

# The Canvasback

HAVRE DE GRACE DECOY MUSEUM

Vol. 36 No. 1

Winter 2026

## *Half the Sky*



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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.

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A salute to the new “Half the Sky” exhibit at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. Ed Phillips Pintail Hen c. 1930s (Foxwell, upper right). Ward Brothers Pintail Hen c. 1932 (Pappas, upper left). Jim Holly Pintail Hen c. 1890 (Tragakis, lower right). William Heverin Canvasback Hen c. 1925 (Tragakis, lower left).

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44TH ANNUAL

# Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival

May 2 & 3, 2026

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Saturday, May 2  
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Honorary Chairman  
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All correspondence should be sent as above.

## From the President...

I hope that everyone had an enjoyable holiday season. It seems like the holidays are a good time to relax a bit from the chaotic times that lead up to this most important time of year. We at the museum, certainly experienced a whirlwind of events during the fall season that included our Annual Ed Henry Memorial Clay Shoot and exhibiting at the Upper Shore Decoy Show in October, exhibiting at the Easton Waterfowl Festival and managing the Tailgate at The County School during Guyette & Deeter's November Auction, and hosting our Inaugural Decoy Carvers & Collectors Banquet at the Historic Wellwood in December. Our participation at all of these events served to help us raise funds for the museum's operational expenses.



Since our last Canvasback magazine, the decoy community lost Douglas Abraham Gibson (Milford, DE) who left us at the age of 102. Doug was instrumental in assisting the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum with its *"Influences of African Americans on Decoy Making"* exhibit that recently opened. Not only was he generous with his time, but he furnished us all of his carvings that are in the exhibit at no charge. Having worked closely on this project, Doug left me with many fond memories.



Virginia Sanders was presented with the Ralph Hockman Award in honor of her more than 16 years of unwavering volunteer service to the museum. The award was presented at the Inaugural Decoy Carvers and Collectors Banquet on December 6, 2025. Joining me to present the award to Virginia was Ralph Hockman himself for whom the award is named. We thank "Ginny" for her many years of volunteer service. The museum is a better place as a result of that service.

As we enter 2026, the Decoy Museum plans to continue its active temporary exhibit program honoring those decoy makers and collectors throughout our industry. Special thanks to the Potomac Decoy Collectors Association, Delmarva Decoy Collectors Association, New Jersey Decoy Collectors Association, North American Decoy Collectors Association and Guyette and Deeter for providing wonderful opportunities to us to exhibit world class decoys from not only our surrounding regions but those from outside our geography. We have all worked as a team to celebrate and preserve the cultural heritage of waterfowling and decoy making.

And lastly, we have begun to focus on the 44th Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival that will take place on May 2 & 3, 2026. This year's Honorary Chairman is Chad Tragakis. Chad is an avid collector and historian who has dedicated countless hours in the documentation and interpretation of not only decoys but the entire cultural heritage of making, using, and preserving them so future generations can enjoy them. The event will again take place at the STAR Centre in Havre de Grace.

# Inaugural Decoy Carvers & Collectors Banquet

By Mike Tarquini

The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum held its inaugural Decoy Carvers & Collectors Banquet at the Historic Wellwood in Charlestown, MD on December 6, 2025. The event was held to raise much needed operational funds for the museum. By all measures, the fundraiser was successful and accomplished its objective. All funds raised during the evening will go directly to support the museum during 2026. Other than grant funds from the Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) and the City of Havre de Grace, all operational funding must be raised by museum volunteers.

Two-hundred attendees braved a chilly December evening to support the event. They participated in numerous games, raffles, a silent auction as well as a live auction. The Wellwood staff ensured that all participants had a most enjoyable evening. Plans are already being made for a 2026 event.

**A special thank you to our Patrons, whose generosity is greatly appreciated.**

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Two-hundred supporters gathered at the Historic Wellwood to raise operational money for the Decoy Museum.



Founders Trio - Allen Fair (L), Mitch Shank (C) and Jimmy Pierce (R) founded the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum over 40 years ago.



Tim Funk - Bass Pro Shops - Ruby Sponsor



Chad Tragakis (L) congratulates C. John Sullivan Jr. on his 80th birthday.



Kevin Peel & Carolyn Harris celebrate their winnings.



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John Graf, Event Emcee



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# Workshop Window

By Cindy Currier

**Harry T. Morrison, III**  
Perryville, Maryland

In this issue of Workshop Window, we peek into the workshop of carver, Harry T. Morrison, III. Harry's workshop is at the back of his garage in a 20' x 18' space. He and his wife moved into their Perryville, MD home in 2021, after living in Havre de Grace, MD, where he had a shop for many years.

Harry began carving in 2007 as a hobby and learned from "Master Carver", Jeff Moore. Harry initially started carving fish and currently, carves many different types of wildlife, as well.

Harry uses power tools to carve mostly tupelo, cedar and pine and primarily paints with acrylics. His most recent bases for fish are made from repurposed shutters.

Please enjoy this visual tour!







# All in the Families

Four unfinished decoys forge another connection between the Jobses and the Pierces

By Tony Gentile

It all started about three years ago, when I was in my garage looking at some of the decoys I had stored there. Sorting through them, I found some of the unfinished decoy bodies and heads that Capt. Harry Jobses had given me. Mixed in with some full-sized bodies and cut head blocks, were several carved but unsanded and unpainted half-sized decoy bodies. I had always liked Capt. Harry's half-sized decoys, and I had collected many of them over the years, so I carefully went through what was there and realized I had four half-sized canvasback bodies.

And then it dawned on me. Wouldn't it be nice to get someone to put together the unfinished cans so I could give one of them to each of Capt. Harry's boys? The real question though was, who would I get to do this for me? I thought about all the carvers that I knew, and all the carvers that Harry knew, and then I realized that among them, Jim Pierce was probably one of Harry's oldest and closest friends. They had known each other for a very, very long time. So, I called up Charlie Pierce and explained the situation and what I wanted done and asked if he thought his dad could do it. Charlie said he didn't think that it would be a problem and said he would ask his dad to paint them in a gunning style paint pattern.

Well, I didn't tell Charlie the whole story yet. I said that in addition to the four half-sized can bodies, I also had some of the original exterior wood siding shingles from Harry's old shop that we could use as a base. He was excited about that, but then asked, 'what about the heads?' I told him that, unfortunately, I didn't have any half-sized heads, but I did have some pieces of old wood from the shop, white pine that stuck out of the top of the side boards, and I thought the pieces would be big enough to make four decoy heads. He said, "Okay, bring it all over when you can." And so, that was the beginning of the unfinished decoy bodies, shingles and shop boards that would eventually become beautiful finished decoys that I could give to Capt. Harry's sons as a gift. They would know that the decoys were made by a good friend of their father, entirely with wood from their dad's old decoy shop.

A few weeks later, I gathered up all the pieces I needed to take to the Pierce shop, and I arranged to meet Charlie early one Saturday morning. He looked at everything I had and said, 'yes, I think this should all work,' and right after the holidays, he would get his dad to start working on them.

Well, life happens. Fast forward to a couple of years later, Jimmy Pierce would have some setbacks with his health, things got busy for the family, and life just gets in the way. It's all very easy to understand. Plus, Jimmy and Charlie had hundreds of other orders to get to, so naturally it took a couple of years to get my little project finished. And then one day in April of 2024, I got a call from Charlie, and he said his dad had almost completed them. They were sanded, primed, and all he had to do left was paint them. I can't tell you how excited I was! To say that this had been difficult to wait so long is a major understatement, but I knew in my heart that there was no one else who should have finished these special pieces. I knew it would be worth the wait!

My hope was to have them ready in time for the annual Havre de Grace Decoy Show in early May, because I knew all three of Harry's sons would be at the show and I could give them to each of them there and get good pictures of us holding them. Well, it didn't work out for the show, and I had to wait a couple more weeks. But again, I was patient. I had waited this long, so I could wait a little longer. I knew it was going to be worth it – however long it took. This was something special.

At last, I got word in May that they were ready. I stopped by to pick them up and we took some great pictures of the four of them together at the Pierce shop. This would be the last time and place they would all be together. They really turned out well and so I took some time setting up individual meetings with Bobby, Charles and Joey Jobses to give them the gifts.

As a decoy collector, the Jobses family has been very special to me. I'm so fortunate to have been good friends with Capt. Harry, and it has been a great privilege to become friends with all three of his sons. Now, I could show this great family my gratitude for that longtime friendship with the gifts I had Jimmy make for them with the wood and bodies from their dad's old decoy shop – a shop that was open from 1973 until 2017.

To me, the best part of the story is the connection between these two great decoy-making families. They have been linked together for decades, going all the way back to when a young Jimmy Pierce and a young Harry Jobses were working for the legendary Mr. R. Madison Mitchell. And here again, all these years later was another special connection between the families. And it all started from those four unfinished decoy bodies in my garage!

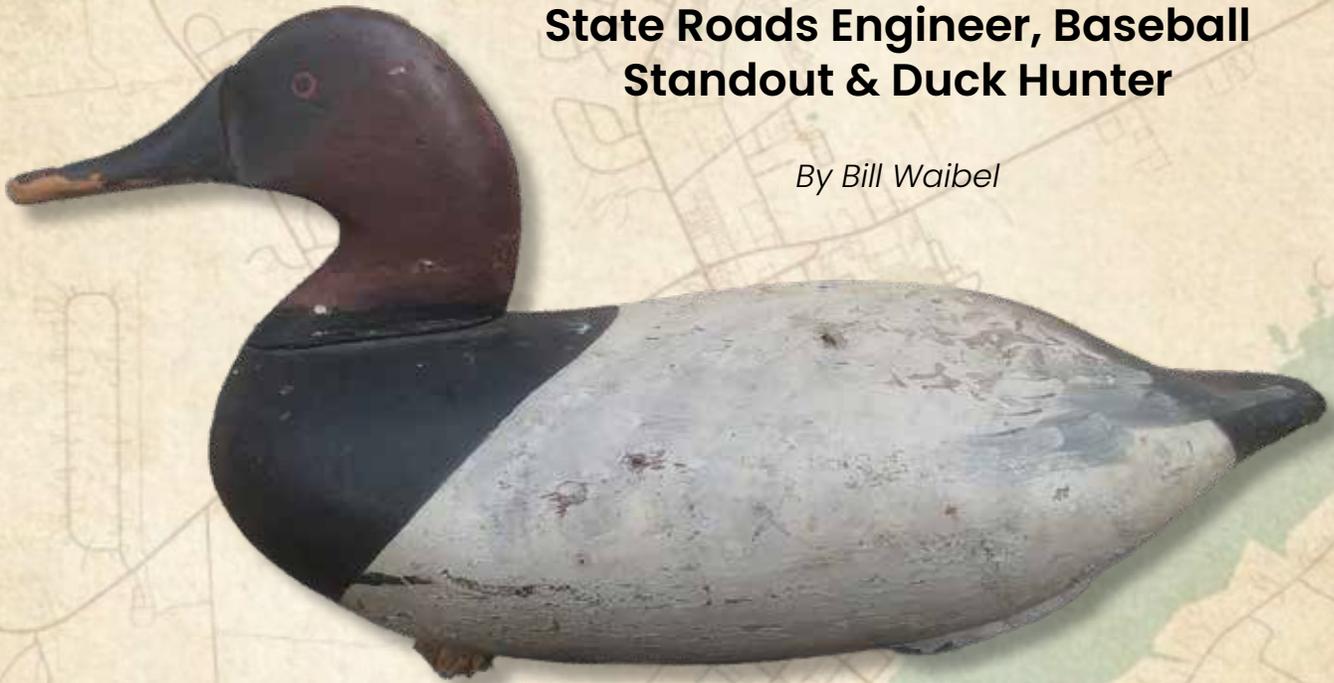
*I would like to thank the Jobses family for their friendship over the years, and for making beautiful decoys that I have greatly enjoyed collecting! I would also like to thank Mr. Jimmy and Charlie Pierce for making this project possible – it turned out better than I ever could have imagined! Lastly, a big thank you to Chad Tragakis for his help and support in telling this story.*



# C. Roland Sharretts, Jr.

**State Roads Engineer, Baseball Standout & Duck Hunter**

*By Bill Waibel*



*Recently discovered Sharretts canvasback with early Charles Joiner repaint. Circa 1940s.*

**T**he Chesapeake Bay was once considered the top duck hunting destination in the United States. While some decent shooting still occurs, the halcyon days have long passed. From 1830 through the 1950s, good shooting could be had all along the vast estuary, as millions of migratory waterfowl wintered there. Even today, despite far fewer birds being available and skyrocketing lease costs, duck blinds are seen on many points and goose pits in most fields.

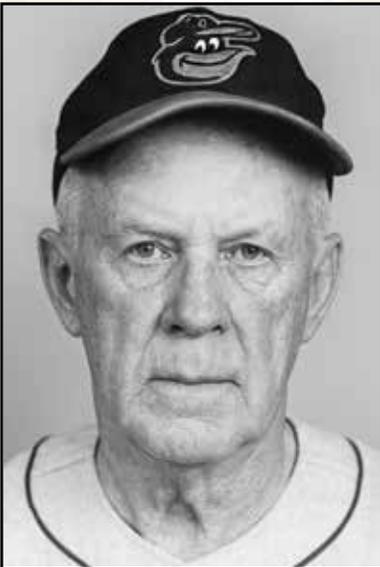
The demand for decoys was great and dozens of commercial decoy makers set up shop in towns along the Chesapeake and the rivers that feed her. Even the most casual collector recognizes names like Daddy Holly, John B Graham, Ben Dye, Bob McGaw, Capt. Johnny Glenn, and Madison Mitchell. These men and their contemporaries, produced well in excess 500,000 decoys over a 125 - year period. The state of Maryland easily produced more decoys than anywhere else in the world.

This is not even considering the many thousands of birds chopped out by unknown makers, who made decoys primarily for their own use. For every “known” decoy maker along the

Chesapeake Bay, there were a dozen more who have remained obscure to this day. Most will never be identified as time tends to erode history.

This brings us to Charles Roland Sharretts, Jr., the latest unknown maker to be discovered. Sharretts was born on July 17, 1899, to Charles, Sr. (1866-1952) and Hanna Bennanzer Sharretts (1869-1969) in Baltimore, Maryland. Sharretts had a brother and a sister and was called Roland to avoid confusion with his father.

The family lived in the Pikesville area of northwest Baltimore during the early years. Now heavily developed, the area was very rural with many active farms during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Roland was an energetic youngster who was drawn outdoors. He enjoyed walking around the countryside, exploring new areas, and collecting snakes, frogs, salamanders, and such. Young Sharretts got involved in some pickup baseball games with other boys from the surrounding area and found that he had a real knack for the game. He played through his



C. Roland "Shad" Sharretts

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after February 17, 1897 and on or before December 31, 1921) 49 7

SERIAL NUMBER 23 1. NAME (Print) Charles Roland Sharretts Jr. ORDER NUMBER 0639

2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) 218 Mount Vernon Ave. Chestertown Kent Md.

3. MAILING ADDRESS Same

4. TELEPHONE 159R 5. AGE IN YEARS 42 6. PLACE OF BIRTH Baltimore City

DATE OF BIRTH July 17 1899 Maryland

7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Eleanor X Sharretts 218 Mount Vernon Ave. Chestertown

8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS State of Md. State Roads Comm. Baltimore, Md.

9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS 327 High St. Chestertown Kent Md.

I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE

D. S. S. FORM 1 (Revised 1-1-42) 16-21630-1

Charles Roland Sharretts Jr. (Signature)

Sharretts' World War 1 draft card

elementary school days and really enjoyed the game. Being a left-brain dominant individual, Roland had the ability to analyze the various skills in baseball and adjust his approach, accordingly.

Sharretts easily progressed through elementary school and made the transition to Baltimore City College, a prestigious high school that draws students from throughout Baltimore. Being bright and having a solid work ethic made high school easy for Roland, which gave him ample time to enjoy his favorite pastime: baseball. Sharretts became a standout third baseman for the City College Black Knights and earned the job of team captain. According to his coach, Herb Armstrong, who eventually spent 40 years working in the Baltimore Orioles organization, Roland Sharretts was a solid player, particularly as a hitter.

Upon graduation, Sharretts entered Johns Hopkins University, majoring in civil engineering. During his first semester, Roland enrolled into SATC (Student Army Training Corps) as the United States was embroiled in World War I. The SATC program allowed students to go through basic training while still attending their college classes. Sharretts was inducted into the United States Army in October 1918 and honorably discharged as a private just a few months later as the conflict ended in November.

Roland continued his studies and played baseball for Hopkins and his old high school coach, Armstrong, who made the transition to college coaching. Once again, he was voted by his peers to be the team captain, a testament to his leadership abilities. The March 10, 1922, edition of the Johns Hopkins News-Letter, a campus periodical, featured an early season preview on the baseball Bluejays, including the following: "Shad" Sharretts, last year's captain and clean-up hitter for several seasons, will be one of the mainstays in the outfield." Sharretts was involved with baseball

most of his life as a player and fan. He played for the old Eastern Shore League once he relocated to Chestertown. Sharretts was inducted into the Maryland Oldtimers Baseball Hall of Fame in 1974. Roland, known to be plainspoken, replied to this honor, "If I was that good, why didn't I get in before this?"

Upon graduation, with a degree in Civil Engineering, Roland took a job with the Maryland State Roads Commission (later Maryland Highway Administration) as a civil engineer. Sharretts had a solid career and rose to the rank of District Engineer for 2nd District which included Caroline, Cecil, Kent, Talbot, and Queen Anne's Counties. Interesting to decoy collectors, in 1962, the Charlestown Town Commission made a formal request to Sharretts regarding some road and sidewalk work in town, who regrettably had to decline due to budgetary constraints. The president of the commission was Ralph Murphy, and another commissioner was Horace D. Graham, two men who made many decoys in their day.

Sharretts courted Eleanor (Nellie) Kimball, from Vermont. The couple married in December of 1930, in Manhattan, New York. They lived in Hyattsville, Prince Georges County for a brief period, when Roland transferred to the 2nd District of State Roads Commission, shortly after 1935. The new residence in Chestertown was located at 218 Mt. Vernon Avenue, close to Washington College. The Sharretts lived in Chestertown or neighboring Kingstown, across the Chester river, for the rest of their lives.

With a keen interest in the outdoors and a job where he met many local people, it's not surprising that Sharretts became heavily involved with duck shooting. Sharretts picked up the name "Shad," back during his college days and it stuck with him the rest of his life.

The recent discovery of Sharretts as a decoy maker came about mostly by happenstance. A museum member and collector found a nice canvasback decoy with Joiner paint. The bird was competent and attractive. When posted on a decoy social media page, the answer to the identification of this duck was provided by David Coleman. Intrigued by the decoy and the story behind it, the writer was able to acquire it and carefully examine it.

Coleman (born 1958) is an interesting man and has been involved with duck and goose hunting his whole life. As a two-time world champion goose caller, David has been a very sought-after guide for more than 50 years. In addition to guiding, Dave has been a firefighter for most of his adult life, serving both Chestertown (life member) and Ocean City (gold badge) Volunteer Fire Departments. Dave's association with Sharretts started, fittingly enough, because of decoys. More on that later.

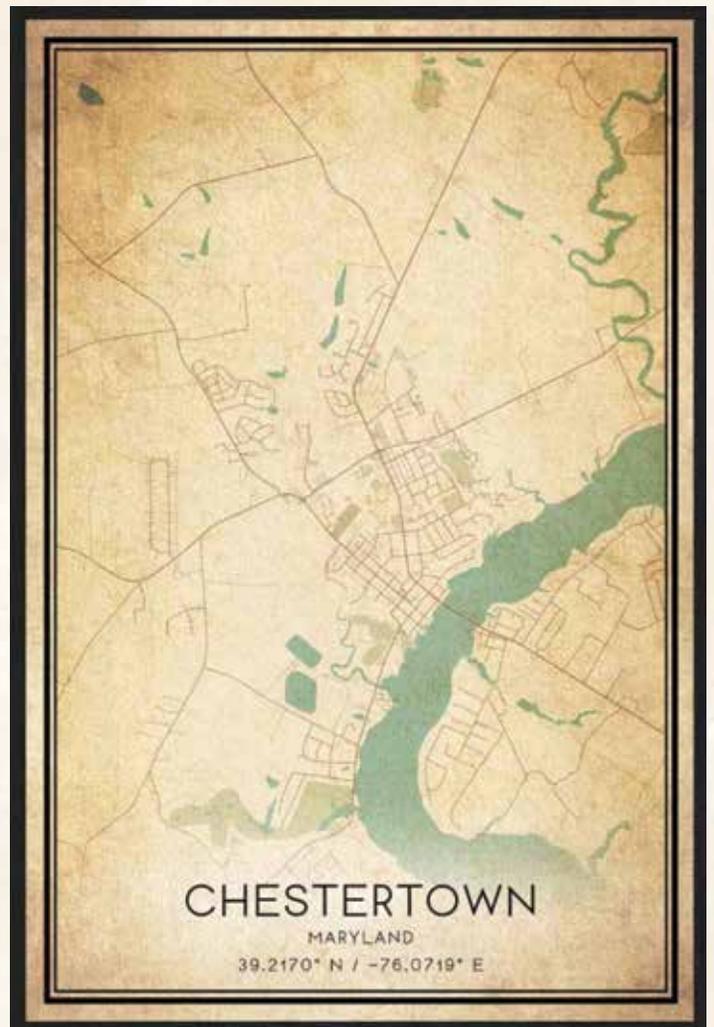
Sometime in the early 1960s, Roland and his wife purchased a home on Primrose Point, just across the Chester River from Chestertown Country Club on the outskirts of Kingstown in Queen Anne's County. In addition to the main house, there was a shanty, where decoys, boats and other accoutrements were stored. Shad frequently hosted several physicians from Baltimore, for a day of gunning on the Chester, many who were his classmates back at Hopkins.

Sharretts employed a couple of local men to serve as guides at Primrose Point. The guides built and maintained blinds and a boardwalk to access the blinds, put decoys out and brought them back in at the end of the day, retrieved birds for Sharretts and his guests and picked (dressed) the ducks and geese for the gunners to take home. David Coleman remembers as a youngster, the two guides were a Mr. Ward and "Mud Eye" Vernon Rodney. These men had regular jobs with the telephone company but were able to manipulate work schedules to guide as much as possible.

Coleman got in with Sharretts in part because of a tragedy. One December morning, Mr. Ward and Mud Eye Rodney guided the doctors to a fine shoot. As the party went back to the house to warm up and eat lunch, the guides crossed the bridge and went home to Rock Hall for their lunch. Not long after their departure, the wind started making up and Sharretts noticed the goose decoys starting to drag anchor and drift down river. He called his guides and told them they better get back over and pull the decoys before they were lost. The guides came back quickly and deployed a 14-foot wooden skiff, built by Stanley Vanzant of Rock Hall, to pull the decoys. Unfortunately, a stout northwest wind with strong gusts caused treacherous seas and the skiff capsized, drowning Vernon Rodney and leaving Ward, who barely made it to chest deep water, in shock. Sharretts had seen them in trouble and called for help, but assistance did not arrive in time to save Rodney, whose body was recovered downriver at Rolph's Wharf.

Coleman lived on Truslow road near the entrance lane that led to Primrose Point and would often paint decoys outside of his house. David was one of the many young men who benefitted from Charlie Joiner's instruction in decoy painting. Sharretts noticed him one day and stopped and had a conversation. After the tragedy at the farm, Sharretts needed a man to put the decoys out in the early morning and pull them each evening and asked David who was still a youngster in high school. This was the beginning of a highly successful career guiding hunters.

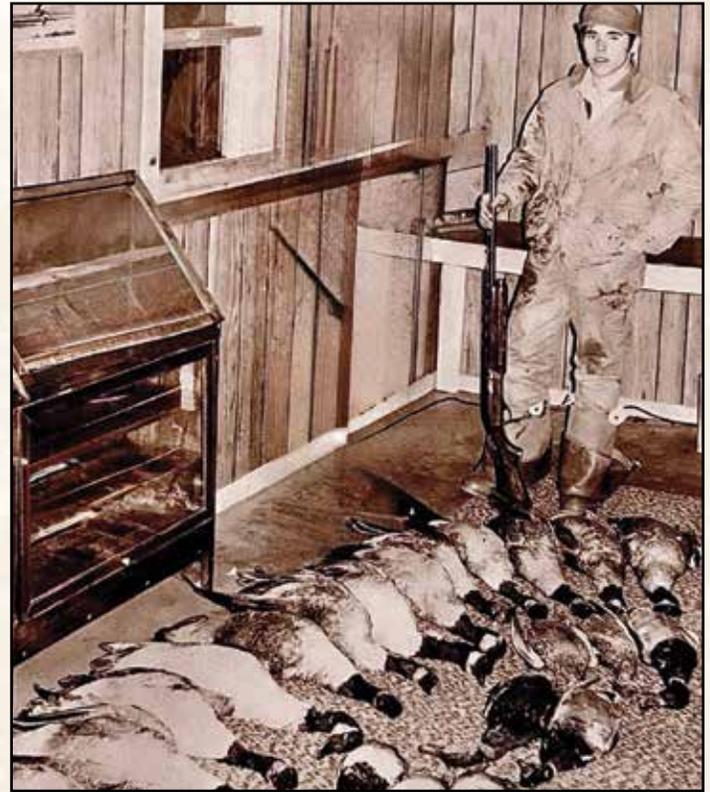
Sharretts was an interesting man, not terribly tall and a bit stout, and if he liked you, he liked you. Otherwise, he was a bit of a "get off my lawn" type guy, always getting to the point in a no-nonsense manner. He treated David Coleman well and David has fond memories of Shad. They spoke often about cars and Sharretts was a big proponent of Dodge/Chrysler vehicles. Shad bought some paint and gave it to David to use to paint decoys. It was made by Budeke Hardware in Baltimore and Sharretts claimed it to be the best paint ever made. David, just eighteen at



*Early map of Chestertown, Maryland*



*David Coleman on the Chester River with his Vansant skiff and rig of cork geese. Circa early 1970s. Photo courtesy of David Coleman.*



*David Coleman in the shanty at Primrose Point after successfully guiding physicians from Baltimore. Coleman guided for Sharretts until Shad's sudden death in 1979. Photo circa 1974. Photo courtesy of David Coleman.*

the time, thought it was “just paint,” and still chuckles about it almost 50 years later. Coleman worked for Sharretts until Shad passed away.

Coleman watched Shad paint decoys in the shanty or on the back porch. When discussing Sharretts’ rig, David explained that Shad loved Heverin decoys and had a hundred plus of his blackheads and redheads in the rig. Sharretts met Heverin in the late thirties and ordered decoys from him. He was proud of those Heverin birds and frequently bragged about their effectiveness, claiming, “Heverin made the best decoys on the Bay.”

In addition, there were six or eight baskets full of the canvasbacks that Shad had chopped out, including the example featured in this article. He believes Sharretts made around sixty canvasbacks in his day, but not all at the same time, spread out over several years. They were chopped out in the Upper Bay style with round bottom and a soft chine. The tail cut is quite reminiscent of the work of George Washington Barnes or Scott Jackson with a paddle that angles slightly upward in contrast to Heverin’s tails that tended to come straight out of the body. Noticeably absent, however, is a neck shelf and why Sharretts did not use one is a mystery. Certainly, he was skillful enough with tools to cut a shelf in but felt the time and effort were not warranted. The head on these birds was competent and interesting. The extra-long and

thin bill is a bit atypical, but appealing, and is stouter, albeit, less refined when looking straight down from the top. The cut that separates the bill from the face (sometimes called “gill”) is deeply cut in and “V” cut at the top if the bill is small. The overall bill carving lacks refinement yet remains attractive.

When rigging his birds, Shad used a typical ring and staple with east/west orientation and placed a bit close to the front of the breast and a rectangular sand cast ballast weight hammered flat on the ends and secured with a single nail on each end. The example featured has Charlie Joiner repaint that was done in the early 1950s. Joiner lived close by and would have been the main source to go to if a man needed a rig repainted. In addition, ever the civil engineer, Shad proudly drove a surveyor’s tack under the tail behind the ballast weight to identify his birds.

Shad Sharretts was a big believer in using coot decoys in his decoy rig. He had around a dozen coot V-boards in the rig and used a coot raft, which was a large, rectangular wooden frame of 2 x 2 pine with chicken wire stretched over it. About every twelve inches, a short length of rope was tied to the wire, and a black net or crab pot float was attached. The raft’s frame was weighted enough to have it sink just below neutral buoyancy. Imagine thirty-six of these back floats bobbing close together with the action of the waves. It really looks like a sizable flock of feeding

coot. The raft was a bit unwieldy, and was just stored in the marsh, behind the blind. The coot decoys would be in addition to the Heverin blackheads and redheads and Shad's canvasbacks completing the rig.

Shad really enjoyed gunning for diving ducks and redheads were his favorites. He told David many times about when redheads would "go dumb" and toll in with reckless abandon, absorb a volley of shots, fly across the river towards and country club, circle, and come back to get shot at again. The cans and blackheads did not behave quite as well. Of course, like most other gunners up and down the Chester, corn was put out in the river and could hold a fair amount of ducks without attracting the "fish cops" (game wardens), if used sparingly.

By the time David took over as guide, Shad had mostly hung up his gun but still enjoyed hosting his friends and telling stories and the like. He understood and cherished the camaraderie associated with gunning with friends. Coleman recalls the many red cedar trees growing around Primrose Point and the smell when Sharretts burned cedar in his fireplace where the men gathered after the hunt.

In early summer 1979, Sharretts attended his 61st high school reunion and went to a Baltimore Orioles game. Just a few weeks later, on July 25th, he was driving his yellow, Dodge Colt station wagon and was severely injured in a head-on collision on Route 20 near Tolchester. He made it to Maryland Department of Emergency Services in Baltimore, but succumbed to his injuries later that evening, leaving behind his wife, two sons, five grandchildren and two great grandchildren. He was interred at St. Paul's Kent Churchyard in Fairlee.

Roland "Shad" Sharretts lived an interesting and full life. He met success with all his life's ventures, from baseball to civil engineering. He was a good family man and enjoyed his friends. While he did not make many decoys, he can now be recognized in the annals of Chesapeake Bay decoy making history.

*The writer would like to thank David Coleman and Jason Superczynski for their assistance in authoring this story. Bill Waibel is a long-time decoy maker and collector and can be reached at [coachbillwaibel@gmail.com](mailto:coachbillwaibel@gmail.com)*



*Closeup of Sharretts canvasback head showing long bill and deep carving between the face and the bill.*



*Bottom view showing typical Upper Bay rigging and ballast and Shad's signature surveyor tack behind the weight.*

# Spring 2026 Raffle

A chance to win ONE of four valuable prizes.  
Four tickets will be drawn.

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By C. John Sullivan III

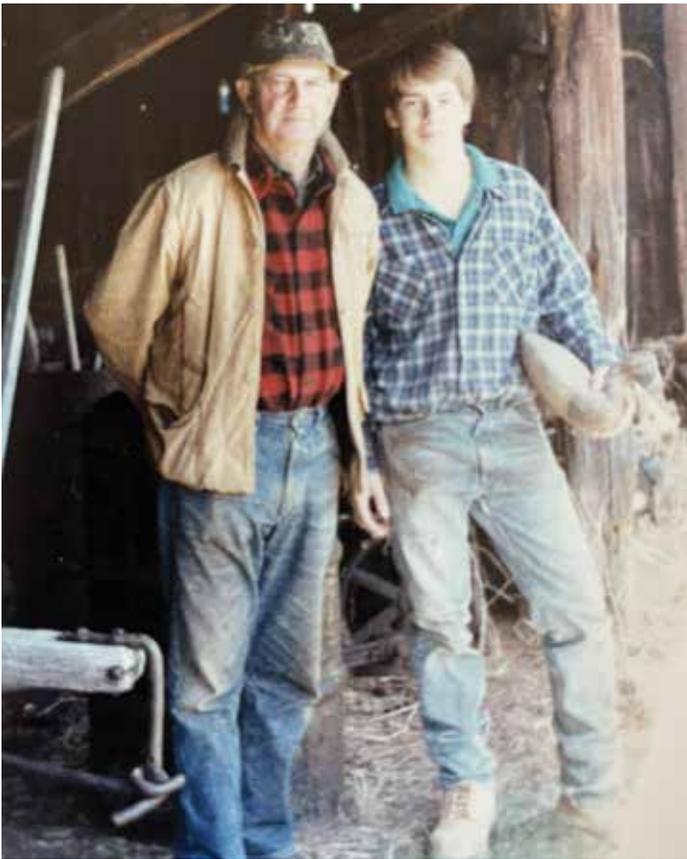


*C. John Sullivan III  
leaving the Pusey  
Farm with one of only  
a few McGaw teal  
circa early 1980s.*

# Picking with Dad

This is a glimpse of growing up the only son of one of the greatest caretakers of Upper Bay waterfowl artifacts and history ever.

Dad likes to tell the story of my early childhood when some of my first words were “new duck,” when I incessantly would point out his latest purchases to my mother. Apparently my first words were “new duck” combined with a point flick in the direction of his latest purchase, which he had tried to blend into the dozen or so decoys he could then get away with having scattered around our living room.



*C. John Sullivan III with John Pusey in his wagon shed holding a Barnard Canvasback drake.*



*C. John Sullivan III with the Pusey rig. According to dad's journals, it took over a decade of visits and purchases to finally make it to the back of the warehouse where the Pusey rig was stored.*

Some of my earliest memories were of going to every farm auction or yard sale within a 60 mile radius, clinging to Dad's side or on his back, looking for anything that resembled a decoy or an old hunting jacket. Dad would also push the envelope, not just accepting what was visibly for sale, but making the effort to ask if we could look in corn cribs, basements, attics, silos, or smoke houses. We would not just ask about old decoys and guns but boats, hunting jackets, hunting licenses, and anything vaguely connected to waterfowl hunting. He would send me into dirt floor basements and tight attics with instructions to look for old hunting gear, decoys, oars, or anything that looked like something an old hunter would use.

I have been in more barns, basements, sheds, and attics than imaginable. Dad and I have had some incredible finds. I remember finding everything from that single teal, goose, or swan left behind when a rig was sold, several hunting coats, often with a hunting license on the back or years' worth of them in the pockets. I remember finding a beautiful Holly goose, a cool hand painted sign, Barnard high necks, numerous McGaw decoys, unopened wooden cases of shotgun shells, and early corn decoys with intricately tacked on husks.

A couple experiences come to mind in Baltimore City. One adventure led us to a historic well-known fishing tackle shop. It had been in business forever. Upon perusing the shelves, we quickly noticed bins filled with wooden fishing bobbers. Let's say there were 4-5 bins with these bobbers organized by size and color. We also noticed several shelves with Creek Chubb fishing lures. Dad picked up a variety of them and set them on the counter and asked, how much if we take them all? The manager said, "I don't think you want them all." "We don't," Dad replied. "I don't think so. See, we have numerous boxes of them." This led us thru a trap door in the floor down to the basement. One could barely get into this space due to 100+ years of inventory. Not on the shelves were the paper mache duck decoys. Hundreds of unopened cases. We ended up cleaning out the basement of this historic Baltimore tackle shop. The decoys filled 2 pickup trucks. The lures and bobbers filled the back of our Chevrolet Suburban.

Another Baltimore City pick wasn't a fishing tackle shop but an old bicycle repair shop. I'm not 100% sure what led us there, but I think it was a work friend of Dad's who had purchased a bunch of old model trains and noticed a few neat old fishing bobbers there. This led to a great picking experience. The proprietor was a really neat old guy. This was back when we used to have real snowy winters. He had newspapers scattered on the old greasy concrete floor to absorb our wet shoes. As we entered he yelled "stay on that



*C. John Sullivan III at their family's Bon Air Farm in Fallston, MD with a rig of early R. Madison Mitchell Canvasbacks.*

paper” which we clearly heard over the jazz music playing in the background. Followed by basically, what is it you want? So my Dad and one of his best friends started inquiring. The bicycle repair shop had been in business since before the turn of the century. It was home to dozens of bikes in various stages of repair but also 6-8 old big wheel bikes and several boxes of large fishing bobbers. These bobbers were the kind that were hand-painted with striking colors and designs. The bikes we quickly sold to recoup the investment, but the bobbers remain in Dad’s collection. What a pick!

Another amazing aspect of Dad’s collecting is his recollection and journaling. Dad has an amazing memory and some incredible journals. He has recorded every single purchase he made and gift he received. Date, time, place, weather, those in his company, and the finds. He even has collections of journals. In addition to journals of every year of my grandmother’s life since she started writing in elementary school, he has amassed a rather notable collection of hunting club journals, assessment records, and hundreds of records of over 150 years of waterfowl and hunting activities on the Chesapeake Bay. He has blanket chests full of journals. I guess that is part of the reason why he has recently become popular with some of the decoy collecting clubs, the stories. Someone should record his presentations.

So now, as I’m in-between jobs, I find myself spending more time than ever with Dad. We often go to the eastern shore looking for more treasures. I’m frequently scanning auction listings. Over the course of the past year, Dad has uncovered some incredible treasures. Some based upon memories of picking with Henry Fleckenstein, and some based upon journal entries from 30-40+ years ago.

Another observation that I’ve had recently is that Dad has a few old friends with rigs that will only sell a few decoys at a time. Actually, both of us have one of these going on right now. I have a nice old guy who inherited his Uncle’s collection. I visit him 3-4 times a year and he will pull out a few things for me but always wants the same amount of money. I guess it’s like a pay check for him to subsist. Another nice old guy who holds onto his family’s rig, will only sell Dad 4 decoys at a time. And he admits, this is only to make sure he comes back to visit. Either way, pretty cool and as a result of relationships decades in the making.

Dad has led me on some incredible picking adventures which have led to some incredible finds but more importantly relationships and experiences. Lessons learned, pay attention to your elders, for they will lead you on some incredible adventures and always document these little treasures.

# Half the Sky

Celebrating  
the beauty and elegance  
of the hen decoy

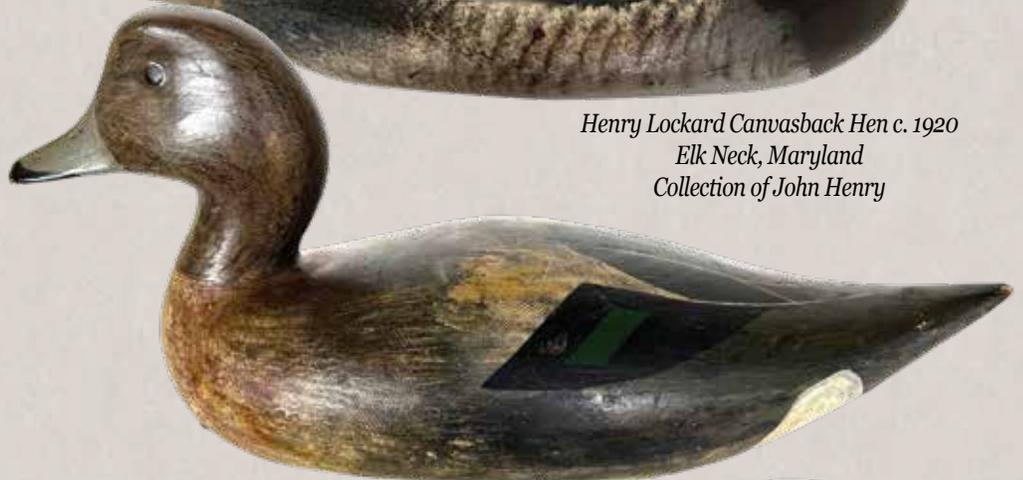
By Chad Tragakis



Lloyd Sterling Green-winged Teal Hen c. 1920s  
Crisfield, Maryland  
Collection of Griff Evans



Henry Lockard Canvasback Hen c. 1920  
Elk Neck, Maryland  
Collection of John Henry



Ed Phillips Widgeon Hen c. 1930s  
Cambridge, Maryland  
Collection of Larry Foxwell



John Dawson Merganser Hen c. 1930  
Duck Island, New Jersey • Collection of Don Kirson

When most people consider decoys, whether they are serious collectors or not, they tend to focus on those emulating male ducks, or drakes. In decoys, as in nature, the drakes are brighter, colorful, bold, and typically show tremendous distinction between the species of ducks they are made to represent. Decoys made as female ducks, or hens, are often overlooked by collectors and more casual observers as being too drab, too brown, too bland, and too similar to one another to be very interesting or appealing.

With this longstanding attitude in mind, the Potomac Decoy Collectors Association launched a new exhibit at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum this summer, that aims to challenge and change that perception. By highlighting a varied range of unique,

important and rare examples of exceptional quality, including many representing the very best of their type, the club hopes to help collectors see hen decoys through a different lens and in a new light, giving them their due appreciation and respect.

For more than 20 years, the PDCA has curated a series of guest exhibits in partnership with the museum. These special displays, featuring decoys from club member collections, provide an insightful and valuable supplement to the museum's permanent collection. Carefully selected from 20 top collections, this landmark exhibit—the first-ever in any museum dedicated exclusively to hen decoys—showcases more than 85 outstanding examples from a wide range of waterfowling regions across America and Canada. Collectively, they demonstrate just how different the decoy makers' interpretations can be – and how breathtakingly beautiful hen decoys truly are.

As decoy collectors and connoisseurs, there is something intrinsically special about hens. For starters, they remain much more scarce today than drakes. In nearly all gunning regions across North America, carvers simply didn't make as many hens as drakes, and in some places, like the Upper Chesapeake Bay, this disparity is even more pronounced. When decoys were put out for hunting during waterfowling's "golden age," rigs usually consisted of several dozen, or even several hundred decoys depending on the species of ducks being pursued and the method used to pursue them.



*Tolson Family (att.) Canvasback Hen  
c. 1920s Stafford, Virginia  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis*



*Ward Brothers Mallard Hen c. 1936  
Crisfield, Maryland  
Collection of Don Kirson*



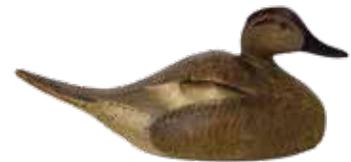
*Ward Brothers "Fat Jaw" "Humpback" Goldeneye  
Hen c. 1925 • Crisfield, Maryland  
Collection of Pete Pappas*



*Ward Brothers Pintail hen c. 1932  
Crisfield, Maryland  
Collection of Pete Pappas*



*Ward Brothers "Knot Head" Canvasback Hen  
c. 1928 • Crisfield, Maryland  
Collection of Pete Pappas*



*Ward Brothers Pintail Hen c. 1925  
Crisfield, Maryland  
Collection of Pete Pappas*



*Ward Brothers Black Duck Hen c. 1932  
Crisfield, Maryland  
Collection of Don Kirson*



*Ward Brothers Ruddy Duck Hen c. 1948  
Crisfield, Maryland  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis*



*Ward Brothers Canvasback Hen c. 1936  
Crisfield, Maryland  
Collection of Pete Pappas*



*William Heverin Canvasback Hen c. 1925  
Charlestown, Maryland  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis*



*Ward Brothers Canvasback Hen c. 1948  
Crisfield, Maryland  
Collection of Griff Evans*



*William Reitz (att.) Canvasback Hen c. 1920s  
Susquehanna River, Pennsylvania  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis*



*Ward Brothers Mallard Hen c. 1935  
Crisfield, Maryland  
Collection of Griff Evans*



*Ward Brothers Black Duck Hen c. 1936  
Crisfield, Maryland  
Collection of Pete Pappas*



Scott Jackson Canvasback Hen c. 1920  
Charlestown, Maryland  
Collection of John Henry



Sam Smith Pintail Hen c. 1870  
Amityville, Long Island, New York  
Collection of C. John Sullivan Jr.



Sam Barnes Canvasback Hen c. 1890  
Havre de Grace, Maryland  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis



Otto Weinert Blue-wing Teal Hen c. 1920  
Oshkosh, Wisconsin  
Collection of Don Kirson



Mandt Homme Canvasback Hen c. 1935  
Stoughton, Wisconsin  
Collection of Don Kirson



Madison Mitchell Widgeon Hen c. 1940s  
Havre de Grace, Maryland  
Collection of Bill Waibel



Madison Mitchell Pintail Hen c. 1930s  
Havre de Grace, Maryland  
Collection of Lloyd & Sharyn Sheats



Samuel Hutchings Goldeneye Hen c. 1919  
Jones Falls, Ontario, Canada  
Collection of Don Kirson



Sam Barnes Goldeneye Hen c. 1890  
Havre de Grace, Maryland  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis



Robert Elliston Mallard Hen c. 1890  
Bureau, Illinois  
Collection of Don Kirson



Mason Decoy Company Mallard Hen c. 1905  
Detroit, Michigan  
Collection of Don Kirson



Mallard Hen by an Unknown Maker c. 1900  
Susquehanna Flats, Maryland  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis



Madison Mitchell Widgeon Hen c. 1940s  
Havre de Grace, Maryland  
Collection of Bill Waibel



Lloyd Tyler Pintail Hen c. 1929  
Crisfield, Maryland  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis

Regardless of location or hunting method, however, the majority of decoys in most rigs were drakes, often in a ratio of 2-to-1, 3-to-1, or even greater, versus hens. The brighter, vibrant colors of the counterfeit males showed up much better to passing flocks than the darker, brownish hues of their female counterparts, so it made practical sense to use more drakes than hens. This can make hens much harder for collectors to find, which makes them an even more special prize when extraordinary and unique examples are added to the shelf, either as part of a pair or on their own.

All this discussion of drab, brown hens begs the question – why are the drakes so much more colorful? The answer comes down to survival and sexual selection. The difference in appearance between males and females of the same species is known as sexual dimorphism. The specific type found in birds, where the primary differences are in the color, patterns and brightness of the feathers, is called sexual dichromatism. This genetic phenomenon is an evolutionary strategy that evolved to reflect the specific pressures on each bird in a pair, and the division of labor they would each undertake in raising their young. In short, it has helped to ensure the survival of these species.

The brown feather coloring of hens, like most female birds, provides vital camouflage from predators for vulnerable mother ducks unable to leave their nests, especially when they are incubating and raising young ducklings. The duller plumage blends in better with their

surroundings, helping them avoid detection and increasing their chances of survival and successful reproduction.

The more colorful plumage of drakes serves a very different, but equally important part of the equation – helping male ducks lure female mates. In the duck world, those bright, vibrant colors signal health, vitality, and the ability of a drake to defend a hen, her nest and offspring, and the pair’s territory. Research shows that hens are more likely to choose drakes exhibiting brighter plumage.

Interestingly, as we all know, some species of birds do not show much, if any, difference between males and females. These species are known as monomorphic birds, where male and female look identical or nearly identical, at least to the human eye. Think grebes, blue jays, crows, chickadees and doves. In the waterfowl world, think black ducks, gadwall, brant and Canada geese. In fact, most species of geese and swans are monomorphic.

For black ducks, the difference is largely found in bill color – drakes having a more vibrant, yellow bill, and hens having a duller, olive-green bill. This difference, to varying degrees by certain decoy makers, has been expressed in a great number of black duck decoys produced over the years. Several examples of such “hen” black ducks are featured in the exhibit.

Few, in any, makers ever intentionally produced working hen or drake decoys



Lloyd Tyler Bufflehead Hen c. 1930s  
Crisfield, Maryland  
Collection of Griff Evans



Lloyd Parker Brant Hen c. 1890  
Parkertown, New Jersey  
Collection of Will Freng



Lawrence McLaughlin Bluebill Hen c. 1940s  
Edgeley, Pennsylvania  
Collection of Jim & Ina Jo Van Ness



L. Travis Ward Sr. Canvasback Hen c. 1920  
Crisfield, Maryland  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis



Josiah Travers Mallard Hen c. 1930s  
Vienna, Maryland  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis



Josiah Travers Canvasback Hen c. 1930s  
Vienna, Maryland  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis



John Graham Canvasback Hen c. 1875  
Charlestown, Maryland  
Collection of C. John Sullivan Jr.



John Glenn Widgeon Hen c. 1935  
Rock Hall, Maryland  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis



John Glenn Pintail Hen c. 1935  
Rock Hall, Maryland  
Collection of David Farrow



John Glenn Bluebill Hen c. 1935  
Rock Hall, Maryland  
Collection of David Farrow



John “Daddy” Holly Canvasback Hen c. 1870s  
Havre de Grace, Maryland  
Collection of Darrell & Kathy Hagar



John Blair, Sr. Widgeon Hen c. 1890  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Collection of John Henry



John Blair, Sr. Blue-winged Teal Hen c. 1875  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Collection of John Henry



John “Mickey” McLoughlin Bufflehead Hen c. 1950s  
Bordentown, New Jersey  
Collection of Jim & Ina Jo Van Ness



Henry Davis & Asa Owens  
Canvasback Hen Wing Duck c. 1915  
Perryville, Maryland • Collection of Jim Lockard



Jim Holly Pintail Hen c. 1890  
Havre de Grace, Maryland  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis



Jim Currier Canvasback Hen c. 1920  
Havre de Grace, Maryland  
Collection of Kevin Peel



James Baines Widgeon Hen c. 1950  
Morgantown, Maryland  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis



Ira Hudson Merganser Hen c. 1920s  
Chincoteague, Virginia  
Collection of Henry & Judy Stansbury



Hurley Conklin Bluebill Hen c. 1950s  
West Creek, New Jersey  
Collection of Jim & Ina Jo Van Ness



Henry Grant Goldeneye Hen c. 1900  
Barnegat, New Jersey  
Collection of Will Freng



Joe Lincoln Merganser Hen c. 1900  
Accord, Massachusetts  
Collection of Don Kirson



Jim Holly Canvasback Hen c. 1890  
Havre de Grace, Maryland  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis



Jim Cockey Mallard Hen c. 1930s  
Kent Island, Maryland  
Collection of David Farrow



Ira Hudson Widgeon Hen c. 1930s  
Chincoteague, Virginia  
Collection of Josh Barfield



Ira Hudson Bufflehead Hen c. 1920s  
Chincoteague, Virginia  
Collection of Henry & Judy Stansbury



Howard Bacon Bluebill Hen c. 1930s  
Delanco, New Jersey  
Collection of Jim & Ina Jo Van Ness



Henry Grant Bluebill Hen c. 1900  
Barnegat, New Jersey  
Collection of Will Freng

for geese, brant or swans. For characterizing “hen” decoys of these species, it almost comes down to feel, or to our very human tendency to personify or ascribe human attributes, in this case feminism, to the pieces in our collections. If I think this brant decoy looks more dainty and petite than most, or that goose decoy looks more “feminine” than others, maybe it is a hen? Or, maybe that’s just anthropomorphism at work! To highlight this dual reality and possibility for decoy collectors, one exceptional and, to our eyes at least, feminine brant is featured in the exhibit.

From cave paintings 37,000 years ago, to prehistoric terracotta, to early inks used by ancient Greeks and Romans, to the canvases of the Renaissance painters and beyond, brown has always been a central color in art. In the right hands, artists can achieve dazzling results with the otherwise blah color, evoking mystery, nostalgia and sensuality. One could argue that the same holds true for decoy makers and painters – that in the right hands, talented hands, those shades of brown can create captivating results, like the interplay of shadow and light, subtle gradations and realism, and life-like natural attributes like the warmth and softness of feathers that are not there.

Just as brown represents one small slice of the broader color spectrum, so too does brown have its own vast range of shades – with both stark contrast and subtle gradations, from dark to light. Taking our cues from an artist’s palette, the

range starts with the darkest shade of brown, a color almost black in appearance, all the way to the lightest brown colors, more tan than dark. When collectors really look at a hen decoy, and especially when comparing and contrasting different examples, all the colors on this spectrum come much more clearly into focus.

For decoy collectors, understanding this wide range of colors along the brown spectrum helps both perception and appreciation. From the blending, layering, and subtle shading, to the artful scratch painting on those decoys exhibiting it, to the interplay of colors, it's perhaps even more impressive to see how decoy makers achieved more impact with less color. Add to this the impressionistic effects some decoy makers achieved with simple geometric shapes on their hens, or the precise patterns and careful applications on some, contrasted with the seemingly slapdash applied strokes on others, and the bold contrast between lighter and darker hues becomes even more visually interesting.

For collectors and students of decoys, there is yet another potential and fascinating benefit to studying hens versus drakes. In the absence of a drake decoy's brighter, more varied, and potentially distracting colors, the eyes adjust and are able to focus more closely and more deeply on other things – like form, proportion, quality of carving, and the smaller, subtle details and tell-tale characteristics of a certain maker that might otherwise be missed. It's akin to



*Harry M. Shourds Goldeneye Hen c. 1920  
Ocean City, New Jersey  
Collection of Will Freng*



*Frank Buchner Goldeneye Hen c. 1910  
Erie, Pennsylvania  
Collection of Steve Brown*



*Frank "Doc" Baumgartner Bluebill Hen c. 1940s  
Houghton Lake, Michigan  
Collection of Jim & Ina Jo Van Ness*



*Elmer Crowell Mallard Hen c. 1920  
East Harwich, Massachusetts  
Collection of Lloyd & Sharyn Sheats*



*Elkanah Cobb Bluebill Hen c. 1895  
Cobb Island, Virginia  
Collection of Griff Evans*



*Charles Nelson Barnard Bluebill Hen c. 1935  
Havre de Grace, Maryland  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis*



*Ed Phillips Pintail Hen c. 1930s  
Cambridge, Maryland  
Collection of Larry Foxwell*



*Ed Phillips Bluebill Hen c. 1930s  
Cambridge, Maryland  
Collection of Larry Foxwell*



*Ed Parsons Goldeneye Hen c. 1890  
Oxford, Maryland  
Collection of Bruce Baynard*



*Doug Jester Black Duck Hen c. 1930s  
Chincoteague, Virginia  
Collection of Steve Brown*



*Cockey Family Merganser Hen c. 1920s  
Kent Island, Maryland  
Collection of David Farrow*



*Charlie Moore Bluebill Hen c. 1935  
Saint George Island, Maryland  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis*



*Charles Nelson Barnard Canvasback Hen c. 1910  
Havre de Grace, Maryland  
Collection of C. John Sullivan Jr.*



*Charles Nelson Barnard Canvasback Hen c. 1935  
Havre de Grace, Maryland  
Collection of Kevin Peel*



Taylor Boyd Redhead Hen c. 1915  
Perryville, Maryland  
Collection of Kevin Peel



Charles E. "Shang" Wheeler Canvasback Hen c. 1920  
Stratford, Connecticut  
Collection of Don Kirson



Cecil Rollins Bluebill Hen c. 1930s  
Harbor Beach, Michigan  
Collection of Jim & Ina Jo Van Ness



Capt. John Smith Bluebill Hen c. 1940s  
Ocean City, Maryland  
Collection of Rob Knight



Capt. Benjamin Davis Long-tailed Duck Hen c. 1865  
Monhegan Island, Maine  
Collection of Tom Rogers



Canvasback Hen by an Unknown Maker c. 1880  
Susquehanna Flats, Maryland  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis



Canvasback Hen by an Unknown Maker c. 1850  
Middle or Back River Neck, Maryland  
Collection of Kevin Peel



Bufflehead Hen by an Unknown Maker c. 1910  
Chesapeake Bay  
Collection of Tom Rogers



Bob McGaw Redhead Hen c. 1930s  
Haure de Grace, Maryland  
Collection of C. John Sullivan Jr.



Bluebill Hen by an Unknown Maker c. 1880s  
Winous Point Shooting Club - Port Clinton, Ohio  
Collection of Steve Brown



Arthur B. Vance Widgeon Hen c. 1875  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Collection of John Henry



Arthur B. Vance Mallard Hen c. 1860  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Collection of John Henry



Art Chilton Bluebill Hen c. 1950s  
Toronto, Canada  
Collection of Jim & Ina Jo Van Ness



Alvin Meekins Bufflehead Hen c. 1950s  
Hoopers Island, Maryland  
Collection of Chad & Christy Tragakis

the phenomenon whereas when one sense becomes diminished, the others become heightened.

This occurs through a process in the brain called neuroplasticity, where the brain "rewires" itself to create new neural pathways that expand and enhance perception, sensitivity, awareness and discrimination in the remaining senses to compensate for the loss. As the eyes continue to adjust to the more narrow color palate, a decoy enthusiast begins to see beyond the obvious, and the mind is able to process even more. One may notice subtle carving nuances like texture or raised wing carving that might otherwise have been missed. Or details like the placement and angle of the head or the sweep and shape of the tail.

If there is one takeaway from this exhibit, we hope it will be to encourage all collectors to look harder, longer, and more closely at hen decoys to see the amazing depth within. And of course, we hope this new perspective will lead to greater appreciation for these beautiful works of art – wooden manifestations of waterfowl that make up half the sky.

*"Half the Sky" runs through Summer 2026. To learn more about the Potomac Decoy Collectors Association, visit them on Facebook.*

Guy Taplin and C. John Sullivan III at the Chapel of  
St. Peter-on-the-wall, November 1992.

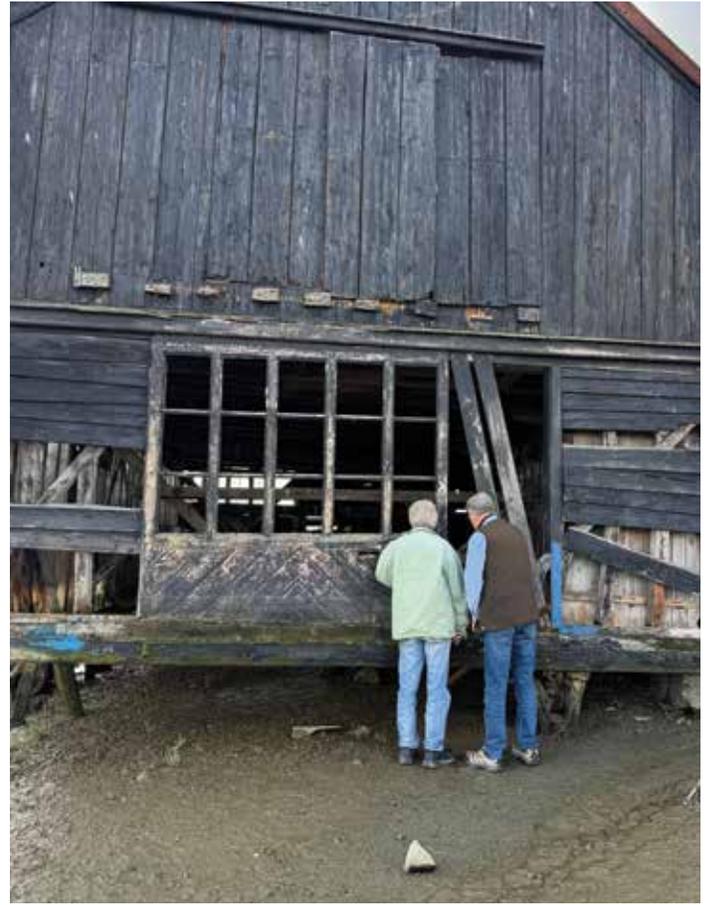
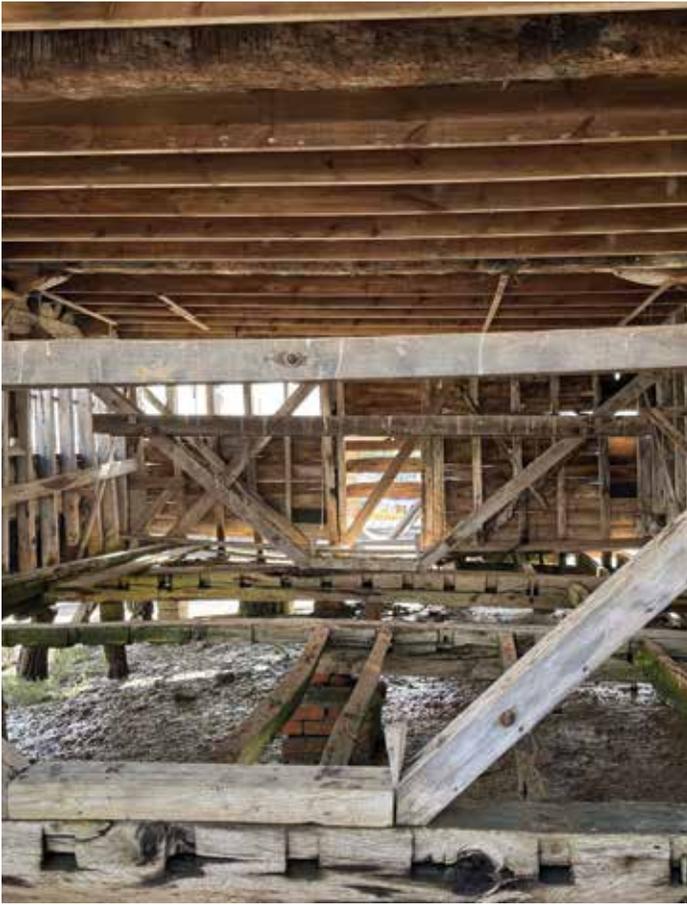


# Coastal Adventure

By C. John Sullivan Jr.

I met my British friend Guy Taplin in the late 1980s. He was a rare personality among the artist community in Essex County, United Kingdom. He was the sole bird carver living in the coastal village of Wivenhoe. Not only did he carve birds, he collected decoys from North America, especially from Maryland and Virginia. Our mutual dedication and passion for the historic carved wooden fowl brought us together and bonded us one to another. My late friend Henry A. Fleckenstein, Jr., was a part of the trio; in conversation and trades by letter or phone calls, we were kinfolk separated only by the miles and an ocean. Sadly, Henry was destined to never make the trip across the sea but experienced it through me or Guy. Guy always has said that “the marsh and tidal waters run through our blood.” After I met Guy at the Easton Waterfowl Festival, he returned to Maryland to visit me and traveled to the Eastern Shore to visit Henry, Bobby Richardson, and Bill Purnell. Upon visiting my home, he set his sights on a couple of prized decoys from my collection. In November of 1992, my son, C. John Sullivan III and I, along with several L.L. Bean tote bags, made the journey to Wivenhoe. I will not recite here what I gave up, but we returned home with two wonderful punt guns. One is a very

rare breech-loading under-lever 4 bore and the other an 8-foot-long 2-bore muzzleloader. Along with a stack of British pounds, we carried onto the plane gunpowder, 4-bore shells, display cases of taxidermy mounted shorebirds, and a few Susquehanna Flats teal decoys. It was an incredible journey and a lifetime memory for both of the Sullivans. Before we left Essex to return home, we traveled to Colchester to visit two historic shops: one was a vintage bookstore where Guy purchased a book for us to enjoy for our lifetimes, *Coastal Adventure* by J. Wentworth Day, published in 1949. The preface describes the contents: “There is a great deal about duck-shooting, about punt-gunning --- that most dangerous of all sports --- and of fowling in the cold beauty of winter. And this, again, is of East Coast life, for there men shoot for a living as earnestly as other men ply a pen, add up figures, or plough a furrow. Like all life on the coast, even shooting for the market is often a matter of high adventure --- sometimes of a close appointment with death.” The other shop was a delightful gun and related merchandise store. We walked out of that old shop with classic Barbour jackets, shotgun shells, powder cans, and great memories. Since our return home with stuff and memories, the pleasant smell of those places has



*Abandoned waterside structure at Tollesbury.*

remained in our heads to this day. For those of us who love things from bygone days, there are few scents more pleasing than a vintage book store, and equally pleasing to my nose is the smell of gunpowder, leather, and the aroma of wax on a 50-year-old weatherproofed jacket. I'm sure my entire home shares those smells to this day.

I have now returned from my sixth trip to Essex County, UK, which lies northeast of London and faces the North Sea. On each of these trips, Guy has taken us on a coastal adventure.

I've been to Bradwell-on-Sea (Bradwell-juxta-Mare) three times; it a place that lives in my head. The vision of this peaceful historic site travels with me. Although some 3,700 miles from my home, it feels like it could be just around the corner. When I arrive in Wivenhoe, the journey to this place starts with a ride on the narrow British roadways. My friend Guy Taplin drives at what seems to me an outrageous rate of speed. We are always in a hurry to get there. We climb out of the tiny British-friendly vehicle and then walk down the Roman road to the Chapel of St. Peter-on-the-Wall. The thought of how many thousands have taken this walk before is a part of the experience. The Chapel, built from stone fragments and tiles from the time of the Romans, comes into view, and in the distance I see the vast mudflats. The Chapel was built by the Eastern Saxons and dates from a.d. 660. It is without question the earliest building that I've ever been near. On each of my visits, I walk around the exterior of the Chapel and then go inside this house of worship, where thousands have prayed for over a thousand years. The high walls of stone add to the peaceful serenity of this place. The evidence of other uses can be clearly seen; it was used for a period

as a barn. A large archway now filled in with stone is easily detected on this great structure's south side. On each of my visits, the sun has a way of beaming through the high windows and shining a bright glow on the stone slab altar. A short walk past the Chapel leads me near the remnants of an ancient Roman wall. Just below the wall and hidden by bushes is the cottage of Walter Linnett, the third generation of Linnett wildfowlers of Bradwell. The cottage, shrouded in lap-sided wooden planks, was constructed in 1798. It was constructed by the Admiralty to house naval officers. The exterior is painted with black pitch and is well disguised by the sea wall. Today the cottage is used by local birders as an observation point and resting place. I would be curious if they realize that the Linnett family had maintained their residence at this place since the mid 1800s. Walter was the last who lived there, dying in 1958. The four-room one-story dwelling place provided shelter for the Linnett men after their days of punting on Gunners Creek in front of the cottage. The Linnetts stored their punts adjacent to their home and let their huge nine-foot-long guns rest in them. It was going out from Gunners Creek into the marshes where the great fowler plied his trade. He was called "King" of a barren coast some seventeen miles long. That coast was considered the loneliest within fifty miles of London. It was here that Walter Linnett killed untold thousands of waterfowl, swan, geese, curlew, avocets, godwit, and plover. It is not the harvesting of fowl that draws me to this place. Perhaps it is the juxtaposition of the ancient Chapel near to this fowler's home. It is the powerful serenity of the vast openness of this place that captures me.

On my most recent trip to Bradwell-on-Sea with Guy, in 2017, the emotions that I have felt each time rush over me, around me, and



*Guy and C. John, Jr. on the Mersea, September 2025.*

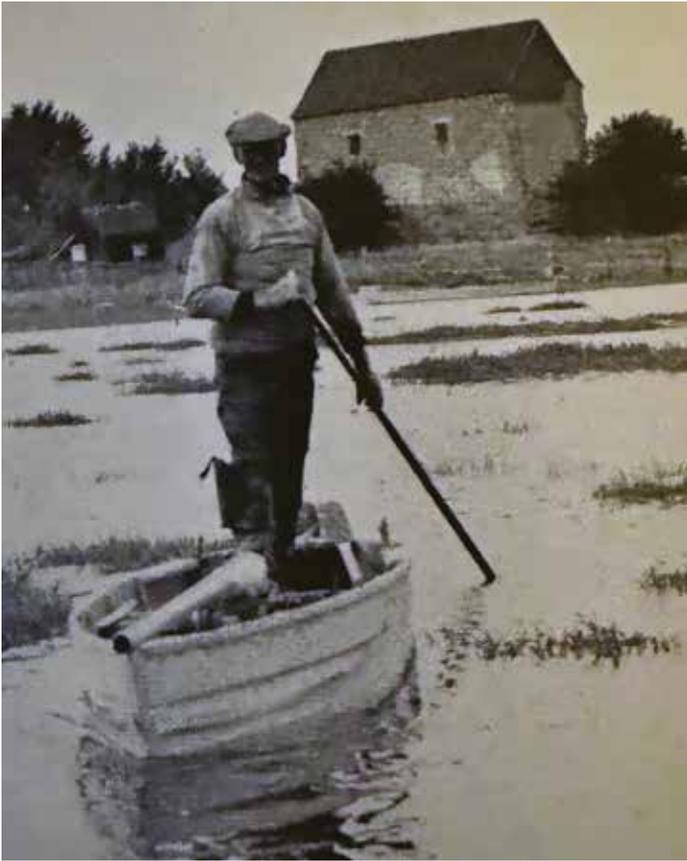


*C. John, Jr. holding a 4-bore breech loader, November 1992 (above). Group of punt gunners circa 1925 (below).*

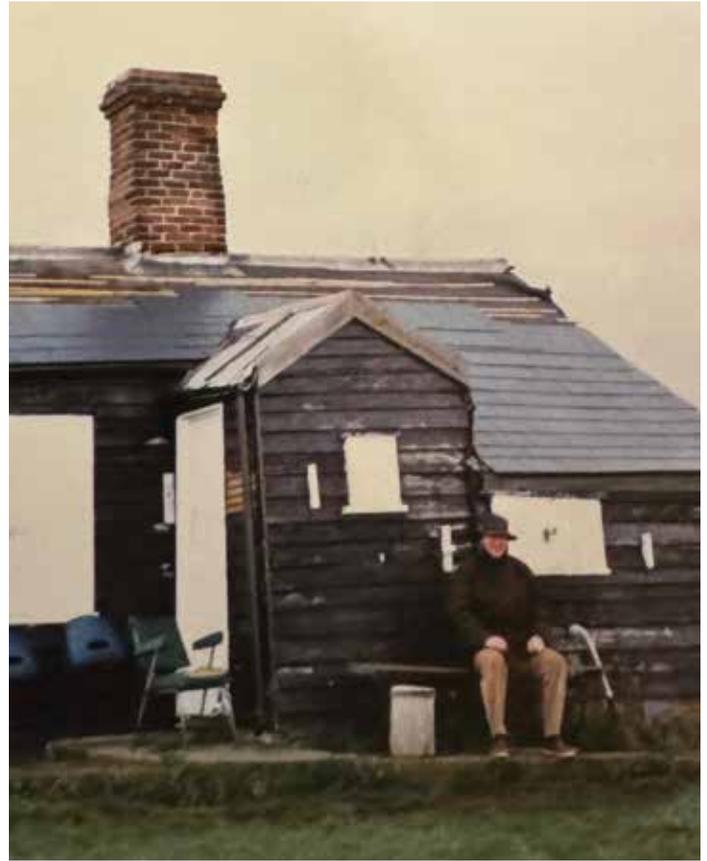
through me. All of my loves, my family, both the living and the dead, are with me. It is so powerful that I'm lost to properly describe it. There was a moment on this most recent visit that the feel and the spirituality were broken. As we walked from the Chapel to the Linnett cottage, we stopped for a moment to take note of the Roman wall. As we stepped in front of the cottage, just a few feet away an ancient birder spoke a few harsh words. "Well, you've frightened off the badgers that I've been watching all day!" I apologized for the intrusion and thought I could transform the moment by making a comment about this place, I said "what happened to that old bench that used to be against the front of the cottage?" He instantly replied "I've been coming here for the past 45 years and there has never been a bench here!" I could have challenged him, but I stopped short of taking the brief exchange any further. I have had my picture taken there, sitting on that "nonexistent" bench on my last two visits. I was reminded of Linnett's solitary life and the reputation he had for not welcoming strangers. I wondered as we continued on our hike whether the old birder was capturing a bit of Walter Linnett's spirit. We walked along the marsh line and then back up to the Chapel for a farewell to this ancient place. As we started up the Roman road leading us to our ride home, a silver streak appeared in the distant bright blue sky. A military jet flew over our heads. It was three of us on that road, and we experienced what turned out to be the most spectacular air show that I have ever witnessed: barrel rolls, climbs, and dives, each leaving a silver trail on its path. It wasn't a momentary display but a private air show just for us to mark this special visit. When the show was over, we drove to the cemetery where Walter Linnett and his wife are buried. There is no church in the graveyard, just rows of stone monuments to those gone before us. We stood by the grave site and paid our respects; we commented on

some of the elaborate markers and the plain one of the Linnetts. As we stepped from that tree-shrouded sacred place, it was dead quiet with the jet long gone, just the singing of birds flitting among the grave's shade trees, but then a sound of something coming down the road. We each stopped motionless in our tracks and then as on cue a magnificent horse came galloping down the middle of the road. Sitting astride her mount was a beautiful young woman, her lovely dark brown hair streaming out from under her helmet. To add to this very special day, the young lady wore riding boots and the tiniest of shorts that my eyes have had the pleasure to view. As she rode out of sight, the sound of the horse's shoes on that hard road drifted over us as did the vision we had just been witness to.

Guy's riverside chalet sits on the shoreline of the River Colne, a tributary of the Thames. This historic site was once a fowler's paradise and waterman's treasure trove. Today it provides inspiration and raw materials for Guy's birds-in-nature carvings, capturing flocks of birds in flight or feeding in the marshes, many of which reside in some of the major collections on both sides of the Atlantic. Guy's chalet is located down a rut-covered gravel roadway that boasts of one pothole after another. Walking through the cottage/workshop to the rear deck, one passes literally hundreds of found objects; bits and pieces of the world where Guy lives are displayed here. Standing on the rear deck of this rustic structure and looking toward the shoreline of this historic river, I can understand his passion. As I walk to the shore, I must contain



Walter Linnett pushing his punt with big gun, with his cottage and the Chapel visible in the background.



C. John, Jr. on the bench at Walter Linnett's cottage, November 1992.

myself or else I would be overwhelmed picking up well-worn stones or pieces of flotsam and jetsam. It is at this place where Guy lives in his head no matter where he may rest. Here is the true place of the origin of his creations, his “coastal adventures.”

*Coastal Adventure* included this remark from December 27, 1922: “Sailed *Teal* in creeks off Mersea, across Blackwater. Nothing to be seen. Well out beyond entrance of Blackwater saw several flocks of brent geese, very restless. Sailed after what looked like a bunch of teal which afterwards turned out to be 12 dab chicks (Little Grebes). Tried a long shot at 5 at 100 yards. Shot covered them but did not stop any. These birds are getting more difficult to get than ever. I have tried to get these birds time after time without success. Shot 7 dunlin out of a flock.” Guy drove us out to explore Mersea. We have made this trip before. A narrow causeway crosses the water to the island, and the fast-moving tides must be monitored. We have walked the shoreline and the boatyards searching for a perfect bit of discarded wood or iron to incorporate into one of Guy’s carvings, and we have seen the tide inflict damage to more than one vehicle on our trips here. We have examined the hulls of abandoned ships and admired the brilliant blue paint which time makes only more vibrant. On each of the trips here, we take the tiny high-speed water craft to the now restored oyster shed. We are rewarded on each of these trips with a hard-driving rain followed by a brilliant rainbow upon our return to hard land.

“Now the ducks are up. Fifteen or twenty of them sharp against the sky. Then a great wedge swings across the apple-green—there must be three hundred of them. The faint, cannonade sounds unreal. More duck etch the sky every moment” (from *Coastal Adventure* by J. Wentworth

Day.) This is why we are here, in Tollesbury. Our host, Guy Taplin, has brought us to this place, a famous waterfowlers’ outpost, to get the feel of this shoreline, to smell the salt air, and to share the sense of where he draws inspiration for his waterfowl creations. It is September of 2025, and Guy has taken us to this sparsely inhabited seaside village. We parked the car and walked down the gravel roadway, past abandoned boats and sail lofts undergoing restoration, to the shell of a once busy structure. The framework is now just a ghost-like shell of what was once a magnificent building. We peer through an opening into the skeleton. The sea washes into the floorless building as we glance up to the bones, powerful timbers proudly holding this shrine together. Almost as on cue, we instantly focus on a piece of the framework that we both covet. It is a perfectly formed wedge seeming to hold the massive timbers in perfect order. We simultaneously devise a plan for a quick removal process with minimal damage to this grand old building. We search about and quickly come upon an eight-foot-long metal pipe, perhaps the barrel of a long-ago-discarded punt gun. By the time I had placed the barrel through the opening, Guy had crawled into the framing. I shove the barrel to his hands, and with me on one end and Guy on the other we gently tap the wooden wedge. The wedge comes free from its home quickly without compromising the framework’s integrity. Before Guy crawls out through the black muck and mire, he continues his search. Our hopes run high as he scours the muck looking for the lock, the trigger guard, or any other pieces of the ancient firearm. Finally, he spots a piece of metal and raises it up from its muddy home. Not a piece of an ancient gun but rather a rusty old kitchen fork. Guy crawls from the great structure with the rewards in his hands, the beautiful wooden wedge and the rusty old fork. I feel the excitement as he tightly grips the bounty of this quest. I feel confident that these objects will



*A wonderful hull at Mersea*

find a place of honor on a windowsill in the Taplin home or to someday be incorporated into one of his creations. To many, the thought of this adventure would never have crossed their minds. Most visitors to this spot would have perhaps glanced in the direction of this ancient structure and thought “there it is, just an old frame of a building about to fall in on itself,” but to us of the same mind it is a cathedral to be admired and honored and searched for a fragment of the history that grand old lady could share with us when Tollesbury was a destination for hundreds or perhaps thousands of ancient fowlers.

Reading through *Coastal Adventure*, I became fascinated with references to various characters along the coast of Essex. Some of the gunners had great names: Titus Mussett, Sooty Mussett, Charlie Mussett (the three Mussett brothers), and others, including Charlie Prigg and Harry Banks. All of these gentlemen were known as punt-gunners, oystermen, and fishermen. Guy insisted that we visit stops along the coast where these gunners had shot. One memorable place along the way was the Green Man Pub, a usual stop before a night’s rest after a historic shooting day and a place where the Mussetts had celebrated a great shoot 100 years earlier. The familiar toast after a successful day, “Ere’s to you mate,” had been oft-repeated and echoed among the cobwebbed beams of the old inn till early in the morning. When Guy took us to the Green Man in 1992, it appeared just as I had imagined, musty and smoke filled with three locals sitting at the well-worn old bar. Two years later, we visited this wonderful old tavern again and found, much to my surprise, the same three local men sitting in the same places as before. We struck up a conversation with them. As my memory serves me, the conversation picked up just where it had left off two years earlier. Wonderful memories, but fast forward to 2017, and we travel back to sites we had traveled to before. We drove to the historic Green Man, parked outside the pub, and tried to recall this historic structure; were we at the right location? Something had changed. I walked to the front door; it was locked. I peered inside, and the barkeep saw me. She opened the door and greeted me, “I’m sorry but we are closed for the day.” I replied “we have just now arrived from



*Guy Taplin’s seaside “chalet.”*

the United States, we came back to be sure the Green Man was still here.” “Well in that case, please come in and have a look around and let me pour you a couple of pints.” We enjoyed the visit and the pints she poured, and although the building had been restored, its old soul had somehow survived. The Green Man lives and so does “Ere’s to you mate!” Our travels were rewarded, and although not celebrating the reward of a successful hunt, we celebrated the return to a wonderful country, being with dear friends, and once again reuniting for a coastal adventure.



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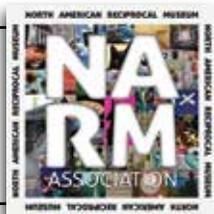
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# The Labrador Duck

Gone But Not Forgotten

"The labrador duck ... disappeared so swiftly and so quietly that it is not only difficult to compose a suitable epitaph but also impossible to write a complete obituary."

Paul Johnsgard  
-Waterfowl biologist



## 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.

## Introduction

Through my mind's eye, I picture it to be a very grey morning. The clouds are heavy and low, almost scraping the seed heads of some tall phragmites plants by the water's edge. The wind is blowing a steady 10-15 mph from the north, northwest. It feels cold and damp; I would suggest "raw". Some of the heavy rainfall of the previous evening still seems to give the marsh vegetation a liquid coating. The increasing brightness of the eastern horizon tells of a rising sun hidden by dense clouds. Our location is on the edge of a Long Island salt marsh experiencing a rising tide. The year is 1875 and the probable extirpation of a living species is about to occur.

On this day ***Camptorhynchus labradorius*** (Greek for flexible bill), the labrador duck, will enter the great void of extinction. Millions of years of evolution have brought this species to this point in time and place and from this point on the bird will exist only as a memory, a historical phenomena found in books, or one of 56 museum skins or mounts found throughout the world. Although never an abundant species, the tipping point of its population occurred years earlier and now the bird will be no more. The labrador duck will have become the first strictly North American bird to experience extinction in historical time, that is, since European settlement in the New World.

As the young hunter had approached his blind on the marsh shoreline, I think he was probably hopeful of putting food on the table for his family, not being a market hunter wanting a different sort of bounty yield. With patience, he waited and soon his reward arrived, dropping into his decoy rig. A mixed group of divers, mostly bluebills and a few others descend within range. His shotgun sounds 3 times, Boom, Boom, Boom and 3 birds fall into his wooden ducks and the shallow bayside waters. As he leaves the blind and works to retrieve the downed birds, he soon gathers a large drake bluebill and two other birds he is not quite sure of. He has seen a few of this type of bird before and he remembers them as being called the pied duck or stink duck. He later discovers the two ducks are a male and female labrador duck pair after checking in with some of the older hunters that day. He, like almost any other hunter of his day, would have no understanding of the significance of his morning hunt and its outcome. He was bringing food home for his wife and kids and nature's limitless cornucopia had provided him that possibility.

I have often heard it stated that "Ignorance of the law is no excuse", however in this fictitious scenario of a young man's efforts to feed his family in 1875, I don't see that his action in any way should be considered negative because of the greater significance of the death of the final two labrador ducks that resulted from his morning's hunt. How in any way could guilt be brought to bear on what he had done or any of our countless ancestors who were doing the same thing? Ecological and moral association to resource exploitation



*Mounted Drake Labrador Duck  
Chicago Field Museum*

was only beginning to suggest that there are limits, that creatures can go extinct, and that any loss of a species is a diminishment of the whole of ecosystem stability. Today, my contemporary knowledge and understanding of these ideas enables me to have a different level of thought as to what happened that morning in the marsh, but it in no way provides me with a sense of elitism over the past. If anything, I should have a greater context and acceptance of what had happened. My guilty verdict should be rendered only if I continue to allow the continuance of such events today. With that said, I would still like to have had the opportunity to travel in time and question the young hunter about his feelings about the killing of those birds on that day, especially after providing him with a fuller context to what he had just done. I truly feel, he and probably most of our ancestors would have experienced a sense of regret and remorse for their actions. Today, my responsibility as an educator about such an event is to provide the proper apriori context to it and eliminate any ignorance of the law for the species' protection.

Note: A less likely date for extinction of the labrador duck is listed as 1878 with the bird having been shot near Elmira, New York. This inland location suggests an unreliable record and no specimen exists. (Johnsgard, North American Sea Ducks, p. 68) Interestingly a beautiful statue of a labrador duck is located in a nearby park which commemorates this suspect event's happening.

## The Bird

Very limited information is known about the labrador duck's natural history and eventual extinction and much that is thought to be known is speculative at best. Apparently the bird's population was never large and it waned quickly until its extirpation in 1875. Originally labrador ducks were thought to have been closely related to scoters, but more recent evaluation suggests a closer relationship to the Steller's eider. They are categorized as a sea duck and are medium-



*Closest Relatives - Stellar Eiders*

sized in comparison to other sea ducks. Labrador duck's wings whistled in flight and although not known, they were thought to have "cooed" like other sea ducks.

**Description:** The male labrador duck was a handsome enough bird with an all white head, chest, and wings set against an entirely black body. Its head had a black stripe from its crown to the nape, a black band around the base of the neck, and its wings had black primary feathers and coverts. The black and white coloring is why the duck was sometimes called the skunk duck. Female plumage was brownish grey with various lighter and darker shades of that coloring throughout. The tail was very dark brown and the female birds had a white speculum. Juveniles resembled females with immature males transitioning to adult plumage in about 2+ years.

The legs and feet of both birds were thought to have been a dark greyish-blue. The adult male iris was probably a red-hazel although possibly yellowish in color. The female's eyes were a dark brown in color.

The labrador duck's bill was large and odd looking and it widened towards its tip. It was a "flexible bill" with soft lateral flanges that hung down from the beak. Its beak size has been compared to a shoveler's beak and the pattern to that of a Steller's eider. The bill is assumed to have been specialized for feeding purposes with the bird having greater tactile sensitivity. The bill has a large number of lamellae and according to biologist R.I. Groudie, the lamellae of the labrador duck are the biggest in relation to body size among sea ducks. Controversy exists as to the bill color of the male, but most descriptions suggest it was colorful with a black portion and a blue-grey portion separated by a yellowish-orange band. The female bill was not as colorful.



*Labrador Duck  
Range Map*

**Range:** Labrador ducks were endemic to North America. They ranged from the North Atlantic coast of the Canadian Maritime Provinces and New England to the Chesapeake Bay region. Some scientists suggest that they may have been found as far north as the Canadian Arctic, while some consider western coastal Greenland as within their range, and nesting sites on islands in the St. Lawrence seaway have been considered possible. (Johnsgard. *The North American Sea Ducks*. 2016.) Long Island has been thought to be the central location in their range. John James Audubon reported seeing a group of about a dozen labrador ducks at the mouth of the James River in the Chesapeake Bay during the mid-1800s. Migration routes are unknown and any reported sightings to far inland areas from the coast should be considered accidental and probably weather caused.

**Habitat:** Labrador ducks were found and active in sandy bays, estuaries, inlets, harbors, and salt marshes. They were considered birds of the "sandy shoals". (Cokinos. *Hope is theThing with Feathers*. 2000.) Their environment was brackish to marine in terms of salinity. Areas where SAVs such as eel grass (*Zostera marina*) grew proved to be popular as activity and feeding zones. Sandy to muddy bottoms with large amounts of benthic infauna were their feeding grounds.

**Biology, Reproduction, Nesting:** Information relating to these topics is not known. It is thought that they were 2-3 years old when breeding, produced a limited amount of eggs, and were long lived.

**Food and Feeding:** Due to its specialized bill, the labrador duck in all likelihood also had a specialized diet according to waterfowl biologist Paul Johnsgard. The large lamellae aided the bird in retaining food of an appropriate size and filtered out sand and detrital debris. (Cokinos) When diving for mollusks and other invertebrates of the benthos community, its bill would flex as it probed. As it worked the sand and mud bars in search of food, it was very dependent on touch rather than sight for procuring its meals. The turbidity of the water may have been a key factor of explanation for this. In shallow waters, the bird would dabble for its food like a puddle duck. Overall, it is suggested that the labrador duck can be compared to the Steller's eider in terms of its feeding habits and food preferences. (Johnsgard)

Christopher Cokinos relates that these birds may have had a strong desire for common mussels for their food. Trot-lining fishermen were known to have caught labrador ducks on lines baited with mussels occasionally. Audubon cites that they greedily took to bait.

## Extinction

"The beauty and genius of a work of art may be rediscovered, though its first material expression be destroyed; a vanished harmony may yet inspire the composer, but when the last individual of a race of living things breathes no more, another heaven and another earth must pass before such a one can be again." - *William Beebe, Scientist and Explorer*

The Earth has existed for about 5 billion years and during the last 4+ billion years living things have been on it. Life began when complex inorganic chemicals reacted with lighting or possibly vulcanism, established a membrane, and began to replicate. In billions of years of time, life forms evolved to changing circumstances presented by the Earth, became complex, and reproduced through sexual activity. To continue to live has always been the greatest challenge for any species that has existed or presently exists because at any moment in time and space, a constant state of change or flux is or was always occurring. As a result of this changing environment, life forms are and were forced to adapt to the new circumstances, migrate to a place where the old environment exists, or perish. Extinctions occurred when a species was no longer capable of adaptation or migration and thus no young could be reproduced with the potential of survival. The changing Earth favored no life form over another and a great "experimentation" happened, resulting in an extremely biodiverse system. "Evolution crawls to imperfection. It ends with extinction." Scientist, Greg Keyes.

Presently, the diversity of Earth's life experiments is in the multi-millions, probably billions. All are relatively new results with only a handful of living fossils (e.g., Horseshoe crabs, Ginkos Coelacanths, etc.) having had a longer span of successful existence. All creatures today have a message

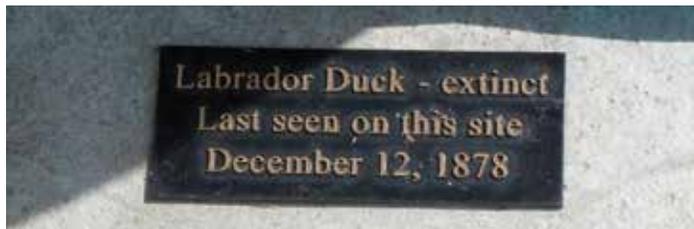


*Mounted Pair of Labrador Ducks  
New York State Museum*

on survival in their genetic code from past life form's efforts to survive. The average earth span for any life form has been between 1-10 million years. Please note, our species (Homo sapiens) has had only a brief period of about 200,000 years of successful experimentation. Over the vast period of life on Earth, over 99.9 % of all life species that evolved have become extinct. It is suggested that approximately 5 billion "experiments" with failed outcomes have occurred before this present moment of life on Earth. "Extinction is the rule. Survival is the exception." *Scientist, Carl Sagan.*

The labrador duck is one such example of a failed experiment with the inevitable consequence of extinction. I regret never having had the opportunity to witness, first hand, this bird during its existence. No one, today, has had that possibility nor the interaction with any of the other 5+ billion past species. As a naturalist, I love studying the diversity and complexity of life and often shed a tear at what has been lost, especially that caused by my species activity. As a scientist, I see this is the reality of the miracle of life on Earth. I also realize that this is the way for all of life to evolve, exist for a moment in time and space, die out to extinction until life and planet Earth reach their finality when our star, the sun, begins to die, and extinguishes planet Earth as a red star. With that said, I can still enjoy my now and try to learn from both past and present.

Extinction can be the result of one casual factor, but is usually caused by an interaction of factors. Although the labrador duck was considered to be a specialized species of lifeform especially in consideration of its dietary preferences, it seems that a variety of factors may have led to its demise.



*Labrador Statue Plaque*

### 1.) Its behavior

Opinions on the Labrador duck's behavior range from its being a shy, hard to approach duck, which would quickly take flight to a tame, confiding duck, not difficult to shoot. Generally, it was thought to be a "stupid" duck often labelled the "fool bird or fool duck". (Cokinos)

### 2.) Hunting pressure

The labrador duck was considered to be a trash duck which tasted of shellfish and was not considered food for the table except as "poor folks fowl". It was not market hunted because of its poor taste, but in general hunting pressure put stress on an already limited population.

### 3.) Egging

Egg collection for food was another potential cause of decline. Eggs for sustenance were very common in coastal communities and had a high nutritional reward for a rather limited effort of energy.

### 4.) Decline of food supply

As coastal communities increased and developed higher human populations with increased densities, pollution resulted. This pollution impacted shellfish beds which were increasingly sensitive to its presence. One naturalist, Outram Bangs, argued increased sewage effluent loading in coastal areas led to shellfish decline. Also increased competition for these shellfish resources by humans increased further food challenges for the bird. Even the Little Ice Age has been considered a potential cause to the diminishment of shellfish populations. (Cokinos) Inability to adapt to different food sources certainly seems a potentially very stressful factor and in general has been cited as a significant cause of decline in bird populations. A modern example from the 1930s is the loss of eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) and the decline in population of the brant goose.

It seems that a synergism of these factors was the cause of the extirpation of the labrador duck. These factors are speculative at best but seem to be plausible historic considerations.

### Conclusion

I will never see, hear, or taste a labrador duck. I regret and to an extent mourn that reality. Maybe with age, I have become soft and sentimental to both mine and other lifeforms' eventual



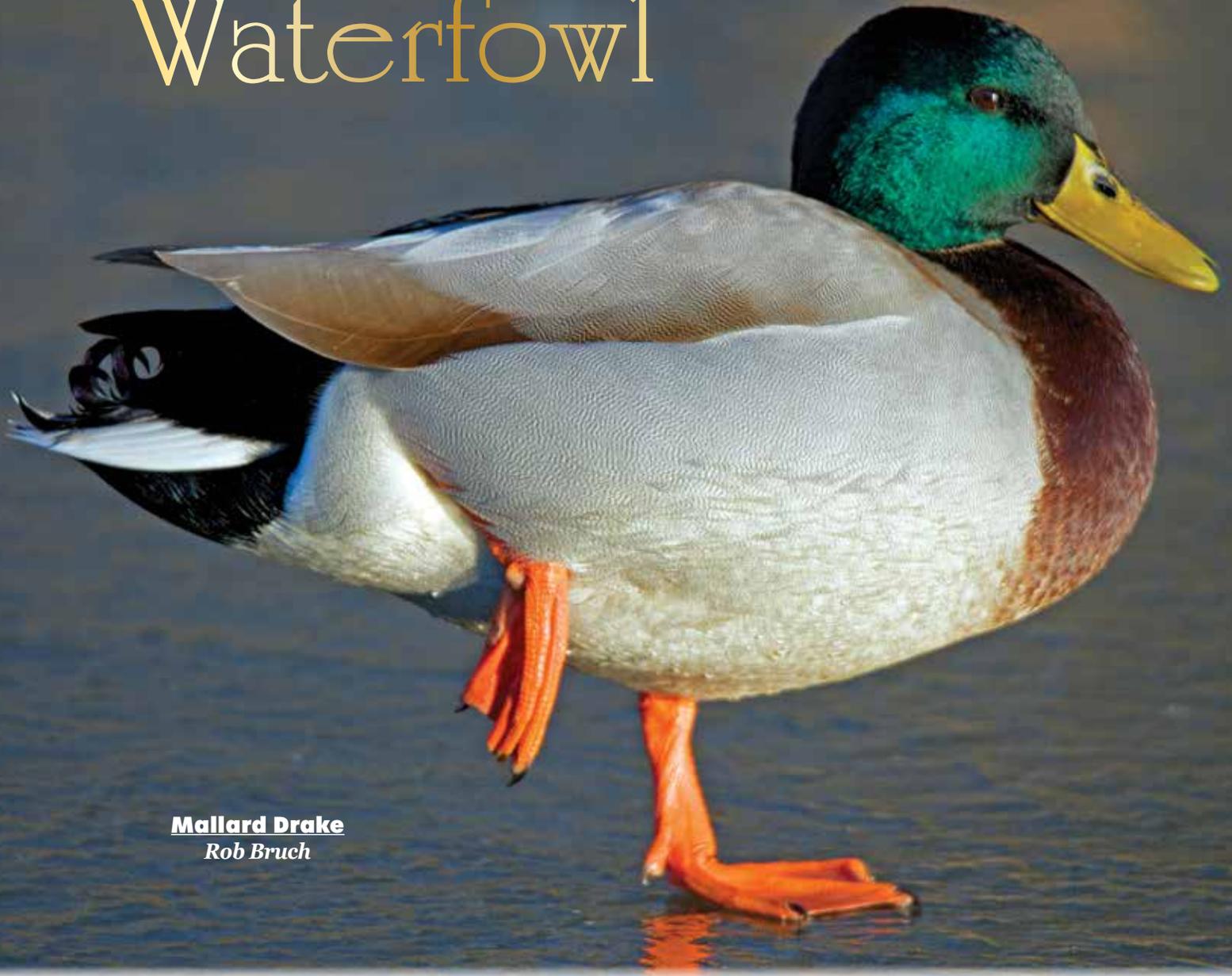
*Labrador Duck Statue*

mortalities and to our potential long-term successes. I would love to have had an opportunity to discuss all of these thoughts with the young Long Island hunter and understand his thoughts about his actions. The labrador duck's disappearance is but one happening in the overall experience of living things. It is an inevitable outcome for all of life.

"It may be fruitless to mourn for a bird that has been gone longer than the memory of any living human, but it would be folly to ignore this lesson of history. Uncounted millions of years of evolution failed to prepare the Labrador duck for survival in a world dominated by people with the ability to kill from great distances, to pollute the seas, and to ravage the wilderness. It is now beyond the lifetime of any human since the Labrador ducks made their last ill-fated flights from their breeding grounds along the North Atlantic coast to the vicinity of Long Island; in that period our concern has gradually changed from the problem of how birds can survive modern humanity to the question of whether humankind can survive modern humans. The twenty-first century will no doubt provide that answer." - Paul Johnsgard, *Waterfowl biologist*

**Note:** I would recommend a very interesting reading about the labrador duck. Dr. Glen Chilton's *The Curse of the Labrador Duck: The Obsessive Quest to the Edge of Extinction* published in 2009. It is a travelogue and search for the 56 known remains and mounts of the labrador duck known to still exist in the world. It is a fun read!

# Winter Waterfowl



**Mallard Drake**  
*Rob Bruch*

## **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](mailto:wildlifephotography@decoymuseum.com).  
Only high resolution photos will be accepted. (i.e. at least 2,500 pixels wide and 300dpi)**

**Great Blue Heron**

*Rob Bruch*



**Snow Geese**

*Ralph Hockman*



**Juvenile Red Tailed Hawk**

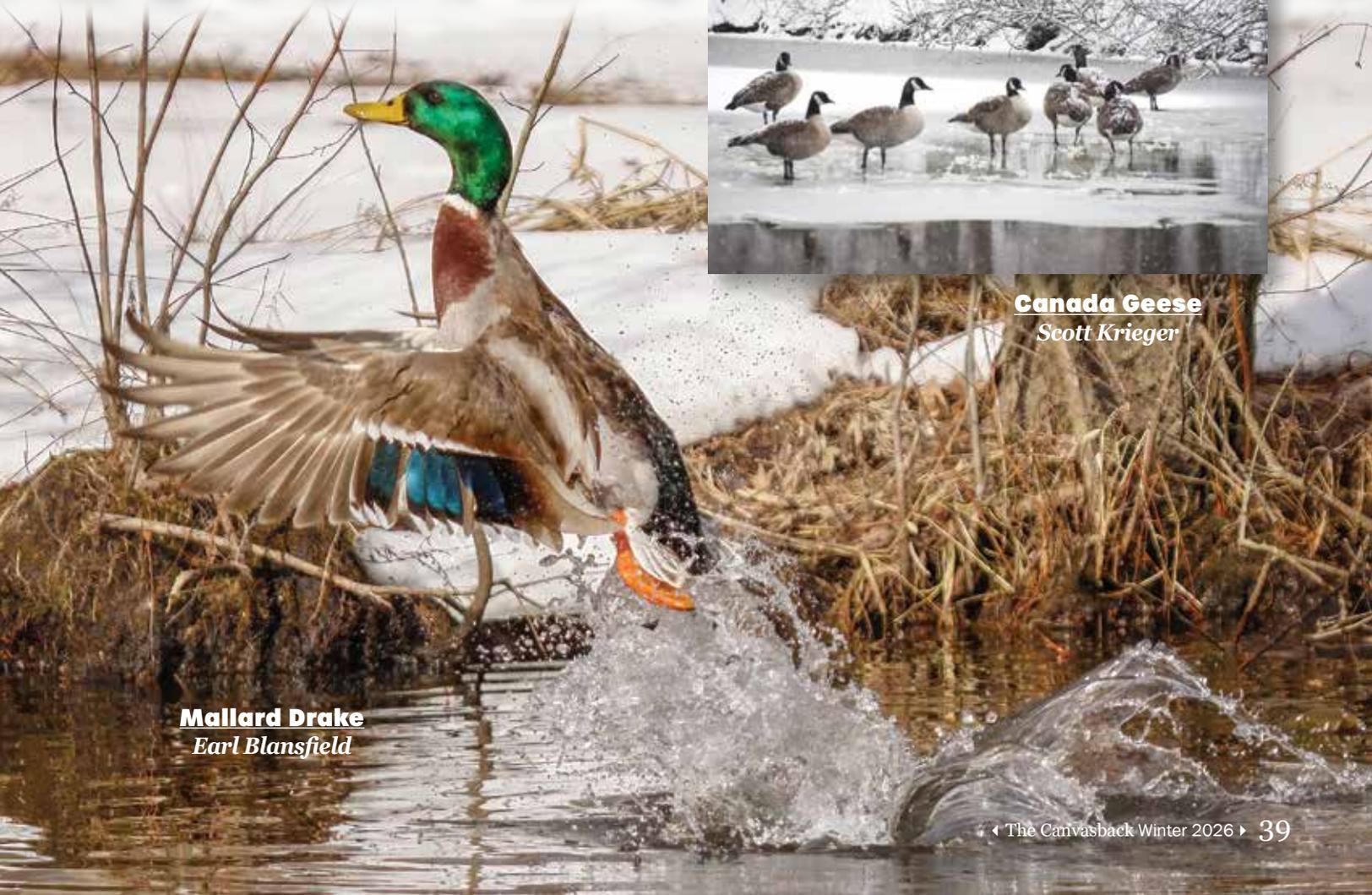
*Ralph Hockman*



**Snow Goose**  
*Earl Blansfield*



**Canada Geese**  
*Scott Krieger*



**Mallard Drake**  
*Earl Blansfield*

**American Widgeon Drake**  
*Ralph Hockman*



**Snow Geese**  
*Ralph Hockman*



**Northern Shoveler**  
*Earl Blansfield*

**Snow Goose**  
*Ralph Hockman*



**Common Merganser**  
*Rob Bruch*



**Snow Geese**  
*Ralph Hockman*



**Ring-Neck Drakes**  
*Rob Bruch*

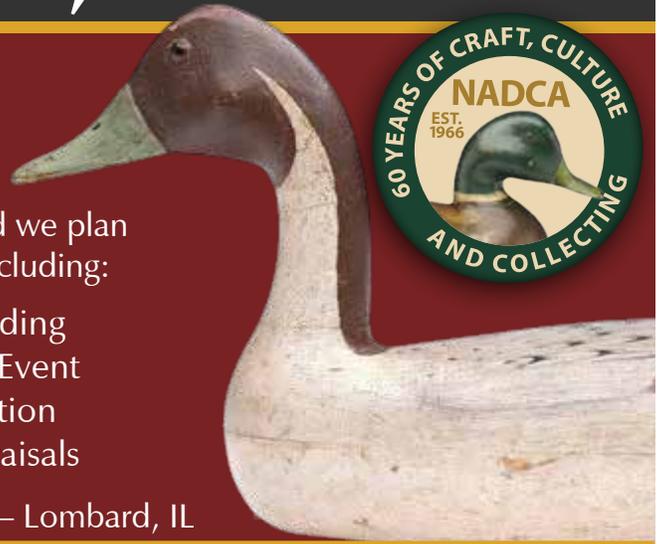
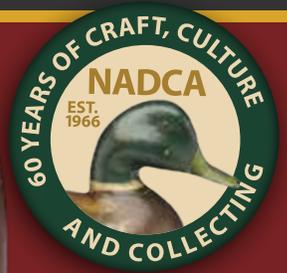
# North American Vintage Decoy & Sporting Collectibles Show

## April 21-25, 2026

### 2026 MARKS THE *60th Anniversary*

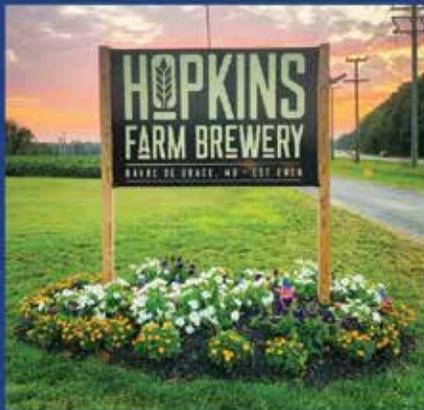
of the largest sporting collectibles show of its kind and we plan a very special celebration for this milestone event including:

- Special Anniversary Displays
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- 60-Year Surprises
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- Ballroom Event
- G&D Auction
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Sponsored by the North American Decoy Collectors Assn.  
For information on daily events, booking rooms, and reserving selling tables go to  
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We are a family owned and operated farm brewery off of 155 in Havre de Grace, MD. Our beers are hand-crafted using local ingredients grown right here on the farm.

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# Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club



## 5th Annual Jim Pierce Sportsman & Decoy Show

**Saturday, February 21, 2026  
8 am - 3 pm**

Minker Banquet Hall  
920 Principio Furnace Road • Perryville MD 21903

### Antique & Contemporary Decoys

Hunting & Fishing Items  
Oyster Cans & Shell Boxes  
Sporting Art & Books  
Rods, Reels & Powder Tins  
Guns, Ammunition & Knives

**BUY • SELL • TRADE**



For Information & Exhibit Space Contact  
**Gary Armour**  
Email: [garmour@singerly.com](mailto:garmour@singerly.com)

**667-365-0268**

All proceeds benefit the  
Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club

## UPCOMING DECOY SHOW INFORMATION

**January 31, 2026**

**Susquehanna Flats Vintage Hunting  
& Fishing Collectibles Show**

Level Fire Volunteer Company, Havre de Grace, MD  
Info: Chuck Usilton (443) 252-0685

**TBD**

**The Eastern Shore of Virginia Decoy Show**

Cape Charles, VA  
Info: Andy Dunton (757) 999-0469

**February 21, 2026**

**Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club Annual Decoy Show  
Honoring Jim Pierce**

Minker Banquet Hall, Perryville, MD  
Info: Gary Armour (667) 365-0268

**March 7, 2026**

**54th Annual Antique Decoy & Sporting Collectibles Show**

IBEW Union Hall, Hauppauge, NY  
Info: Tim Sieger (516) 384-0728 or Dick Richardson  
(631) 475-4199

**March 28, 2026**

**New Jersey Decoy Collectors Association  
Annual Decoy Show**

Stockton University, Galloway Township, NJ  
Info: Clarence Fennimore (609) 405-4376  
or John Shores (732) 691-3278

**April 9 –11, 2026**

**East Coast Decoy Club Buy – Sell – Swap Event**

St. Michaels Inn, St. Michaels, MD  
Info: Kevin Peel (410) 937-2218

**May 2 & 3, 2026**

**43rd Annual Decoy  
& Wildlife Art Festival**

STAR Centre, Havre de Grace, MD  
Info: Mike Tarquini  
(410) 459-8487  
[www.decoymuseum.com](http://www.decoymuseum.com)

**June 7, 2026**

**Annapolis Decoy Show  
(sponsored by PDCA)**

Annapolis Elks Lodge, Edgewater, MD  
Info: Chad Tragakis (703) 593-3024





## 54th Annual Antique Decoy & Sporting Collectibles Show

**SATURDAY, MARCH 7, 2026**  
9 AM - 4 PM  
IBEW UNION HALL  
#370 Vanderbilt/Motor Parkway  
Hauppauge, New York

• **FREE DECOY APPRAISALS** •  
ADMISSION: \$10

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L.I.E to Exit 55, to Motor Pkwy West to 370 IBEW Union Hall

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EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL

## SUSQUEHANNA



## Vintage Hunting & Fishing COLLECTIBLES SHOW

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 31, 2026**

8 AM - 3 PM

**Level Volunteer Fire Hall**

3633 Level Village Road • Havre de Grace, Maryland

ADMISSION \$6

### FEATURING

Decoys • Ephemera • Fishing Lures  
Guns • Ammunition  
Rods & Reels • Shot Shell Boxes  
Sporting Art • Oyster Cans  
Gunpowder Tins  
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Food & Drinks Available  
Approximately 100 Tables

Proceeds to Benefit  
Level Fire Co. &  
Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

For more information contact  
Pat Vincenti: 410-937-8193  
Chuck Usilton: 443-252-0685

**NEW JERSEY DECOY  
COLLECTORS ASSOCIATION  
32nd Annual  
Decoy, Art & Hunting  
Collectibles Show and Sale**



**Saturday, March 28, 2026**

9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.- Rain or Shine

**LOCATION:** Stockton University - Campus Center  
101 Vera King Farris Drive  
Galloway, NJ 08205

**ADMISSION:** Adult - \$5.00  
Children 12 & under FREE

- ▶ **FEATURED CARVER:**  
Terrence "Terry" McNulty
- ▶ **ARTIFACT DISPLAY BY:** Bob Seabrook
- ▶ **FOOD & DRINK** available in the  
Campus Center
- ▶ **FREE DECOY APPRAISALS**

**SHOW CONTACTS**

Jaim Lloyd • Club President  
609-703-6143

Clarence Fennimore • Co-Chairman  
609-405-4376

John Shores • Co-Chairman  
732-691-3278

Al Barker • Art Chairman  
609-298-7459

OLD BIRD CONTEST - Jim Thompson  
609-338-7574

**EAST COAST DECOY  
COLLECTORS**



**BUY • SELL • SWAP**

**THURSDAY - SATURDAY**

**APRIL 9-11, 2026**

**IN ROOMS - RAIN OR SHINE**

**ST. MICHAELS INN  
ST. MICHAELS, MARYLAND**

**410-745-3333  
(MENTION EVENT)**

**FRIDAY LATE AFTERNOON/EVENING  
MEETING + COOKOUT**

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