Boy Scout Troop 967** (*Havre de Grace*) and **Troop 238** (*Hickory*) presented scouting equipment, displays, and distributed literature to those interested in pursuing the **Scout BSA program** (ages 11-17). **Pack 965** (*Webster Village*) gave younger prospects (*grades K-5*) the option of learning more about the **Cub Scout program**. The event even featured **Sea Scouts** (ages 14-20) from **Unit 1808** whose goal is to promote better citizenship and improved members’ boating skills through instruction and practice in water safety, boating skills, outdoor, social, service experiences, and knowledge of our maritime heritage.

All visitors registered for time slots throughout the day which allowed the museum to better control the number of guests inside the facility. Everyone’s temperature was measured by volunteers and contact tracing information was collected. The Scouting units were set up outside in the museum parking lot which allowed for more effective social distancing. Several outside fun activities were also available within the museum property to entertain guests of all ages. According to Claire Yoritomo, “we hope to make this an annual event and look forward to working with the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum on other events as well.”

Working with local Scouting programs is not new for The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. The museum has hosted numerous Cub Scouts and Webelos over the years as they earn their Whittling Chip certification. Local decoy carver Josh Blanchette and Education Coordinator Heather Thompson have taught these sessions that focus on knife safety and carving. The Decoy Museum has also hosted Eagle Scout Service Projects that include the outdoor stairway leading to the R. Madison Mitchell Decoy Shop and the vast landscaping effort with Maryland native plants in front of the facility. The museum has hosted an Eagle Scout Court of Honor ceremony where a Scout is awarded the coveted Eagle Scout Medal.





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Thank you and welcome to the following members and businesses that recently renewed their membership or newly joined us. Your continued support and contributions are essential to the overall success of the Decoy Museum:

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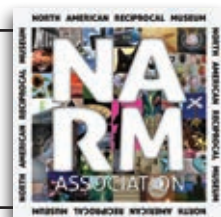
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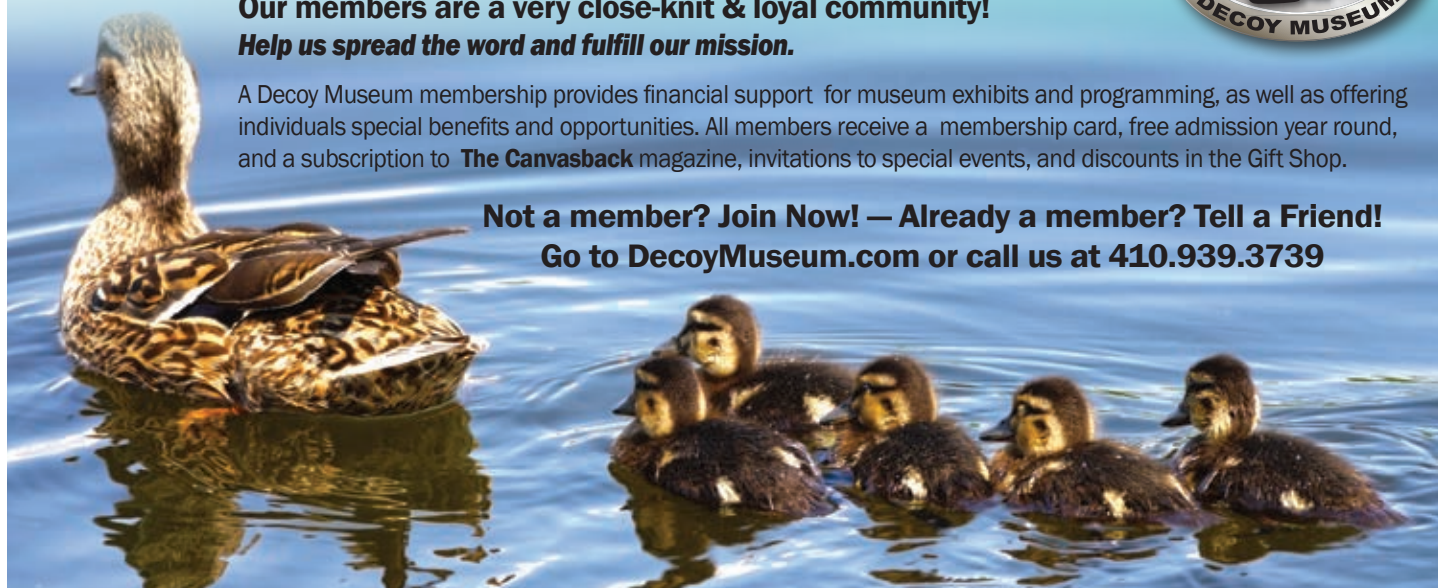
Get in the FORMATION!



Our members are a very close-knit & loyal community!
Help us spread the word and fulfill our mission.

A Decoy Museum membership provides financial support for museum exhibits and programming, as well as offering individuals special benefits and opportunities. All members receive a membership card, free admission year round, and a subscription to **The Canvasback** magazine, invitations to special events, and discounts in the Gift Shop.

Not a member? Join Now! — Already a member? Tell a Friend!
Go to DecoyMuseum.com or call us at 410.939.3739



Museum News



Carve & Candy!

October 31, 2020 – With COVID infections decreasing, the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum successfully hosted its annual Carve & Candy event. Although the overall participation was lower than in previous years, about 40 children were on-hand to tour the museum and carve a pumpkin and paint a silhouette with one of our guest decoy carvers. All in all, the event was fun for all in attendance.

Following CDC guidelines, all participants wore face coverings and practiced social distancing. Volunteers measured everyone's temperature before granting access and contact tracing information was collected for all in attendance. A pre-registration strategy was employed this year to control the number of visitors inside the museum at any one time. Many of our participants incorporated their face coverings into their costume.

Education Coordinator Heather Thompson prepared a special scavenger hunt for all the children inside the museum. Special guest decoy carvers John Eichelberger, Joey Jobs, Josh Blanchette, and Jeannie Vincenti worked with the children in the R. Madison Mitchell Decoy Shop carving pumpkins and painting silhouettes. The children had full control over what they wanted to do with their pumpkin and silhouette. The museum presented every child with special treats completely sealed within a zip-lock enclosure.

The Carve & Candy event has become an annual gathering of local costume-clad children at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. Since its inception, this museum event has provided children a safe environment to show off their creative costumes, carve a pumpkin and get the traditional Halloween treats. During the event, it was hard to determine who has the most fun, the children or the museum staff and volunteers. Please plan to join us in October 2021 for another Carve & Candy event!

Current Exhibits @ the Museum

- **NEW EXHIBIT** – A collection of exquisite decoys and memorabilia from George David Blackiston (Chestertown, MD).



- **NEW EXHIBIT** – A refreshed exhibit of legendary carver R. Madison Mitchell.

- **NEW EXHIBIT** – A myriad of waterfowl decoys created by a host of Annual Festival Chairpersons from throughout the years.



- The breathtaking decorative carvings from the personal collection of master carver and 2018 Festival honoree J. Noble Mentzer.

- A collection of Len Burcham's unpainted red cedar decoys with beautiful grain patterns.

- The Potomac Decoy Collectors Association's stunning collection of coots in the Carver's Gallery.

- A traditional tule decoy in the centuries-old "Lovelock style" by Paiute decoy maker Joe Allen.



- The Home Run Baker rig and bushwhack boat.

- A teal carved in the 1930s by Joseph Coudon of H, a gift from Pat Doherty.



- A lifelike rockfish (striped bass) carved by master carver Lee Tate, Sr.

- A beautiful decorative eastern bluebird carved by master carver Barb Wachter.

- The extraordinary pair of "Daddy" Holly canvasbacks, a gift from the Michael family.



- A collection of songbirds created by various artists donated by John Hostetter in memory of his parents, John and Edith Hostetter

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