

# The Canvasback

HAVRE DE GRACE DECOY MUSEUM

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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



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Charles Jobses proudly displays a high neck keeled drake canvasback that he will be making commemorating the 41st Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival.

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# Charles Jobs Decoys



Charles Jobs has been carving since he was seven years old, trained in the art of decoy making by his father, Captain Harry Jobs. He makes traditional hand carved Chesapeake Bay style decoys handed down from the masters of the craft. . Decoys are available in several collectible styles as well as gunning decoys to be used while hunting. Special orders are accepted for all occasions. Feel free to inquire if you have an item you would like made for your event or to add to your particular collection.

**Charles is honored to be chosen as this year's Honorary Chairman**

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## The Canvasback

#### EDITOR

Mike Tarquini

#### CONTRIBUTORS

Michael Daley  
Ralph Hockman  
John E. Hughes, Jr.  
C. John Sullivan, Jr.  
Chad Tragakis

#### GRAPHICS

Anne Fullem Design

#### PRINTING

Prestige Color, Lancaster, PA

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## From the President...

It's early April and that can only mean one thing, the Havre de Grace Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival is just around the corner. This year's 41st Festival is proud to have Charles Jobs serve as its Honorary Chairman. The Festival will again be held at the STAR Centre on the grounds of the former Havre de Grace High School Gymnasium. Exhibitor spaces are sold out and we are planning for another exciting event on May 6 & 7. The customary Carvers Reception will take place the evening of May 5, after exhibitor set up earlier that afternoon.



This past winter has seen the museum embark on two major strategic initiatives: development and implementation of our electronic touchscreen project as well as the launch of our ambitious effort to expand the museum footprint and encapsulate the R. Madison Mitchell Decoy Shop in order to make it an inside exhibit within the museum's walls.

In July 2021, the Maryland Heritage Area Authority (MHAA) awarded the museum a grant designated to enhance our visitor experience by developing and introducing written, video, and audio content for our visitors by means of electronic touchscreen monitors that will be located at strategic sites throughout the museum. The rich history of waterfowl hunting and decoy making in the Upper Bay region will be presented through the accounts and voices of those who actively participated in these activities. Their stories have been digitized and will be preserved for future generations to enjoy. The museum will add to our digital library of information as time moves forward and will make it available for everyone to enjoy. Our goal is to have the touchscreens operational by the Festival weekend.

Thirty-four years ago the original R. Madison Mitchell Decoy Shop was relocated to the grounds of the museum. Since that time, the shop has survived the deteriorating effects of the weather but has started to show signs of its age. A new roof was recently installed courtesy of John & Jolie Mitchell. In an effort to preserve the shop, and all it has stood for over the years, the museum has undertaken an ambitious effort to expand the current museum building, encapsulating the Mitchell Shop, bringing it indoors and out of the weather. This will enable its preservation for future generations to enjoy as they tour the museum and learn about decoy making in the Upper Chesapeake Bay region. Plans for the project were presented to the Havre de Grace Planning Commission on March 14 and we were given approval to enter into the design phase of the project. Over the coming months, the building expansion committee will work closely with an architectural firm to design a structure and project costs for this effort. This project will be very expensive and will encounter many challenges, but "Our History is Worth Preserving." One hundred percent of the Museum's Board has contributed financially to support this effort.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Potomac Decoy Collectors Association (PDCA) and its members for its fabulous exhibit of Bay Bluebills which has resided in the museum for several months. The PDCA has recently taken down this bluebill exhibit and replaced it with a sensational exhibit of John "Daddy" Holly Canvasbacks, that has already earned itself critical acclaim. I would also like to thank the PDCA for their generous gift of \$2,000 that they recently presented to the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum.



41ST ANNUAL

# Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival



Friday, May 5, 2023

**Vendor Set-up** • 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

STAR Centre, 710 Congress Avenue, Havre de Grace, MD

**Carvers Reception** • 6:00 PM

Decoy Museum, 215 Giles Street, Havre de Grace, MD

Saturday, May 6, 2023

**Exhibition** • 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

STAR Centre, 710 Congress Avenue  
Havre de Grace, MD

Sunday, May 7, 2023

**Exhibition** • 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM

STAR Centre, 710 Congress Avenue  
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Honorary Chairman  
Charles Jobs



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# 2023 Festival Information

## Friday, May 5

### **Exhibitor Set-up**

1:00 PM – 4:00 PM • STAR Centre

### **Carvers Reception**

6:00 PM – 9:00 PM • Decoy Museum

## Saturday, May 6

### **41st Annual Decoy & Wildlife**

#### **Art Festival Exhibition**

9:00 AM – 5:00 PM • STAR Centre (Main Gym)

### **Gunning Decoy Registration & Competition**

STAR Centre (Small Gym)

Registration: 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Judging: 11:00 AM – 3:00 PM

### **Decorative Carving Registration & Competition**

STAR Centre (Small Gym)

Registration: 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Judging: 11:00 AM – 3:00 PM

### **J. Evans McKinney Old Decoy Competition**

STAR Centre (Small Gym)

Registration 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Judging: 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

## Sunday, May 7

### **41st Annual Decoy & Wildlife**

#### **Art Festival Exhibition**

9:00 AM – 3:00 PM • STAR Centre (Main Gym)

### **Museum Spring Raffle Drawing**

1:00 PM • STAR Centre (Lobby)

## A note about the Honorary Chairman . . .

Charles Keith Jobes is the middle son of Captain Harry Robert Jobes (1988 Honorary Chairman). Charles has been making waterfowl decoys since he was 7 years old. He began working with Captain Harry in his decoy shop in Aberdeen, MD in 1971. In 1996 he began working with his older brother Bobby where he stayed until 1996. Charles established his own decoy shop in Havre de Grace that same year and has been there ever since. Charles and Patty, his wife of 38 years, have successfully operated their decoy business ever since. They are avid supporters of Ducks Unlimited.

**Food & Beverages will be available throughout the weekend. Please visit our website [www.decoymuseum.com](http://www.decoymuseum.com) for updates to this schedule as we draw nearer to the event.**

41ST ANNUAL  
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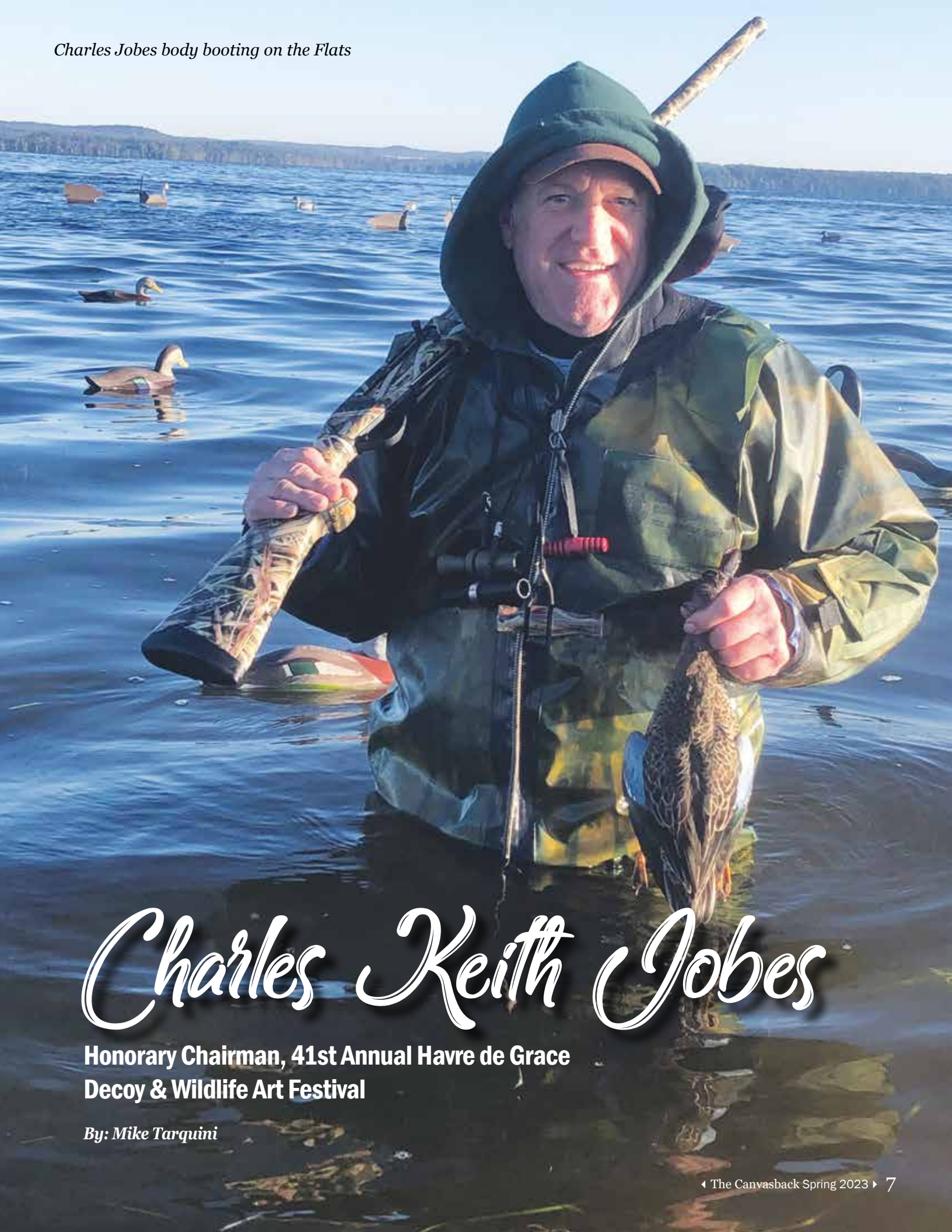
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A man in a green hooded waders is standing in shallow water, holding a duck decoy in his right hand and a small fish in his left. He is smiling at the camera. In the background, there are several other duck decoys floating on the water, and a line of trees on the far shore under a clear sky.

*Charles Jobes body booting on the Flats*

# *Charles Keith Jobes*

**Honorary Chairman, 41st Annual Havre de Grace  
Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival**

*By: Mike Tarquini*



Within the saga of American history, there are a handful of instances where the forces of nature, geography, industry, and humanity came together for brief periods in important ways. Duck shooting on the Upper Chesapeake Bay represents one of these instances. By the mid-19th century, waterfowling played an important role in the nation's commerce and sport, influencing everything from the American diet and fashion to politics and economics, to literature and art. In the process, it forever changed a handful of humble villages that dotted the shoreline of Maryland's Susquehanna Flats and led to the development of what many believe is the ultimate expression of a uniquely American form of folk art, the waterfowl decoy.

*Chad Tragakis – Forward, Waterfowling on the Susquehanna Flats by Michael Daley (2021)*



*Charles proudly displays a punt gun that is one of two that he made as family pet Chester looks on.*

It was in that shop that Harry Jobses introduced all three of his sons to the trade. All of them have developed into notable decoy makers since those early years.

The entire Jobses family have had a relationship with the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum throughout its thirty-seven year history. Captain Harry Jobses was recognized as Honorary Chairman of its 7th Annual Decoy & Wildlife Arts Festival in 1988. Oldest son Bobby Jobses was bestowed that honor in 2014 at the 33rd Festival. Five years later, youngest son, Captain Joey Jobses was chosen as the Honorary Chairman of the 38th Festival in 2019. We are honored to have Charles Jobses serve as Honorary Chairman this year at the 41st Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival.

Charles Keith Jobses was born at Harford Memorial Hospital in Havre de Grace on February 28, 1964 to Captain Harry Robert Jobses and Alice Helen Stalters Jobses. Charles is the middle son of the three Jobses children. From the start, Charles became part of decoy carving royalty as Harry and Alice chose R. Madison Mitchell to serve as his godfather. As a youth, Charles was influenced by his surroundings. Being raised in the Upper Chesapeake Bay area, he fished and hunted waterfowl. He fondly remembers that starting at age 10, he was assigned the duty of shooting and retrieving cripples (ducks and geese) as Captain Harry and his crew body booted on the Susquehanna Flats. It wasn't until age 13 that Charles actually killed his first goose. Charles recalls accompanying his father to a water blind in the Bohemia River where he learned how to row a boat and had his indoctrination to river mud. Charles' first shotgun was a 410 Springfield Savage Pump. His second gun, a 20 gauge double-barrel, he received as a Christmas gift.



*Charles, R. Madison Mitchell, Joey Jobses, and Captain Harry Jobses in 1967*



*Alice, Charles, R. Madison Mitchell, Bobby Jobses, and Helen Mitchell*



*Charles at age fourteen working on his mini miniatures*



*Mississippi and Mississippi State decoys*



Charles married Patty Gorham, his wife of 38 years, in June 1985. Charles and Patty have raised 2 sons: Keith (1986) and Andrew (1988). They enjoy 3 grandchildren who live in Salisbury, MD and Laurel, DE. According to Charles, "Patty has been a major cog in the wheel that keeps our business going. She actively participates in every aspect of our business, even providing guidance on the accuracy of the colors on our decoys." Patty packs and ships every decoy sold to those outside our area.



*Charles and Captain Harry Jobs at Charles' decoy shop*

Charles indicates that he has never worked for anyone else and has been making decoys since the age of seven (1971). Charles began his decoy making career working for his dad, who opened up his decoy shop in Aberdeen that same year. Charles enjoyed having Captain Harry take his early creations to the many shows up and down the East Coast and offering them for sale. Charles sold his mini miniatures for \$0.50 each, elevating their price to \$1.00 over time. "Daddy would pick Joey and I up on most Friday evenings when he would be painting at R. Madison Mitchell's Shop and we would play in the saw dust downstairs, nailing blocks of wood together, and give each

other rides in the old wooden wheelbarrow that was always found under the tree adjacent to the shop." As Charles aged, he remembers Captain Harry picking he and younger brother Joey up after school and taking them immediately to his shop to work on decoys. Charles remembers following this schedule until the age of sixteen when he began working with his older brother Bobby in his shop, where he stayed until 1996. It was at that point, that Charles established his own shop in Havre de Grace where he has remained ever since.

Charles fondly remembers learning how to feather decoys with Captain Harry, where they would paint small (3") cast iron canvasback paper weights together, Charles painting the white on the back, light-gray feathers, and black tails, handing them over to Harry who struck the tail feathers on each bird. They would paint over one-hundred canvasback paper weights in an evening.



*Charles Jobs' mini miniatures.*

Charles remembers 1996 being a slow time for his decoy venture. It was that year, that Captain Harry's second wife Helen's son, Jeff Williams, influenced QVC to offer authentic Jobs family decoys on the network. The effort was part of a 50 in 50 states tour where they picked 20 handmade items from each state. Six-hundred-fifty Jobs antique drake mallard decoys were sold on the QVC network in 3.5 minutes.

When asked what differentiates his decoys from most others, Charles is quick to respond, "I paint all tailfeathers the way they are supposed to be." He paints the tailfeathers placing the longest feather furthest away from the decoy's centerline and shortens each of the other four feathers as he

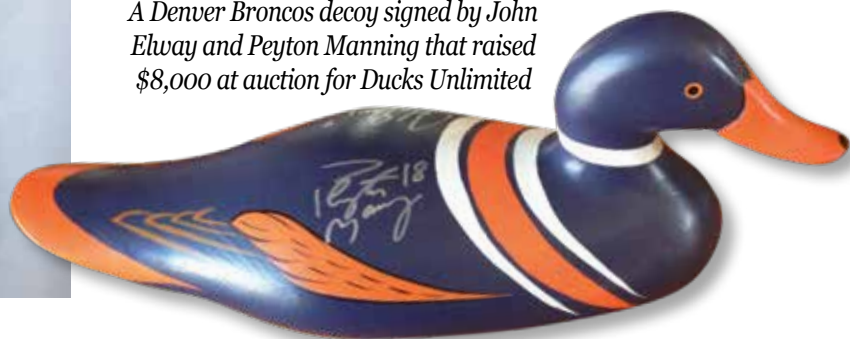


*Charles and Patty Jobs at the Lancaster DU Dinner in Willow Street, PA*



*Charles Jobs Nene goose decoys (foreground) with authentic Nene geese in the background (Hawaii).*

*A Denver Broncos decoy signed by John Elway and Peyton Manning that raised \$8,000 at auction for Ducks Unlimited*





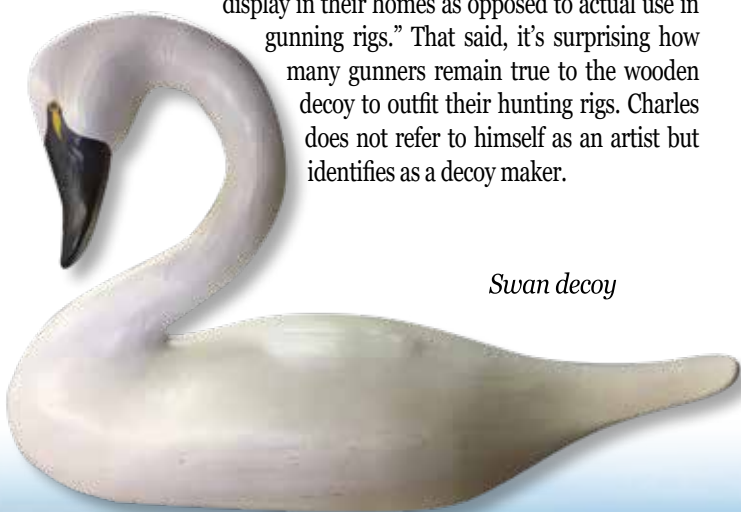


*Charles with the Bo Whoop Shotgun*



*Charles, Doug Schoenrock (President of DU), Keith Jobs, Andrew Jobs, Daniel Thiel, Dan Thiel (Executive Secretary DU) enjoy a hunt at Beaver Dam (Tunica, MS) in 2019*

moves toward the centerline. He notes there are other decoy painters that order the feathers in the same way, but many don't. He also mentions that his paint sheen is more of a satin versus the traditional flat finish, adding more "patina" to the finished surface. Charles, like most decoy makers has come to accept that "contemporary decoys are made more for people to display in their homes as opposed to actual use in gunning rigs." That said, it's surprising how many gunners remain true to the wooden decoy to outfit their hunting rigs. Charles does not refer to himself as an artist but identifies as a decoy maker.



*Swan decoy*

When asked, Charles indicates that a canvasback is his favorite species to make. He refers to them as "the king of ducks." He likes painting them for they are easy in his opinion. He also enjoys making "anything that is different from the normal species made by most makers." He fondly remembers making nene geese. The nene, also known as the nēnē or the Hawaiian goose, is a species of bird endemic to the Hawaiian Islands. The nene is exclusively found in the wild on the islands of Waikoloa, Oahu, Maui, Kauai, Molokai, and Hawaii. His least favorite species to make include mallards, harlequins, and wood ducks. Charles states these species have "a great deal of complicated lines and are



*Black Swan decoy*



*Charles and his two sons Keith (L) and Andrew (R) enjoy a body booting day on the Susquehanna Flats*





*Charles bags a canvasback on the Susquehanna Flats*

much harder to paint.” Charles Jobes is known for making a variety of specialty decoys to commemorate special groups or causes. He hollows out decoys to serve as “Tribute Ducks” that contain ashes of the hunter’s favorite dogs. He has painted decoys for Orioles and Ravens fans in their team colors as well as making patriotic US flag-colored swans. He indicates that he has made decoys in the colors of most if not all of the Southeastern conference (SEC) for college sports fans to proudly display. Charles has also crafted decoys that bear logos that companies use as promotional gifts for employees and customers. Charles was one of the first carvers in the Susquehanna Flats region to make full-size standing geese and ducks.

While carving decoys, Charles also worked on the water with his brothers Bobby and Joey catching crabs and fish of all kinds. It’s no surprise that working the water is a challenging way to make a living, necessitating long days in all kinds of weather. As with all watermen, stories abound concerning life on the water. In 2008, Charles realized that he was more suited to focus on making his waterfowl decoys.

Significant events along with the QVC experience mentioned above for Charles Jobes include the making of a series of three body booting videos with his brothers for Ducks Unlimited Films for DUTV on the Outdoor Network in 2003, 2011, & 2013. Through years of involvement with Ducks Unlimited, Charles and Patty have been recognized as Diamond Life Sponsors. A full set of Charles Jobes waterfowl decoys is on display in the National Ducks Unlimited Headquarters in Memphis, TN. Charles also has decoys featured in several displays within the Ducks Unlimited Waterfowling Heritage Center in the Bass Pro Shop Pyramid which is the official museum of DU. Charles proudly recalls winning the Outdoor Category for Garden and Gun Magazine’s Made in the South Awards with his mourning dove.



*Charlie Daniels Decoy*



*Gadwall pair*



*Speckled Belly Goose*





*Tommy Gorham turns decoy bodies on Charles' duplicating lathe*



*Wood ducks*

Charles and Patty have traveled for the past sixteen years to every National Ducks Unlimited Convention. Their trips have taken them from Hawaii to Quebec City, Quebec Canada, and points in between. Charles and Patty have donated a body booting adventure on the Susquehanna Flats experience at each convention that has raised well over \$100,000 for Ducks Unlimited.

Charles and Patty purchased a trip to Beaver Dam (Tunica, MS) to shoot the famous Bo Whoop Shotgun owned by Nash Buckingham. Charles remembers that trip well and states that it was a great experience for he and his two boys, Keith, and Andrew.

Charles' entire family are Lifetime members of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. Captain Harry's first wife Alice sponsored Charles' oldest son Keith as a Charter member in the year he was born (November 1986). He was undoubtedly the youngest Charter member in the Museum's history.

As he looks forward to the future, Charles hopes he can enjoy at least thirty more years of good health. As all of us who reach our golden years, he looks forward to having to work a bit less so he can focus more on home projects and do additional things outside of decoy making with his family, especially his grandchildren.



*Charles and Patty spend some quality time with grandchildren Harrison Charles (L) and Rowan (R)*



*Charles and granddaughter Sophia*

In commemoration of being the Honorary Chairman of the 41st Annual Decoy & Wildlife Festival, Charles will be making a special edition of high head keeled canvasbacks that will be available at the show. Charles and Patty are taking orders for this special decoy at [chesterdecoys@comcast.net](mailto:chesterdecoys@comcast.net).







# Decoy Maker Doug Gibson Becomes a Centenarian

*By: Mike Tarquini*

A centenarian is a person who has reached the age of 100 years. Because life expectancies worldwide are below one hundred, the term is invariably associated with longevity. The United Nations in 2012 estimated that there were 316,600 living centenarians worldwide. The most recent data collected in 2021, suggests that there are 97,914 centenarians in the United States.

**On February 28, 2023, long-time decoy maker Douglas Abraham Gibson (Milford, DE) joined that prestigious club as he celebrated his one-hundredth birthday.**



**D**oug Gibson was born as the ninth of ten children to Samuel and Harriet Gibson in Trappe, MD on February 28, 1923. Samuel Gibson worked on a Schooner that ferried lumber and other goods from Maryland's Eastern Shore to Baltimore. Samuel was an outdoorsman that enjoyed hunting and fishing on the nearby waters of the Tred Avon and Choptank Rivers as well as the Chesapeake Bay.



*The Gibson family in 1945. Samuel (left), Harriet, Donald (nephew), and Douglas.*

When Doug was 7 years old, Samuel and Harriet moved their family from Trappe to a farm, owned by Billy Meyers, near Oxford, MD. Samuel, Harriet, and the children worked that farm as sharecroppers for many years. Samuel continued his love for the outdoors. To outfit his hunting rig, Samuel Gibson made working waterfowl decoys in the 1930s-1940s. Like most decoy makers at that time, Samuel made his decoys out of necessity and not for pleasure. He hand chopped his decoys with a hatchet and carved with a pocket knife.

Doug attended an all-black elementary school in Trappe where the students had to use old, tattered text books and were taught by black teachers. He said, "blacks did not feel neglected at that time, for that's all they knew." Doug attended Easton High School from 1937-1941. After graduation, he attended Princess Anne Academy (now University of Maryland Eastern Shore, UMES). Doug was the homesick type and returned to the farm every weekend during his time at Princess Anne Academy. Samuel told Doug that if he continued to come home every weekend, that he wasn't sending him back to college. Billy Meyers' wife often advised Doug to forego college life and return to work the farm. Doug's mother, Dorothy, was determined that Doug was not going to become another one of Samuel's farm hands and insisted that he continue to pursue his education and leave the farm behind.

In 1942 with the world at war (WWII), Doug at age 19, abandoned his studies at Princess Anne Academy, traveled to Baltimore, met with a recruiter, and enlisted in the United States Navy. Doug was stationed at Pearl Harbor, HI for the next four years (1942-1946). While in the Navy, he attained the rank of Petty Officer, Second Class. The Navy was also segregated during these times and according to Doug, "we didn't like it, but we tolerated it."



*Doug Gibson in the Navy.*

Once discharged from his service obligations, Doug used his GI Bill benefits to continue his college studies at Delaware State College, originally founded in 1891 as Delaware College for Colored Students. During his time at Delaware State (1946-1950), Doug pursued a bachelor's degree in Industrial Arts. While working on his degree, he served as an independent contractor in charge of commission at the Tred Avon Yacht Club in Oxford where he was responsible for food, beverages, and a staff to accomplish his role. Being a contractor, Doug financed things with his own money. Billy Meyers, owner of the farm in Oxford, was the Commodore of the Tred Avon Yacht Club at that time.



*Doug Gibson College photo (Delaware State College, 1950).*

During his time at Delaware State College, Doug would frequent sporting events where he couldn't help but notice all of the young ladies in attendance. Doug recalls, "All those pretty girls kept smiling at me and I wanted to know what they were smiling at. I ended up marrying one of those pretty girls and settled in Milford, DE." Doug was referring to Dorothy Henry who would become his wife in 1953. Doug graduated in 1950 from Delaware State College with a B.S. in Industrial Arts. In 1993, Delaware State College was renamed Delaware State University.

Doug Gibson, along with many of his WWII veterans used their GI Bill benefit dollars to support the financially struggling Delaware State College after the war. He and many other black veterans pumped their GI Bill dollars as a group into the school to keep it afloat while furthering their education at the college.





*Doug Gibson teaching class at Delaware Technical and Community College.*

Following his time at Delaware State College, Doug decided to pursue a master's degree in education at the University of Delaware. He found himself 1 of 4 African American students enrolled at the University at that time. The University of Delaware was obligated to accept Doug for he was using his GI Bill benefits to fund his education. Doug recalled the challenges of being black during that time of segregation. He was permitted to purchase his meals in the school's cafeteria but forbidden to sit among the white student population to eat them. He once earned an "A" in one of his classes, only to be accused of cheating by his instructor. Doug says, "the treatment that he and other African Americans were subjected to just showed the ignorance and attitudes of whites at that period in time. Despite all that, I was determined to get an education." Against all odds, Doug completed his master's degree in education in 1952.

After earning his master's degree, Doug applied for a teaching job at a junior high school in Virginia. Doug initially interviewed with the selection committee by telephone and was accepted for the vacant position. After Doug arrived at the Virginia school to complete the details of his hiring, the offer was withdrawn because school officials then realized that he was an African American. They told Doug, "We can't have a black man teaching our children."

Doug's first teaching job was at an African American school in Southern Maryland where he taught woodworking and mathematics. He then went on to teach a number of years within the Milford School District at Benjamin Banneker Elementary School and Milford Junior High School. When Doug moved to Milford, DE he found that most blacks were not willing to rise up and challenge the "status quo". In his own words, "I was determined not to be that way." There were many other blacks at that time in Milford that shared Doug's passion for change but did not share his fearlessness. In 1968, He was recruited by Delaware Technical and Community College (Del Tech) to teach architectural engineering. He remained at Del Tech for 20 years until his retirement in 1988 at the age of 65.



*Doug with two of his duck decoys*

Doug Gibson married Dorothy Henry in 1953 and moved to Milford, DE. Doug and Dorothy had two children: Darrald (1954) and Dawne (1965). The couple adopted Darrald's cousin Craig after his mother died as a result of complications from childbirth.

Doug had an interest in architecture prior to his time at Delaware State College, but it was while taking a class there that he designed what was to become his home in Milford, DE. Doug taught himself many of the skills required to build that house. He recalls gathering some used bricks from a nearby burned down building, purchasing some mortar, and teaching himself to lay brick properly in the backyard. Although Doug is quick to point out that "my hands are the only ones that have ever touched this house", he later shared that he taught Dorothy to lay the flooring inside the house. Other than his own house, Doug designed several commercial and residential projects in the Delaware area.





*Doug Gibson takes a break from detailing a decoy head.*



*Doug Gibson with historian C. John Sullivan, Jr. at age 99 (2022).*

Like his father Samuel, Doug enjoyed the outdoors and as a youth frequently went hunting and fishing. As he grew older, Doug hunted less and less, but remained loyal to his love for fishing. In the morning before his class at Del Tech, Doug would frequent Indian River Inlet and fish, often before dawn. Doug recalls that he named his daughter Dawne because she was born near dawn and caused him to miss his fishing that day.

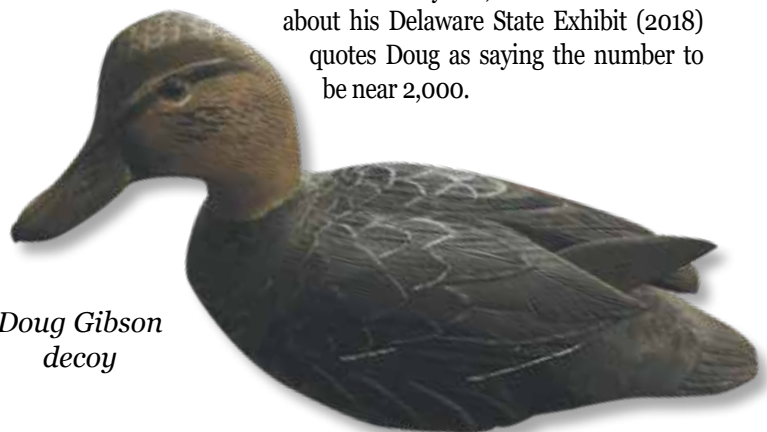
Hunting waterfowl during his youth was not the motivator for his entry into waterfowl decoy making. Although his father Samuel was the first to expose him to the folk art of making decoys, it was his love for woodworking and a visits to the World Carving Competitions (Ward Foundation) in nearby Salisbury, MD in the late 1960s that enticed him to try his hand at carving. Doug said “as I made my way around the competition, I said to myself, I can do that.”

In 1970, Doug embarked on his waterfowl decoy carving career. He would shape his decoy bodies and heads using a band saw. He would then refine them with hand tools. Doug’s wife Dorothy gifted him a Fordham tool and the following Christmas, his son Darrauld gifted him a Dremel tool. Both of these tools enabled Doug to carve his decoys in a more efficient way. Doug became obsessed with his carvings to the extent that with every carving he made, he wanted to make another. He made both full-size and miniature decoy carvings.

At Del Tech, Doug Gibson taught both daytime and evening classes. Instead of making the half-hour trip back to Milford after his daytime classes, he would remain in Georgetown, DE and work on his carvings in his shop area classroom. When at home, Doug would

sit in his living room and advance his carving projects, much to his wife Dorothy’s chagrin. According to Doug, “my wife Dorothy evicted me from the living room and forbade me to work on my carvings inside the house any longer.” It was at that point, after his retirement from Del Tech in 1988, that Doug built his decoy shop adjacent to his home. Doug carried out his carving and taught carving classes in that shop.

Doug states that there were no active African American decoy carvers that he knew of at the time that he launched his carving career in 1970. Despite being a minority carver, Doug felt that all of the white decoy carvers treated him with respect and as an equal. He interacted with numerous carvers at the many decoy shows where he exhibited and sold his works of art. In addition to selling his carvings, Doug entered some of them in carving competitions. He recalls winning a 2nd Place ribbon at a competition in Canada in the early 1970s. Doug Gibson was invited by the Smithsonian Institute to demonstrate his craft in 2003. Doug doesn’t know exactly how many decoy carvings that he has created over the years, but an article written about his Delaware State Exhibit (2018) quotes Doug as saying the number to be near 2,000.



*Doug Gibson  
decoy*





*Doug Gibson was honored at Delaware State University in 2018. (L-R) Provost Tony Allen, Institutional Advancement VP Vita Pickrum, Douglas Gibson, DSU Acting President Wilma Mishoe, DSU Trustee John Allen and DSU alumna Reba Hollingsworth*

Doug Gibson has always been a proponent for positive change. According to his son Darrauld, “he was a one-man civil rights movement.” As Doug Gibson was growing up on the Eastern Shore and during his early years in Milford, DE racial tensions were significant. Segregation was still very prevalent in the school systems. In 1954, Milford attempted to integrate a local high school with 11 African American students without success. This famous Milford 11 incident has been well documented in the history books. Despite the unfavorable conditions, Doug Gibson managed to advance his teaching career.

In the mid-1960s, Doug felt that government within the City of Milford did not represent the needs of black people. Doug stood up, expressed an interest, and filed his candidacy to be a Milford City Councilman. It wasn’t long afterwards that a group of white men showed up at his house with the intent to discourage him. Doug Gibson continued to run his campaign, but was not elected that year. Although Doug was disappointed, he was not intimidated from running again. In later years Doug was elected as Councilman in Milford. According to Doug Morrow, who served on that council with Doug Gibson, “he was always fair and served Milford in a professional manner throughout his terms as councilman.”

Today, Doug Gibson continues to reside in the house he built in the early 1960s along with his oldest son Darrauld who serves as his caretaker. Doug lost his adopted son Craig in 1993, wife Dorothy in 2004, and his daughter Dawne in 2011.

Doug Gibson says, “I was not always easy to deal with, especially if you were treading on my privileges, but always being myself and not allowing anybody to stop me from pursuing and achieving the goals that I set for myself is the key to the success that I have experienced.” Congratulations to Doug Gibson for achieving the title of centenarian and having achieved so much in his 100 years. We hope that he remains in good health and continues to share his life stories which will serve to inspire those who are fortunate enough to hear them.

#### **Author’s Note:**

Writing the Doug Gibson story was both an inspiration and an honor. I would like to thank Darrauld and Doug Gibson for assisting with the facts, spending time on the telephone, and opening up their home as interviews were conducted. Special thanks to Doug Morrow for graciously making the introduction to the Gibson family and providing the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum and Canvasback magazine the opportunity to feature this incredible story.

#### *Doug Gibson’s works on exhibit at Delaware State University*







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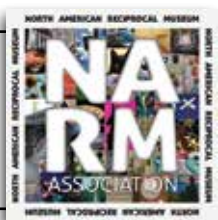
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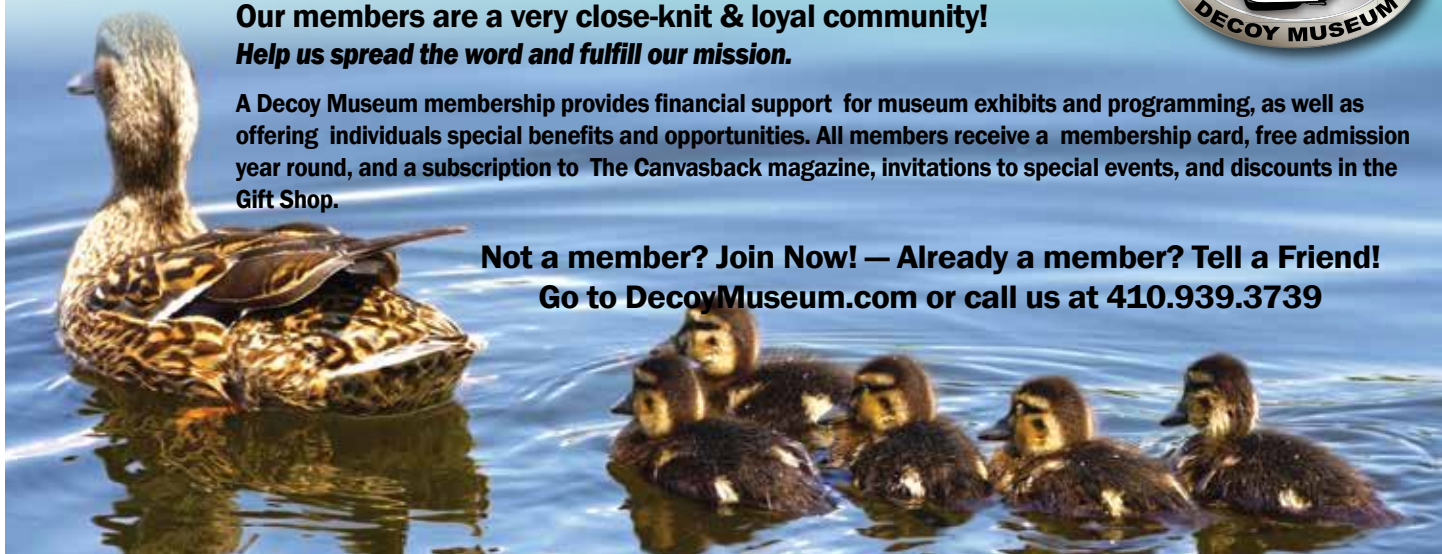
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*Placing decoys on  
the Bush River*

## **Sinkbox Shooting at Broad Neck Farm, Bush River, Edgewood, Maryland 1866 to 1868 and 1872**

*By C. John Sullivan, Jr.*

**I**n 1929, John C. Phillips, the noted ornithologist, penned the introduction to *Shooting Journal of George Henry Mackay 1865-1922*. Mackay was born in 1843 and died in 1937. Phillips, who had published over 200 books on hunting, conservation, and birds, was a friend and hunting companion of Mackay. He recognized Mackay's dedication to maintaining accurate descriptions of hunts. Both successes and losses were documented. In addition to his shooting journal, he had authored over 70 ornithological articles, most of which were published in *The Auk* from 1890 to 1926. Mackay grew active in efforts to preserve native birds. He was aggravated by the demand for feathers for fashions in the 1890's. His journal entries stopped in 1897 and then resumed for the years 1921 and 1922.

In 1983, I first wrote about the sinkbox and its devastation to waterfowl populations. I have written and researched the sinkbox and have collected numerous photographs and journal entries depicting its use. George Mackay's written description of and successes with this device allow the reader to travel to those days and to share his experiences. Mackay traveled far and wide for days of sport; he journeyed from Nantucket, Massachusetts, to as far away as Buenos Aires, Lake Champlain, both North and South Carolina, Prince Edward Island, and Minnesota. In November of 1866 at the age of 23, he traveled to experience shooting from a sinkbox in Harford County, Maryland. He stayed at Broad Neck Farm in Edgewood and shot between the famed Gunpowder and Bush River Necks. In October of 1865, he wrote "This book is intended to show the numbers and kinds of game shot by my friends and myself and the various localities in which they were procured ...."



E. Madison Mitchell sinkbox assessment  
record of 1902

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FUNERAL DIRECTOR,  
HARROLLTON AVE. AND FAYETTE ST.  
TELEPHONE 1140  
NORTH AVENUE AND OAK STREET,  
TELEPHONE 3589.

BALTIMORE.

May 12<sup>th</sup> 1902

To the County Commissioners  
of Harford Co  
Gentlemen

I herewith hand you  
a statement of property located at  
Phumb Point in Harford Co.

About 300 decoys	\$45.00
1 Sink box	10.00
1 Tub	15.00
2 Small Boats	20.00
1 Gasoline Launch	150.00
1 Bug eye	40.00
House furniture	50.00
	425.00

water's level with iron. It is just large enough for a man to lie down full length. Well, with the help of a man, I got the "machine" all ready, and was duly stowed away about sunrise. But as it was stark calm I did not do much, and I missed several shots early in the most astonishing manner. Let me here state that I never saw anything I liked half so much, and it is without the slightest exception the finest contrivance for killing fowl that I ever saw or heard of. It is completely hidden by the numberless decoys, so much so that a person in a boat fifty yards off can discern nothing but a flock of decoys, in looking down on it you can of course see the whole surface, and it is a very singular site to a person who is not used to it, to see a flock of fowl wheeling around and then seeing a man suddenly rise and pour in a destructive fire. I have not yet got quite used to it, but considering my being wholly unused to it, I did fully as well as I expected. I came into dinner and went out again about half past one o'clock but I did not get a single shot again today. It breezed up a little from the S.E. at about two p.m., but all died away in a couple of hours. Tomorrow is Sunday, and on the day after I shall try them again, wind and weather favorable."

Geo. H. M.

13 Blackheads

The above statement differs from what  
the assessor, viz the decoys are old and  
not worth more than I gave, the box is very old,  
one, boat cost \$20, when new about 7 years ago  
and not \$5 at present, the other boat \$25, and been  
in use 4 seasons, the ~~rest~~ Gasoline boat

In November of 1866, Mackay made his first trip to the Bush River, where he spent 13 days. He describes in great detail his very first experience on Broad Neck Farm, Bush River, Edgewood, Maryland, on November 10, 1866:

"I left Boston on the 3d by steamer and reached Baltimore the morning of the 7th. The 8th and 9th I was hard at work getting ready to shoot, stringing decoys, etc. The number we use here is much greater than I ever shot over, 225 to a box; each decoy has a separate weight and line, and it is no small job to set and take them in, I assure you, when the water freezes on them on a cold November day. Today I commenced a new experience in shooting; viz., a sink box which is an exact imitation of a coffin, with wings, and sunk to the



Water-level view of sinkbox





*Boarding a sinkbox for a day's shoot*

On November 15, 1866, Mackay wrote of a day that few of us if any would care to endure, but he accurately describes what most all who have participated in shooting from a sinkbox would experience:

*"I shot off the Point this morning. There was a little breeze when we set the decoys, but it calmed down at sunrise, and what few fowl darted very badly, coming mostly on my left shoulder. The Ducks did not decoy well at all. At about 10 o'clock it breezed up very fresh from the S., and the box jumped and took in a good deal of water, and I can not imagine a more disagreeable position than to shoot out of a box in choppy weather. I got wet through, most of the water going down the back of my neck. Think of this, my readers, on a cold day in November or December, and answer if shooting is not a healthy sport. As for me, I do not like it, and I was obliged to knock under and take in the decoys at*

*12 o'clock, at which time there was two or three inches of water in the box and more coming in, and it is a hard piece of work to take in two or three hundred decoys and wrap each one around with its own line and weight (3 lbs.) and have the wind blowing. I saw a great many Canvas Backs but having no decoys for them, they would not dart to Red Head coys. The wind has changed more to the eastward. It commenced to rain at one o'clock quite hard, and I think we shall have some dirty weather and I doubt if I can shoot tomorrow. Q Geo. H. M.*

**4 Canvas Backs**

**8 Black Heads, larger Scaup Ducks**

**1 Velvet Duck, Scoter**

**13**



From November 10, 1866, through November 24, Mackay went out 13 times. On his very best day in Harford County during that time period, he shot a total of 28 ducks, only one of which was a canvasback. His results for canvasbacks during the 13-day stay were a total of 30. Among the list of his total, he includes 3 grey squirrels, 1 velvet duck (Scoter), 3 dumb birds (ruddy ducks). On the day before his last hunt, he returned to shore after a morning in the sink box, painted 150 decoys, and spent the balance of the day fixing up generally. Other than the many references to the use of the decoy rig and painting, he records that "We have a good stool now, take them altogether: 450 Red Heads." Only one mention of another species of decoys, the canvasback, is recorded in his journal entries.

Mackay references several fowling grounds in Harford County that are familiar to many of us, all of which were taken by the United States in 1917 for the development of the Army's Proving Grounds. Some of the locations he makes reference to are Loterick's Creek, Tapley's Bar, Hing's (King's) Creek, Dove's Cove, Ferry Bar, and Eagle Point.

Apparently, Mackay was not discouraged by the results of his Fall sport and returned to Broad Neck on February 28, 1867. The Spring shooting proved much improved, with over 800 ducks killed, the result of 26 days of sport. When most readers consider this sport in this region, they immediately think of the king of all waterfowl, the canvasback duck, but the record revealed that of the more than 800 fowl shot, only 2 were canvasbacks, the majority being redheads.

### *The Gunpowder Neck ca. 1866*



*John M. M. Pusey at age 14 in a sinkbox for the first time*





John M. M. Pusey shooting from a sinkbox rig for a Department of Natural Resources reenactment ca. 1966

On March 22, 1867, Mackay recorded a tiresome experience:

*"The N.E. snowstorm of yesterday continued unabated all day today. At about 11 A.M. we went down to the shore to see how our boxes and boat stood it. We found the boats half full of water but all right. One of our boxes was sunk and the other gone. We then took our small boat and went in search of it and rowed from the little Cedars to Tapley's Bar, but could not find it, so we came home to dinner. In the aft'n we went out again and found it sunk in the middle of Loterick's Creek. We got all the water out of it and towed it in shore. We then cleaned out the boats and the other box and came home, leaving everything all snug. The canvas on the wings of boxes was all torn; otherwise all right. R Geo. H. M.*

As we read of these days, we tend to think of the modern accessories and advantages we have grown to experience. The recovery boat was rowed out, not under power of a modern outboard motor, and the clothing and boots were not made of modern waterproof materials or contemporary insulated fabric. No complaints are ever recorded; it was just whatever the day called for to get the task at hand done.

On March 29, 1867, after 26 days of Spring shooting, George Mackay noted this in his journal:

*"Our old house looks very well tonight, as we have over one hundred and fifty nice fowl hanging up to take home tomorrow. The wind is still N. W. and very fresh and it will no doubt be same way tomorrow. R Geo. H. M.*

**56 Red-Heads**

**15 Bald-Pates, Widgeon**

**3 Black Heads, Scaup (larger)**

**1 Hooded Merganser**

**75**

Mackay returned to Edgewood on November 11, 1867, for another 15 days of the Fall season. Of the 103 birds killed, once again canvasbacks were in the minority, with only 21 of the total being harvested. He did record some different species on this outing: Blue Peters, American coot, Buffle Head, Whistler, Golden-eye, Hooded Merganser, Goosander, Rose breasted, Long-tail Duck, Old Squaw, and Horned Grebe. The majority of the birds killed were once again Red Heads.

On March 16, 1868, Mackay is back at Broad Neck Farm for the Spring shooting, and the next day he records what was to be his very best day on the Bush River:

*"I turned out early this morning as I had concluded to set off the water fence and had to tow the box some ways from where I left it yesterday. At 12 A. M. it was raining and foggy, the rain stopped at about 3 A. M. I left the house at about 4 ½ A. M. in a thick fog, and I confess I was a good deal discouraged with the weather. I however had everything all fixed about light and it was impossible to see over sixty yards, the fog being so thick. For the first fifteen minutes I did not get a shot and then they commenced to fly. At about nine A. M. the fog lifted and the wind came south pretty fresh, and as I had the box head to the shore and as the water coming in a little I was afraid I should have to move, but the Ducks were flying so fast I had no time to do anything but to attend to them. It is*



*almost needless to remark on the shooting. All I would say is that I never saw it excelled in my life and I never have before succeeded myself in killing so many Ducks in one day alone. I took up at 4 P.M. and after getting the guns, ducks, etc. up to the house and washing out my three muzzle-loading guns I was completely tired out. The mere process alone of loading and handling the three guns and constant recoil was enough to tire any one and not having shot for some time it gave me quite a headache and I fairly dreaded to fire, but I had made up my mind to make a great day, so I did not give up and I am glad to say I have got more fowl in one day than has been killed yet. ✎ Geo. H. M.*

**1 Ruddy Duck**

**5 Bald Pates**

**2 Black Heads**

**100 Red Heads**

**108**

Mackay's final remark for his days in Edgewood were rather simple, he entered this comment in his record

*"In all, 205 in five days' shooting. "" BIG."*

In January of 1893, Mackay revisited his journal and added a post script:

*"I have never exceeded this day's shooting alone. "*

✎ Geo. H. M.

It goes without saying that none of us have ever experienced such a day nor, in this day and age, would want to, but in the days before limits were set and the birds were being shot not just for the mere joy of it but to be shared and enjoyed shows how very different the times were then. Mackay spent only 7 days for the Spring shooting of 1868. I think he was so satisfied with his great day that he

traveled back to New England and didn't record his next shoot until September of 1868 in Bridgehampton, Long Island, New York.

George Mackay revisited Broad Neck Farm on February 27, 1872. He expressed satisfaction in finding the old club house as "natural as ever," feeling very much at home in a short time. A major concern was the use of the sinkbox, because legislation had been enacted about its use. On this outing, he stayed from the 27th of February until March 13th. He expressed his reluctance to use the box saying:

*"the Law is so stringent and clear that it is useless to attempt an evasion of it; and as the Legislature on these points does not come together again for two years, I consider the thing effectually killed for us."*

Mackay was referring to the Laws of Maryland, Chapter 54, which required a license to operate a sinkbox or sneak boat, that limited gunning in a sinkbox to three days a week, and that created the ducking police. This trip to the Bush River was to be the last he recorded in his shooting journal. He recorded killing only 19 ducks in the spring of 1872. He was just 29 years old.

Overall, George Henry Mackay entered hundreds of records in his *Shooting Journal*. He traveled up and down the East Coast, out to the Midwest, and as far South as South America. I am pleased that he did not bypass our County in his quest for sport. His records allow us to share his experiences here and to envision what those days were like. Much has changed in the 157 years since he first came to these shores. He first arrived less than a year after the Civil War ended and under a mode of travel that is difficult to imagine for us who feel inconvenienced by a detour or delay, and we cannot conjure the thought of loading multiple muzzle-loading guns for a day of sport. The thought of lying in wait in a sinkbox is difficult to envision. So many changes, but we are thankful for all the luxuries we take for granted but we are more thankful that someone took the time and made the effort to record his experiences so we can travel back in time and try to capture in our minds what the days of Sport once were.

*Sinkbox rig surrounded by decoys*







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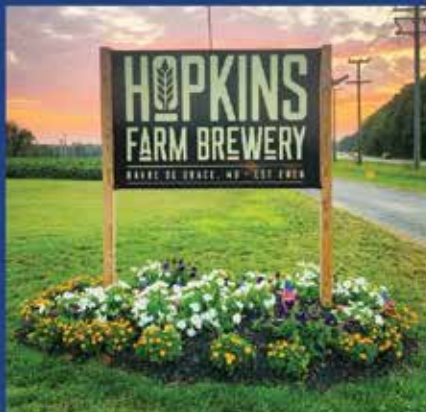
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# Congratulations GRADUATES

Over the last two years, the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum has enjoyed the opportunity to work with three talented individuals who have pursued their education while working with us. In 2023, all three of them will graduate. It has been our pleasure having them as employees, watching them grow, and now we wish them the best as begin to explore the next chapter in their lives. We hope that we are not saying goodbye, but we realize that life moves on. The Museum thanks them for their contributions and hopes that they come back to visit us.



## **Jade Vincenti** • *Reception & Museum Store*

Jade graduated from Havre de Grace High School in 2019. Over the last four years, she has attended Towson University where she has been studying speech and language pathology. She will earn her bachelor's degree in May 2023. Jade's ambitions include attending graduate school at Towson University to earn a master's degree in Speech Language Pathology. Her career plans call for her to work in a medical speech language pathology role within a hospital facility.

Jade's interests include spending time with friends and family. She enjoys karaoke singing. Spending time with her dog "Coco" is a top priority.



## **Josiah Scott** • *Reception & Museum Store*

Josiah graduated from Havre de Grace High School in 2020. He is currently pursuing an associate degree in business administration at Harford Community College. Josiah will graduate in the summer of 2023.

Josiah enjoys coaching basketball at the middle school and parks and recreation levels. Aside from sports, he also enjoys producing music, where he is proficient in playing keys and drums, vocals, and sound engineering. He has invested into a media product group based in Baltimore where he hopes to blend his interest in audio engineering with his training in business administration. Josiah is very active within his church where he puts some of his sound engineering skills to work.



## **Vivian Miller** • *Reception & Museum Store*

Vivian is currently a senior at Havre de Grace High School and looks forward to graduation in June. She has set her sights on attending UMBC in Catonsville, MD in the fall of 2023 where her studies will focus on biochemistry. Vivian has applied for the Meyerhoff Scholars Program that will allow her to pursue a Ph.D. in a science technology engineering & mathematics (STEM) discipline once she completes her bachelor's degree. Her future interests are in forensic pathology and neuroscience.

Vivian's outside interests include playing the cello, competing in and judging equestrian events, and herpetology. She enjoys raising snakes as a hobby and even breeds some of them. Vivian loves to read and listens to heavy metal music.



# Havre de Grace Decoy Museum Collection Committee Appeal

Dear Members,

On behalf of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum Collection Committee, I'd like to update you on our efforts and ask for your assistance. In evaluating the museum's collection, the committee has identified a shortfall in examples of old Upper Bay decoys by carvers who were instrumental in establishing both the Havre de Grace and Cecil County styles of carving.

If Havre de Grace is the "Decoy Capital of the World," that capital was built on the foundation laid by these carvers. Today we recognize their work as true American folk art created by extremely talented artisans. The reality was that they were simple watermen and market gunners who fashioned the tools of their trade out of necessity in order to support their families. The results of their efforts to scratch out a living are remarkable. Our goal is to make the **"Gunning the Flats"** exhibit a destination for decoy collectors, students, and those interested in the history of the Upper Chesapeake Bay.

These carvers deserve to be recognized and the committee is on a mission to ensure they're properly represented in the museum's collection. Funds have been set aside in the museum budget to enhance the collection, and decoys by these carvers are now our number one priority. That said, our funds are limited. We are reaching out to the membership for donations of good examples of the following:

## Baltimore, Harford, and Cecil County Branded Decoys.

**Gunning Clubs:** Carroll's Island Ducking Club, Philadelphia Ducking Club, San Domingo Farm Club, Spesutia Island Rod & Gun Club, Charter (Chowder) Hall Club, Wellwood Club, and Seneca Point Club

**Gunning Scows:** Reckless, Susquehanna, Grace, Widgeon, Canvas Back, Helen, John B. Graham, Wituwe, and Blooming Lilly

**Family Gunning Rigs:** Joel Pusey, John Smith Michael, Jay Ferdinand Towner, Jesse Poplar, Perry K. Barnes, and Lewis Pennock



*Carroll Wally Algard  
Canvasback*



*Charles Nelson Barnard  
Canvasback*



*W. Scott Jackson Canvasback*



*Taylor Boyd Canvasback*



*James T. Holly Canvasback*

## Harford County Carvers:

- The Holly Family, particularly John "Daddy" Holly and James T. Holly.
- Richard Thomas "Dick" Howlett
- Charles Nelson Barnard and Thomas Barnard
- Samuel Barnes
- Joseph Dye
- Columbus "Lum" Fletcher
- Richard Lee "Dick" Simpers
- Albert Thomas
- Richard "Dick" Hipple
- Edward Pearson
- Decoys attributed to the Moore Family



*John Daddy Holly Canvasback*

## Cecil County Carvers.

**The Charlestown Five:** John B. Graham, Scott Jackson, George "Wash" Barnes, William Heverin, and Carroll "Wally" Algard

- Benjamin Dye
- George and Henry Lockard
- Leonard Pryor
- Taylor Boyd
- Standley Evans
- Henry Davis and Asa Owens
- Joseph Coudon
- Chauncey Reynolds
- Severn Hall



*Ben Dye Canvasback*

Donors will be recognized on decoy identification cards and your donation may be tax deductible. Loans will be considered as well. Your consideration in preserving our heritage is greatly appreciated.

- David Farrow, Collections Committee Chair

To discuss further, please contact [dfarrow2@gmail.com](mailto:dfarrow2@gmail.com)



# Workshop Window

*By Cindy Currier*

Workshop Window is a new feature where we will look into the workshops of various carvers and take a peek at their creative spaces.

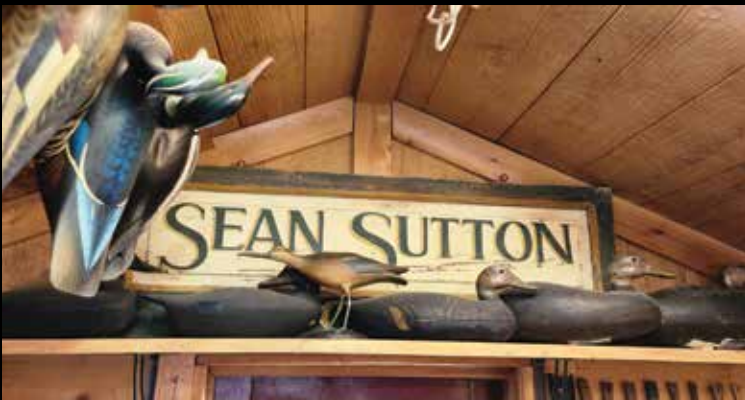
In this issue, we're showcasing the shop of decoy carver, Sean Sutton. Sean's shop is located behind his home in Paulsboro, New Jersey. He is self-taught and his beautiful birds are actively used for hunting.

Sean has an impressive spoke shave and draw knife collection, which he uses regularly to hand carve all of his decoys. They are all hollow and no two are alike.

Please enjoy this visual tour!









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# Osprey

*By John E. Hughes, Jr.*

*Photos by  
Ralph Hockman*

## CANVASBACK NATURALIST

Each edition will feature a natural history topic relating to the mission of the museum. The author, John E. Hughes, Jr. 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.





*“I wanted my child to have the same exposure to the water that I had. My strongest memories of the Northeast Harbor are going in a small Whaler with my dad, looking for osprey.”*

*Parker Stevenson (Author)*

One of my favorites among many areas of the Eastern Shore to visit is Dorchester County, Maryland. It is the largest county on the shore. Located about half way down the Delmarva, it is an area that historically was dominated by agriculture, timbering, and “following the water.” Even until this day these activities keep the people busy pursuing a livelihood. Whether oystering or crabbing, fishing or hunting, logging loblolly, or growing corn or soybeans, Dorchesterians are busy using the resources that the land provides. There is an almost “frontier quality” to the area, especially below Cambridge and Route 50. These western and southwestern portions of the county make up almost  $\frac{2}{3}$  of its size and are composed mostly of wetlands, fields, and forests just above mean high tide. It is largely undeveloped land possessing a wilderness feel to it, particularly when traveling on flooded roads by car rather than water craft. Unfortunately for the county and its citizens, the future looks bleak as rising sea levels and subsiding land threatens the very land and its people and community. The challenges are great and seem almost unsolvable. I feel extremely fortunate to have been able to enjoy interacting with the local people, their land and waterways, wildlife, and the harvested bounty throughout my life.

A friend of mine, Derek McGuirk, recently purchased some property in Wingate in the lower portion of Dorchester. Derek’s land has a small house, which he restored and raised 12 feet, a small workshop, waterfront Honga River, and several acres of wetlands. It would be fair to say the whole property is wetlands. I have half-heartedly joked with Derek whether I should visit his place by canoe or a 4-wheel drive vehicle during high tide or full moon. Derek knows the future challenges and has committed to preparing as best he can. Derek, his wife, and children enjoy this niche of “frontier wild” and explore and interact with it and feel blessed to have the opportunities it gives to them to enrich their souls. Derek is a good naturalist with an artistic flair and I can tell that he loves this place and the niche he has created for

himself and his family on the edge of the wild. It truly is special and as he approaches his retirement years, it may become permanent. With a yard full of salt grass and spartina, nesting wetlands birds in the backyard, osprey on or under the shed, and supper in the river waiting to be harvested, who could ask for more? The protectors of this wetland paradise, i.e. the mosquitoes and midges can prove to be a nuisance, but imagine the condominiums that would surround Derek’s place without them. As Derek’s footsteps bring a more permanent imprint on this place, his wealth of enjoyable experiences will make him a very rich man.

I, on the other hand, will remain a compassionate visitor to Derek’s and Dorchester’s wetland world. I love this area intensely for its vistas, marshes, wildlife and waterways. Its sense of wildness is another quality which brings me back time after time and nourishes my spirit. I enjoy paddling its numerous tidal creeks and rivers and skirting the edges of brackish and salt marshes that seem untouched by human impact. As a naturalist, these are some of the few places that the modern explorer might sense are being witnessed for the first time. Even their names bear this witness with places like the Honga River, Transquaking Creek, and World’s End Creek, etc. The paddler seems diminished as a result of the immense overhead vista in this “Big Sky” of Dorchester County. In these “Everglades” of Maryland the visitor feels as though they are much farther south in latitude, maybe in coastal Georgia or Florida. To feel reduced, small, and mostly insignificant in my canoe and soul is quite a worthwhile and special experience to have anywhere in our contemporary Chesapeake Bay region. Several miles from Derek’s house on the Chicamacomico River, I had it happen to me!

It was mid spring and I was exploring the area for a possible fall trip with students. It was a “blue bird sky day.” A friend and I launched our boats at Drawbridge Road and headed down the river in the direction of Fishing Bay. The Chicamacomico meanders across a very flat coastal plain before flowing into the Transquaking Creek and eventually entering Fishing Bay. It was easy paddling for both of us, but we would have to retrace our paddle back to the launch point so as not to have to set up a shuttle. The temperature was great and a slight southwest breeze kept us refreshed and down to only shirts. The shallow creek seemed pristine, as we passed limited swamp and entered into extensive brackish then salt marsh. On the distant horizon, loblolly forests and hammocks provided our framing. Great Blue Herons actively stalked





the marsh edges or stood motionless waiting for a passing victim. Marsh wrens twittered in the reeds and black ducks kept a safe distance from us. Yellow rumped warblers searched for any remaining poison ivy berries and on occasion, a pileated woodpecker crossed the creek heading for the pine trees. Bald eagles were abundant and soared on flattened wings overhead. A muskrat swam across the creek in front of our boats and a few whitetail deer came down to the river's edge. As we neared our turn around point, the sky overwhelmed us with its immensity. I told my fellow paddler to "excuse me while I kiss the sky."

Not being in a hurry, we spaced our boats as though we were soloing. Although I had been taking notes for the future trip, I found myself drifting off into a peaceful reverie of thought. With my eyes almost closed, I was startled by an explosion of water just behind me. As I lurched forward in the canoe, somewhat shaken and unsure of what had happened, I gradually gained balance in the boat as I sat up. Still somewhat in shock, I turned to see a large osprey about 20 feet behind me semi-immersed in the water. The bird was paying little attention to me, so I began to relax and noticed he had a 10-12 inch fish in his talons and with two, maybe three wing thrusts it was airborne. The fish's head was front and center as the osprey headed to a dead loblolly snag. The bird landed on a large but dead branch and began ripping its prey apart and avidly consuming it. I couldn't identify the fish but whatever it was the osprey sure relished it. Apparently when it was satiated and tired of being viewed, off it went for further adventures. I hadn't seen the original dive but was greatly startled by the osprey's lunge into the water, an event which I have not forgotten over all these years. What a day on the Chicamacomico, overwhelmed by the immensity of Dorchester "Big Sky" and humbled and awakened by a close encounter with a hungry fish hawk. It rarely gets better than this!

The Chesapeake Bay has one of the largest appreciable populations of osprey in the world during the summertime and Dorchester County has a large portion of them. The osprey or fish hawk (*Pandion haliaetus*) has a worldwide distribution and is found on 6 of the 7 continents with Antarctica being the exception. It is remarkable that a bird that was either threatened or endangered throughout much of its range 60 years ago can thrive today. Wherever there is shallow, non-iced over, productive water with fish to be caught, the osprey can probably be observed. Osprey expert and author, Alan F. Poole, has commented "shallow productive areas....turn sunlight into ospreys." (Poole. *Ospreys: A Natural and Unnatural History*. 1989). Osprey are doing well throughout their North American range and especially in

the MidAtlantic region. Recent numbers are over 20,000+ birds in the Bay area. Traveling anywhere around the Bay in summertime is more than likely to provide a glimpse of this bird. Even on a stroll along Havre de Grace's waterfront promenade right in front of the Decoy Museum, the opportunity to spot an osprey is high. The bird might even be caught in its fishing routine. The Chesapeake Bay with its 8,100 miles of shallow shoreline and amazing productivity provides ospreys with excellent habitat and more than ample food supply. It is the perfect place for turning sunlight into ospreys during the summertime.

The osprey is a moderately large bird, bigger than most hawks but smaller than an eagle. It does have an eagle-like profile but it is slimmer in the body and its chest is not as broad. It has dark plumage on top, mostly brown and black, a white or light belly, and a clearly pronounced black eyeline. Both adult sexes appear the same and juveniles have a paler image. Adults have large yellow eyes as compared to the red eyes of the young. Ospreys have very dark gray/black bills designed for ripping. They have large dark black, strongly curved talons with special adaptations called spicules as well as a flexible rear toe which enables them to grab and hold onto a fish. From a distance, the osprey's head appears small, almost dove-like because the bird's head lacks a supraorbital ridge and is mostly white.

The osprey's body measures between 21-26 inches in length. Its wingspan ranges from 59-67 inches in width. It weighs between 2.2-4.2 pounds and the female tends to be the larger of the birds. In flight the osprey appears gull-like but it reveals much more rounded wings upon closer observation. It holds its wings in a distinct M-shape as it glides, unlike an eagle or hawk with flattened wings or a vulture with dihedral. It keeps its plumage as dry as possible by preening with oil from a gland located at the base of its tail. This helps to keep its feathers from becoming saturated during a rainy period or after submersion in a dive. Osprey use step-molting for feather replacement rather than a single molt, like waterfowl. There are 4 races of osprey worldwide with *carolinensis* occurring in North America. The osprey's longevity can be up to 20 years but is usually much less.

Aldo Leopold in his classic, *A Sand County Almanac*, suggested that some creatures possessed a "numemon" or essence when viewed in relation to their overall community and habitat (in his words, land community). The osprey in its relationship to shallow water systems would certainly be representative of Leopold's numemon concept. Almost any place where land and water edge together, this bird and its feeding activity form a





special bond with the other myriad creatures of that habitat. Whether it is streams or rivers, marshes or swamps, fresh or salt waters, estuaries or ocean shorelines, the osprey as a top predator binds the system together and seems to bring out the essence of what that system is all about. Not all creatures in a system have this capacity.

For nesting, osprey are opportunistic and will use almost any site which will give them a view of the water. They will nest in and on trees, power poles, electricity towers, channel markers, buoys, duck blinds, artificial man-made platforms, piers, cliffs and rocky bluffs, high areas in the marsh, and even sailboat masts. It is important to note that the bird probably has a greater commitment to the nest site than to its bonded partner (*Season of the Osprey. Nature. PBS. 2021*). Ospreys will use the same nest, year after year, resulting in huge conglomerations of materials. The nests often look like huge flattened bowls. Each year the returning male will bring sticks, some of rather large size, to the nest to either reinforce or establish a pair bond with the female. The female will then build or rebuild the structure and modify the appearance of the nest. The variety of materials found in nests range from rope, fish nets, balloons, ribbons, cups, 6-pack holders, to assorted plastics, etc. They are true “pack rats” (*Allan F. Poole. Ospreys: The Revival of a Global Raptor. p.88*). Males actively defend nest sites against eagles, owls, crows, and other ospreys. Ospreys are known to nest in densely populated “colonies”. They do not defend feeding territories from other fish-eating birds. (*The Birds of North America. Osprey. p.16*).

It seems that osprey will remain faithful to their first bonded mate. As stated earlier, they will strongly commit to the nest site and in early spring defend it against all returning osprey. Ospreys are solitary migrants and remain alone in their wintering areas. Males are the first to return in late winter or early spring. Their return is dependent on food availability as well as weather conditions, especially ice. It is always exciting at this time of year as a birder to spot the first returning fish hawk. A general rule of thumb is to spot them before the “Ides of March.” Last year while birding with friends Tom Trafton, David Lewis, and Greg Huffman at Thomas Point Park just outside Annapolis, we spotted many late waterfowl, especially horned grebes, bluebills, and long-tailed ducks. Disappointment set in as no osprey were seen. On crossing the narrow neck, connecting the peninsula to the western shore, about 25 feet overhead an osprey soared by. The date was March

15th. Not all osprey migrate, particularly birds in latitudes within or near the tropics. Higher latitude birds move south as shortening periods of daylight, colder periods with potential icing, and diminishing food occur. Chesapeake birds may winter along the Gulf coast, Cuba, Caribbean, northern South America, and southern Central America. A sure sign of approaching cold and winter in our area is the disappearance of osprey.

When the male bird returns, north, to his nesting area, it checks out its former turf and previous nest site. When the female comes back several days later, the male reinforces pair bonding through elaborate aerial displays. Young or unmated birds must go through the competition for a mate and establish their first bonds. Females are noted for their begging displays which encourage the male to be a good provider of fish. It is an exciting time in the fish hawk year. Soon after establishing or reaffirming commitments, copulation begins and is frequent and usually in the early morning. From this time on, the male becomes the provider and the female is largely responsible for nest, incubation, and nurturing of young. Females lay between 1 and 4 creamy/white brown eggs. Incubation begins with the first egg laid and continues for 5 to 6 weeks. The first egg hatched will be the first one that was laid. Young chicks enter the world weak, wet, and hungry. With the great care of the female, these helpless young will mature rapidly and become food addicts. The original natal down will be replaced by feathers and they will appear to be all feet. Constant flights by the male will bring food to the nest for distribution at first by the female. In time the dominant chick will seize the most food. If food supply is abundant, successful recruitment can be high with all four young surviving. Fledging of the juveniles occurs in about 50 to 55 days. With adult help, flight begins and with much practice fishing technique becomes learned. Adults wean the young birds to independence and the day arrives when they are on their own. The young face great challenges, just like their parents had, for survival but the most fit will survive.

Ospreys are piscivorous raptors. Over 99% plus of their diet is live fish. Whether hunting from a perch waiting to suddenly ambush prey or hunting overhead on the wing, ospreys with vision 8 times more powerful than ours are quite good at what they do. Fishing success improves with age and the clearer the water the higher a positive outcome. Not every attempt will yield a positive result, but every attempt will lead to more successful hunting in the future. Once a





fish is detected, the overhead osprey may hover like a sparrow hawk or launch directly down, wings clipped and talons thrust forward. They enter the water with almost full body immersion, protect their eyes with a closing nictitating membrane, and plunge their talons into the fish. The bird then thrusts itself free of the water and with or without fish, flies away. When this is viewed from a distance it is a remarkable sight to behold, but when unexpectedly heard from a short distance by a “nodding” canoeist as I have related, it is quite the experience. Osprey are active hunters and must be on the wing constantly to meet their high energy demands and those of their families during nesting efforts. The type of prey caught is very dependent on geographic and environmental conditions related to the location of the bird. In the Chesapeake Bay and adjacent coastlines, ospreys exhibit a preference for menhaden, winter flounder, alewives, smelt, pollack, and American eel. ( Poole. *Ospreys: A Natural and UnNatural History*). It is true that the osprey will eat any fish that it can catch. Also of note, Bald eagles and larger gulls such as great black backs will challenge an osprey for its catch. This type of piracy can be fairly common.

If you have seen a fish hawk, you are almost sure to have also heard it. Ospreys are very vocal year round but especially during the nesting season. Their calls take many forms but can be summarized as high pitched shrills often repeated. At times they descend in pitch becoming somewhat raspy. (Richard Crossley. *The Crossley I.D. Guide: Raptors*. 2013).

In general, ospreys are doing well today. The current world population for the bird is estimated at below 130,000 individuals. North American numbers are below 40,000 birds with the Chesapeake Bay region having over 20 % of those birds in the summertime. These numbers are estimates. (VIMS. Osprey Population). It wasn't always so! In the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, osprey numbers were greatly reduced; at one point having well less than 1500 pairs in the Bay. Because of pesticide contamination, the osprey just wasn't reproducing. “Hard” pesticides such as DDT (DDE) impacted drastically on the birds through outright mortality to exposure, sterility of the males, and egg shell thinning. This chemical compound which early on in its usage appeared to be a miracle agent against insects, in the long run proved to be deleterious to wildlife and ecosystems as well as carcinogenic to humans. Because of its persistence, high mobility, bio-accumulating and bio-concentrating characteristics, DDT usage became a major threat to the health of the biosphere. Fortunately as research, education, and finally legislation occurred in the 1970s, with many citizens awakened by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, actions were taken at first to limit and then completely ban its use in our country.

*“After reading Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, at age 14, in the back of my parents' sedan, I almost threw-up. I got physically ill when I learned that osprey and peregrine falcons weren't raising chicks because of what we're spraying on bugs at their farms and lawns. This was the first time I learned that humans could impact the environment with chemicals (that a corporation would create a product that didn't operate as advertised) was shocking in a way we weren't inured to... )*

*Carl Safina Scientist/Author*

This proved to be the reprieve for the osprey and many other creatures. Ospreys have had a remarkable comeback and their numbers have soared. This “renaissance” of birds also helped to foster a new mindset for the world's environment by its citizens.

Other factors impacting negatively on ospreys are: 1) indiscriminate shooting of the bird especially on its wintering grounds, 2) trapping, 3) fishing nets and lines, 4) collisions with stationary structures, wires, and wind turbines, 5) chemical ingestion of toxic chemicals, mercury, lead, and plastics, and 6) habitat loss and degradation. (BNA. Osprey).

Thankfully today, ospreys are back in good and seemingly stable numbers. This is especially true in the Chesapeake Bay region. When Derek watches a fish hawk in action over his “wetland home”, he fortunately knows the bird's story and can feel its role and his own role in Aldo Leopold's “land community.” When I watch an osprey overhead , I know it ultimately can bring great wonder and surprise to one's life...and if you happen to find yourself canoeing under Dorchester's “Big Sky” on the Chicamacomico River, please stay alert and pay attention to nature's possible “phenomena.”

*One day I'm going to write a book about osprey. It has really gotten deep into my bloodstream. So when you ask what do I do, I feel this is part of what I do ... is to watch these birds!*

*Alan Lightman Author*



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*Photo by Robert Bruch*

# SHOTS

## From the Wild

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*Osprey with Striper*  
by Robert Bruch



*Photo by Earl Blansfield*



*Photo by Robert Bruch*



*Photo by Debbie Blair*



*Photo by Earl Blansfield*



*Photo by Robert Reynolds*



*Photo by Robert Reynolds*

*Photo by Earl Blansfield*



*Photo by Debbie Blair*



*Photo by Ralph Hockman*



*Photo by Robert Reynolds*



*Photo by Ralph Hockman*



*Photo by Ralph Hockman*





# DECOY CLUB NEWS

## PDCA Holds Annual Banquet and Award Ceremony



*Jim Van Ness (L) Receives 2022-2023 Ralph Campbell Memorial Award from PDCA President Chad Tragakis (R)*

On February 11, 2023, the Potomac Decoy Collectors Association (PDCA) welcomed more than 30 members and guests to the Annapolis Elks Club in Edgewater, Maryland, for the club's annual banquet and awards ceremony. During the banquet,

the club also announced the winner of the annual Ralph Campbell Memorial Award for Goodwill and Ambassadorship in the Decoy Collecting Community.

Chad Tragakis announced that Jim Van Ness is the winner of the PDCA's 2022 Ralph Campbell Memorial Award. In making the award, Chad observed that "Jim is one of our longest-standing and most active members, and he is one of the people who, through his outstanding work—much of it behind the scenes—has helped to make and keep the PCDA the fun and successful club that we are... Jim truly embodies the best of what made Ralph Campbell so special—he is kind, generous, incredibly humble, always a gentlemen, a model of integrity, and always happy to share whatever he knows with others."

Following an excellent buffet luncheon served by the Elks Club staff, the club held its annual fundraising auction to benefit the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, the Upper Bay Museum, the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, and the Ward Museum of Wildfowl Art. The result was far and away the most successful fundraising auction the club has ever held.

## Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club holds Second Annual Sportsman & Decoy Show



*UBDCC President Gary Armour makes a few announcements during the live auction part of the show.*

After two years of being impacted by COVID resurgences, the Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club (UBDCC) held its Second Annual Sportsman & Decoy Show honoring Jim Pierce. The event took place on Saturday, February 18, 2023 on the grounds of Perryville Volunteer Fire Company in Perryville, MD. This year's event marked seventy-five years of decoy making excellence by Jim Pierce, who began his journey in 1948.

The Minker Banquet Hall was chocked full of exhibitors displaying their decoys and other collectibles. Over three-hundred show attendees enjoyed a day of decoy buying, selling, and swapping and used the opportunity to catch up on fellowship with each other.

Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club President Gary Armour was pleased with the overall success of the show and looks forward to next year's event which will take place on February 23, 2024.



# Upcoming DECOY SHOW Information



**April 13-15, 2023**

**East Coast Decoy Collectors Buy-Sell-Swap Meet**

St. Michaels Motor Lodge • St. Michaels, MD

Info: Kevin Peel • kevinpeel1@gmail.com

**April 15, 2023**

**5th Annual Ocracoke Island Waterfowl Festival**

Berkley Barn • Ocracoke, NC

Info: John Simpson • decoysjohn@gmail.com

**May 6-7, 2023**

**41st Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival**

STAR Centre • Havre de Grace, MD

Info: Mike Tarquini • president@decoymuseum.com

**June 4, 2023**

**7th Annual PDCA Annapolis Decoy Show**

Annapolis Elks Lodge • Edgewater, MD

Info: Chad Tragakis • chadtragakis@gmail.com

**September 10, 2023**

**5th Annual Charlie Joiner**

**Memorial Decoy Show**

Galena Volunteer Fire Company • Galena, MD

Allan Schaubert (410) 708-7011

**September 23-24, 2023**

**Old Time Barnegat Bay Decoy & Gunning Show**

Tip Seaman County Park, Tuckerton Seaport

Tuckerton, NJ

Info: Call (609) 971-3085

**November 10-12, 2023**

**Easton Waterfowl Festival**

Easton, MD



# 2023 Annapolis Decoy Show

Sponsored by the  
Potomac Decoy Collectors Association



## Sunday, June 4, 2023

**9 AM - 3 PM**

Annapolis Elks Lodge  
2 Pythian Drive • Edgewater, Maryland 21037

**Antique Duck Decoys  
Contemporary Carvings  
Hunting & Fishing Items  
Sporting Art • Books  
Special Exhibits**

FREE ADMISSION  
FREE PARKING  
FREE IDENTIFICATION  
& APPRAISALS



Dealer Tables Available: \$50/each  
(\$40/each for PDCA Members)

For Map & Directions, visit: [elks622.com](http://elks622.com)

For details and to reserve your table:

Contact Chad Tragakis

**chad.tragakis@gmail.com**

**703-593-3024**

## BUY • SELL • TRADE



# Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

## Events 2023

### An Evening with Honorary Chairman Charles Jobes

Havre de Grace Decoy Museum  
Sunday, April 16, 6:00 – 7:30 PM

Charles will share experiences working with his father, Captain Harry Jobes and his brothers Bobby Jobes and Captain Joey Jobes. Charles will entertain questions from the gallery.

**No Fee.**

### 2023 Carvers Reception

Havre de Grace Decoy Museum  
Friday, May 5 • 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM

This event serves as the official opening for the 41st Annual Decoy & Wildlife Festival. Please join us at the Decoy Museum for fellowship with other carvers, collectors, and friends.

**No Fee.**

### 41st Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival

STAR Centre, 710 Congress Avenue  
Havre de Grace, MD  
Saturday, May 6 • 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM  
Sunday, May 7 • 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM

**Fee \$10**

### FOR THE LITTLE DUCKLINGS

#### Decoy Summer Camp

Havre de Grace Decoy Museum  
June 19-23, 2023 • 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM • Grades 2 through 5  
June 26-30 • 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM • Grades 6 through 8

Local Carvers, Woodshop Safety, Bird Watching, Waterfowl Photography, Safety Presentations by local Fire, EMS, and Law Enforcement, plus additional fun activities. Limited to 25 campers/week. Snacks & Lunch included. **Fee: \$175/ camper**

#### Story & Craft Days

Havre de Grace Decoy Museum  
Every Tuesday in August • 10:30 AM – 11:30 AM

Come enjoy a story and related craft.

All ages welcome.

**No Fee.**





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*Many Thanks*

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