

words on waterfowl

Newsletter of the Sylvan Heights Waterfowl Society and the International Wild Waterfowl Association



flight school

Science, art, and life skills at Sylvan Heights Bird Park

HARLEQUIN DUCKS
2019 IWWA Conference

SPRING/SUMMER 2019 • Issue No. 13

Scarlet Ibis

Photo by Katie G. Lubbock



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ON THE COVER

A Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) addresses a plume in the park's North America aviary.

CONNECT ONLINE!



Get park updates, event information and more. Connect with Sylvan Heights and the IWWA on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or YouTube.

the director's report

Mike Lubbock
Executive Director
Sylvan Heights Bird Park

Since our last Words on Waterfowl, we have been busy with a number of projects, both planned and unplanned. In the “unplanned” category, an unexpected heavy snowfall last November caused a lot of damage to aviary cables, overhead netting and managed to break one of our support poles. Fortunately, birds have great instincts in situations like this, and all were unharmed. It took at least a week before we could reopen to the public and another three weeks to repair the damage. The Breeding Center also suffered considerable damage and our former Assistant Curator, Nathan Bawtinheimer, flew down from Alaska, where he works for the Forestry Service, to help repair fencing and remove fallen or dangerous tree limbs. We are extremely grateful to him for this much-needed assistance.

“Toad Hall” Pavilion is already proving to be a great asset to the Park. The deck was completed and we have since then hosted numerous successful events. Also, it has been marvelous to have room for more school children and wonderful for Ashley Hamlet (Education Coordinator) to teach under cover but outdoors.

The Delagrang house, donated to Sylvan Heights Bird Park last year, has also proved extremely beneficial for housing interns, staff members, and volunteers. We plan to convert one room into an off-site office to help accommodate our growing staff.

One of our Photo Pass members, Kris Webb, had her photograph of the endangered Baer's Pochard that she took at Sylvan Heights selected by Sikhote-Alin Reserve located in the Ussuriland, Far East of Russia, to use in their guide, as the birds are elusive and hard to photograph in the wild. Also in the news is Jessica Meir, who spent two summers at Sylvan Heights as a research scientist studying Bar-headed Geese. She is now an astronaut at NASA and has been selected to go to the International Space Station in September. We send her our heartfelt congratulations for her achievements.

As always, we could not have the successes we have without the work of our staff, our volunteers, Friends of Sylvan Heights, members, and the Board of Directors. Thank you for all you do.

the CURATOR'S REPORT



The park's Red-legged Seriemas will enjoy a new and improved aviary this year.

Photos by Katie G. Lubbock

by **DUSTIN FOOTE** | General Curator, Sylvan Heights Bird Park

A surprise ice storm kicked off a hectic start of the year for Sylvan Heights. While many were stuck home on snow days, our staff were busy replacing cables, telephone posts, and netting throughout the park, all while caring for the birds. Times like that always remind me how much we rely on the support of interns, volunteers, and friends. While the storm slowed progress, we have finally completed several of our winter projects and are now in the midst of breeding season. The park staff are already busy hand rearing flamingos, shorebirds, and more!

We have added several new species this winter, including Azure-winged Magpies, Superb Starlings, and Plum-headed Parakeets. As always, we have lots of exciting things on the horizon. This spring we are starting our Rhinoceros Hornbill Aviary, as well as creating a larger enclosure for our pair of Seriemas. The Seriema aviary will be located next to our walkthrough South America aviary and will allow us to include some South American waterfowl we

currently only work with behind the scenes at the Breeding Center.

All of us at Sylvan Heights Bird Park love what we do. However, there are plenty of days where that love is tested, especially on cold mornings, working holidays, and everything else that comes with taking care of a living collection. It can be easy for us to forget the passion that drove us to this career, but luckily it only takes a moment to remember. Often that moment comes from you, our members, families, and friends. Watching you enjoy the park and the birds we spend our days caring for is a constant reminder that we are lucky to be doing work we care deeply for. This past week, as staff were enjoying lunch outdoors, a young family walked by with a little girl. As they passed, the little girl screamed "this is the best day ever!". It was a perfect moment to remind us how lucky we are to be doing what we love while being able to share that passion with you. From all of us, thank you for your continued support.





Park Tickets Now Available Online

Visitors to Sylvan Heights Bird Park now have a convenient way to pre-purchase admission before their arrival at the park. Online tickets are now available on the park's website at shwpark.com. Those purchasing admission online can also opt to pre-purchase seed sticks and bird food for the Landing Zone, as well as activity booklets like the Endangered Species Passport and the Wetland Safari.

Tickets purchased online are valid for any day within one year of purchase, so there's no need to specify the date of your visit. Check-in with pre-purchased tickets is as simple as presenting your confirmation e-mail at the Visitor Center ticket window. Sylvan Heights Bird Park also plans to offer online gift tickets in the near future, as well as online booking for guided tours, school field trips, and education programs.

ECU BioBlitz at White's Millpond

In May, East Carolina University's Department of Biology conducted the first ever BioBlitz at White's Mill Pond, a biologically rich wetland located near Sylvan Heights Bird Park.

A BioBlitz is a survey that aims to identify as many living species as possible at a designated location. More than 20 students and faculty from ECU, as well as 12 troupe members from the Ayden-Grifton Scouts spent the day recording every species they encountered. In total, the group made more than 200 observations, which were logged in iNaturalist, a citizen-based biodiversity database.

Sylvan Heights Bird Park is assisting in the management and conservation of wildlife at White's Mill Pond, and the data collected during the BioBlitz will be of immense value.

Wings of the Tropics Updates Completed

Thanks to the generous support of our members and donors, as well as hard work by the Sylvan Heights aviculture team, the Wings of the Tropics aviary is now a comfortable home for tropical birds and plants year-round.

The entire aviary has been fitted with clear polycarbonate greenhouse panels, which provide insulation and protection from the elements while allowing natural light to shine through. A newly-installed ventilation system provides a constant flow of fresh air through the aviary during warmer weather. Plants that were lost as a result of harsh winter weather have been replaced, creating an appealing habitat and natural backdrop for the birds. Photographers may especially enjoy the soft, filtered light that now permeates the aviary on bright days.

We hope you enjoy these improvements during your next visit to the park!

Sylvan Heights on Wild Kratts

Last May, cast and crew from the PBS show "Wild Kratts" visited Sylvan Heights Bird Park to film an episode all about flamingos. The episode, titled "Mystery of the Flamingo's Pink", made its debut on PBS stations across the U.S. on April 15, 2019, and featured prominent recognition of Sylvan Heights Bird Park.

The show begins with an introduction of the park by Chris and Martin Kratt, followed by a variety of fascinating flamingo facts supported by footage of the Caribbean flamingos in the Landing Zone and Multinational Aviary.

An animated segment explains more about how flamingos get their pink color, with a fun story to keep kids engaged. The episode concludes with the Kratt brothers interacting with the flamingos in the Landing Zone, and meeting last year's Lesser Flamingo chicks.

Check your local PBS listings or go online to see the full episode!

Duck Landing Café Coming Soon

A lunch cafe is opening within a few weeks at Sylvan Heights Bird Park, directly next to the Wishing Well.

Duck Landing Cafe owners, Tommy and Ginger, have been working hard for several months and they are in the process of obtaining the final permits.

In the past few months, an empty spot at the park has been transformed into a beautiful addition, complete with a log cabin style cafe that is surrounded by flowers.

The menu is simple, with items like traditional and gourmet style hotdogs, chicken salad sandwiches, corn dogs, soft jumbo pretzels, ice cream and more.

A grand opening will soon be announced on the Duck Landing Facebook page!

Stay tuned...

N.C. Aquarium Reciprocal Changes

As a result of a policy change by the North Carolina Aquariums, Sylvan Heights members will now receive 50% off admission at the aquariums instead of free admission. Since this is a reciprocal admission agreement, North Carolina Aquarium members also now receive 50% off admission at Sylvan Heights Bird Park instead of free admission. We apologize for any inconvenience, but please note that Sylvan Heights Bird Park had no control over the change in policy by the N.C. Aquariums.

Sylvan Heights members will still receive free admission to the North Carolina Zoo, the WNC Nature Center in Asheville, and two free admissions to the Carolina Raptor Center in Charlotte.

We greatly appreciate your support as members of Sylvan Heights Bird Park, and we hope you find your membership enjoyable and valuable. Your Sylvan Heights membership also helps to support our conservation and education programs.



flight school

The aviaries and wetlands at Sylvan Heights Bird Park present real-world education opportunities for students from around the corner and around the world. Against a backdrop of birds, they learn about science, language, and the arts - plus a few life skills.

Chilean Flamingo
Photo by Katie G. Lubbock

that's education!

A student from Venezuela learns about ornithology, English, and much more at Sylvan Heights.

by JESUS DE ORIÓN

Usually, you believe you can decide what to do, where to go, and how to shape your life according to your interests. However, sometimes life itself is responsible for tracing very well defined routes, and in some cases it chooses the best teachers that can exist to prepare you on that route already drawn.

It was January 1999. I was a teenager who had felt a great interest in nature since I was very young, especially in birds. I was working as a volunteer for the Condor Reintroduction Program in the Venezuelan Andes. This conservation program was carried out by a foundation with the support of international organizations. At that time, a group of researchers from Akron Zoo and Sylvan Heights Waterfowl began an expedition in the Venezuelan Andes to look for one of the most enigmatic species of waterfowl, the Torrent Duck. At that time very little was known about this species in Venezuela, or even in other Andean regions where this species was more abundant. The purpose of this expedition was to learn about its status of conservation and to create programs to help the species.

The expeditions had already begun and a Venezuelan team was assisting Gary Riggs and Doug Piekarz from Akron Zoo, and Mike Lubbock from Sylvan Heights Waterfowl.

This is when one of those things in life takes control of the situation. One of the members of the Venezuelan team that would go out as Mike's guide, called me the night before to tell me that he felt very sick, and asked me to take his place the next day. I answered that I would do it, but that I didn't speak English! He told me, no problem! Use your body language and many signs; you will find a way to make yourself understood.

And so began the expedition that changed my life forever!

Scarlet Ibis
Photo by Katie G. Lubbock



flight school

Without being able to communicate or understand, Gary Riggs, Mike Lubbock and I started the last field trip of that expedition. We visited several stretches of fast flowing mountain rivers, and we got what we wanted, several pairs of Torrent Ducks. Along the riverbank, we found several bird nests, as well as a bunch of feathers from a dove that maybe a raptor had eaten. We had an excellent day. I didn't know with certainty what they told me, because I did not understand anything, but I could see in their faces the happiness and satisfaction of having fulfilled a task.

That day, by chance, it was Mike Lubbock's birthday and the entire team that worked on that expedition wanted to honor him with a birthday party. I was there, but did not know that at the end of that party I would receive the best gift that anyone had ever given to me in my life.

So that night, Mike stood up in front of everyone, thanked that gesture of cordiality for his birthday and asked someone who spoke English to please translate what he was about to say. Mike saw in me the potential that he considered important to develop, train and educate in the best of possible environments, and he offered me the opportunity to learn everything related to breeding and husbandry of birds in captivity for a period of 6 weeks at Sylvan Heights Waterfowl.

A few weeks later I embarked on a flight that would take me to one of the most incredible places I've seen. The reception was epic! I will never forget my first encounter with the American culture, a rodeo! With a lot of patience and attention, little by little I understood some words, and after three months I



already understood a lot of what they told me. By the way, my experience was so incredible from the very first moment that I asked to stay longer, and on my first visit I spent a whole year, then I returned for periods of 6 months during the next 6 years in a row. At Sylvan Heights Waterfowl I not only learned everything related to birds in captivity and in the wild, I visited many interesting places within the United States, I learned how to design and build bird enclosures, how to write and develop environmental education programs, how to work with wood, how to clean, how to drive, how to speak and write English; I learned about different cultures, trends and traditions; I learned biology, ecology, geography, history; I learned how to cook, to eat, to dance, to relate with people of all ages, strata and customs. I learned the value of family, friendship, punctuality and an immense respect for birds, their ecosystems and nature in general. That's education!!

Today, I can say that thanks to Mike and Ali Lubbock, and the entire Sylvan Heights team that directly created and shaped my destiny, I am who I am. Today, I am perhaps one of the very few experts on Torrent Ducks in the world. I have designed and carried out environmental education programs focused on the protection of water basin and the conservation of Torrent Ducks; I am a scientific illustrator and I use this talent to illustrate my own articles on bird ecology and conservation, as well as those of other researchers. I am a nature interpretation guide and birdwatcher guide. I love what I do, I love who I am and I feel like the luckiest child in the world for having had the opportunity to be part of a great family, the Sylvan Heights Waterfowl family.

flight school

THE ART OF PYSANKY

by AMANDA DOUGHERTY

A Pysanka is a Ukrainian egg that is decorated using beeswax and specialized dye. The earliest remnants of Pysanky date back to the Piast Era (930-992) from Ostrówiek, Poland. The eggs were originally created to celebrate spring but around 900 AD the eggs' symbols took on meanings related to Christianity. The patterns, color combinations, and dyes were handed down from mother to daughter each year during egg decoration the week before Lent. The eggs were given to family members and friends, traditionally shown in a bowl as a colorful display along with pasta and meats, and were blessed at the end of the Orthodox Easter Service.

Traditionally, the yolks from the decorated eggs dried up over time, but now the yolks are typically blown out (yolks removed) before the decorating process begins. The eggs are decorated using a kistka, which is a stylus made of a small funnel which holds wax and is attached to a handle. The kistka is used to draw symbols and patterns on the eggs, which all have meanings. Some of the symbol meanings can vary between different families and regions while some are more constant. Common symbols include the triangle which stands for the Holy Trinity and the fish symbol for Christians. The dyes also have specific meanings. For example, yellow symbolizes the harvest and green means new life and the renewal of spring.

I was taught Pysanky by Tami Hritzay, an artist in Pennsylvania who learned from a family friend at age 15. I have recently begun teaching workshops at Sylvan Heights Bird Park for people to come learn about Pysanky and make some of their own eggs. Keep an eye on www.shwpark.com for updates about future classes!



A student puts the finishing touches on a pysanka at Sylvan Heights



Sylvan Heights Bird Park recently began offering classes in the ancient Ukrainian art of pysanky.

INTERN SPOTLIGHT

TOM HOLMES-SMITH | WATLINGTON, U.K.

I came to Sylvan Heights as a recently graduated zoology student with no previous waterfowl experience or no real hands on animal experience whatsoever. I just about knew that there was a difference between a swan, a goose and a duck... When I crossed the pond to begin this internship I hadn't a sliver of an idea of what was in store but as soon as I landed I was welcomed into the Sylvan Heights family with open arms. Upon the first day, driving through Scotland Neck in the morning excited for what was in store but unsure how such a renowned bird park fit into this quaint Southern American town. Coming into the breeding centre for the first time was incredible to see how this waterfowl haven had been sculpted into the North Carolinian forest. It became clear that the succeeding three months were going to be full activity and that the aforementioned key 'swan-goose-duck' knowledge might come in to play.

Luckily over the duration of my time, there were an incredible staff of extremely knowledgeable individuals who were able to add to my knowledge and provide irreplaceable hands on experience. Witnessing and partaking in the day to day care of all the feathered inhabitants was an absolute pleasure. This paired with the learning

the life history of such species in their respective wild origins and how this knowledge is so valuable for the mirroring of such species-specific conditions in these captive premises for healthy and thriving birds. As recent student of zoology it was also great to witness many theories and phenomena learned through lecture material occurring so vividly in the species at Sylvan. I believe this is something that is so important with learning that is not covered enough and was one of the many things that really made Sylvan Heights a special place to be allowed to work in!

Being one of many, many, many, many, many interns to have the opportunity to work at Sylvan Heights, it was an absolute pleasure and joy to be welcomed into such an established and well-oiled program. This became evident when attending the IWWA Conference 2018 in October when meeting and enjoying talks given by such leading lights in the bird care and conservation and hearing quite how many of them had been through the same internship program. It really is a special place and I'm very thankful to Ali, Mike and Nick and all others at the park and breeding centre for making it such a wonderful time.

Hawaiian Goose

Photo by Katie G. Lubbock



soaring into science

Article and photo by **SUSAN P. CHRISTMAN**
Environmental Educator & SIS Program Coordinator

What do hiking through Sylvan Heights Bird Park wetlands, observing birds, dip netting for macro-invertebrates and testing water quality have in common? All of these activities were part of this year's Soaring into Science Program. The three-year project, now in its final year and generously sponsored through the Burroughs Wellcome Fund, focused on the development of a stronger understanding of the environment, hands-on experiences and the immersion and reinforcement of environmental science beyond the walls of the classroom.

This year Sylvan Heights collaborated with a new group of student learners from Enfield Middle STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics) Academy in Halifax County Schools. The program format was also changed to a series of Fall and Spring Saturday Academies with student scholars meeting over seven sessions from 9 am to 3 pm. Middle school scholars from grades 6-8 conducted studies involving the Scientific Method of Discovery, testing hypotheses and measuring outcomes. Using binoculars, spotting scopes and eye loupes, scholars were able to identify and classify birds, including migratory and wild birds, from the Wetland Bridge, Nature Walkway and Treehouse. They learned to bird by ear for specific calls and sounds for those elusive birds in the tree line! Hands-on opportunities with park birds gave them continuous learning about bird biology from beaks to feather patterns, and they applied those characteristics throughout each session.

Experiential field learning allowed scholars to plot areas of terrestrial and aquatic habitats, use dichotomous keys to identify objects and organisms, make connections to water quality using pH, temperature, dissolved oxygen, plants and soil and then analyze, graph and discuss their findings. Scholars used both pH meters and pH test strips, as well as iPads, water quality kits and field guides. They even had the opportunity to compare bio-indicators from permanent water sources in the wetlands with those found in the temporary, or ephemeral, pools, thanks to the high rain levels this year.

Scholars were able to practice and develop their new understanding and gain confidence as they used these discovery methods and critical thinking skills. During the final session, they presented projects during a learning expo. Families were invited to a lunch-and-learn where each participating scholar received an Environmental Science certificate, a pin and the opportunity to kayak with Sylvan Heights staff in May. This kayaking activity on White's Mill Pond, containing old growth stands of cypress and tupelo gum trees, will support Soaring into Science scholars experience in their analysis and application of learning gained throughout the program. They are truly excited and ready for an amazing trip!

It has been a great year for Enfield Middle Scholars and Soaring into Science. The program has given each participant new tools for learning which they can continue to use and develop for future goals. They have learned to embrace the natural world, and looking ahead I envision a bright future for self-learning and sharing of knowledge with others.

from the **iwwa** president

Dear IWWA and Sylvan Heights members,

The signs of spring are upon us. Here in Pennsylvania the Snow Geese and Tundra Swans are departing for their summer residences in the Arctic. In their place Wood Ducks and Hooded Mergansers are moving into their favored nesting ponds which only weeks ago were locked away under the ice. Occasionally these seasonal characters pass each other like workers passing at shift change, but the advancing spring makes both groups anxious to move towards their final summer homes.

While spring is exciting for the traveling of birds, this fall will be exciting for the traveling of the IWWA. We are headed to Italy, Austria and Germany for our annual convention. The conference begins on September 30th in Milan, Italy and includes visits to Italian castles, travels through the Alps and of course, fantastic birds in world-class aviaries before ending on October 8th in Vienna, Austria. Thank you to IWWA board member Peter Kooy who crafted the exciting conference agenda. For those who have attended a European conference arranged by Peter, you know this is a trip not to be missed! More details are available on the IWWA's website (www.wildwaterfowl.org).

Fall is a busy time of year for IWWA for more than just our conference. It is also grant application review time. For those interested in applying for one of IWWA's waterfowl conservation grants, now is the time to download a copy of our application form. 2018 saw a fantastic, and competitive, number of grant applicants and I am hopeful that IWWA can help fund a new group of deserving awardees this year.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to Gus Ben David, longtime IWWA board member, conservationist and friend who decided to step down from board service. Gus' dedication to waterfowl and wetlands conservation is rivaled only by his commitment to mentoring the next generation of naturalists. Thank you Gus for your many years of service to our organization and the birds we love!

Ian Gereq

President, International Wild Waterfowl Association

African White-backed Duck
(*Thalassornis leuconotus*)

K.G. Lubbock



INTERNATIONAL
WILD WATERFOWL
ASSOCIATION

2019 CONFERENCE

Italy | Austria | Germany

SEPTEMBER 30th - OCTOBER 9th, 2019

Join the International Wild Waterfowl Association on an incredible tour of world-class aviaries, Italian castles, a journey through the Alps, and the exciting annual waterfowl conservation fundraiser and benefit auction.

Registration now open at wildwaterfowl.org



Salzburg, Austria

photo by Jiuguang Wang/Wikimedia Commons



IWWA Grant Update:
waterfowl
OF THE WORLD

article and photos by
GARY KRAMER

I would like to provide a progress report to the individuals who have generously donated funds in support of the Waterfowl of the World book project. The project has been endorsed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Wildfowl & Wetland Trust, International Wild Waterfowl Association and California Waterfowl Association.

Since the project began in November 2017, I have been traveling extensively to obtain photos. With 166 species of ducks, geese and swans worldwide, gathering the necessary images is a monumental task. To date, my excursions have included locations in England, Germany, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Azerbaijan, India, Chile, Peru, Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, Madagascar, New Zealand, the Philippines and the Cayman Islands, plus several trips within the United States and Canada. So as you can see, I've been on the move almost nonstop and have I have taken literally tens of thousands of images.

The images will be used in Waterfowl of the World - a high quality coffee table book that will measure 11.75 X 10 inches, with 520 pages, more than 675 color photos and 166 range maps. The book will be available for distribution in 2021.

Among my travel highlights was a 2-week trip to Madagascar to photograph the rarest duck, and possibly the rarest bird in the world - the Madagascar Pochard. This species, which was thought to be extinct for 15 years, was rediscovered in 2006 on a remote lake in the highlands of Madagascar. When the birds were rediscovered, they were the only 23 individuals of the species known to exist. Today, on the same lake, there are 68 birds. Reaching this remote location required three days of airplane travel then three days more by vehicle. The last 60 kilometers (36 miles) was a 4-hour, 4-wheel drive adventure. Once I finally arrived at the lake, I was able to successfully photograph the Madagascar Pochard and came home with hundreds of images.

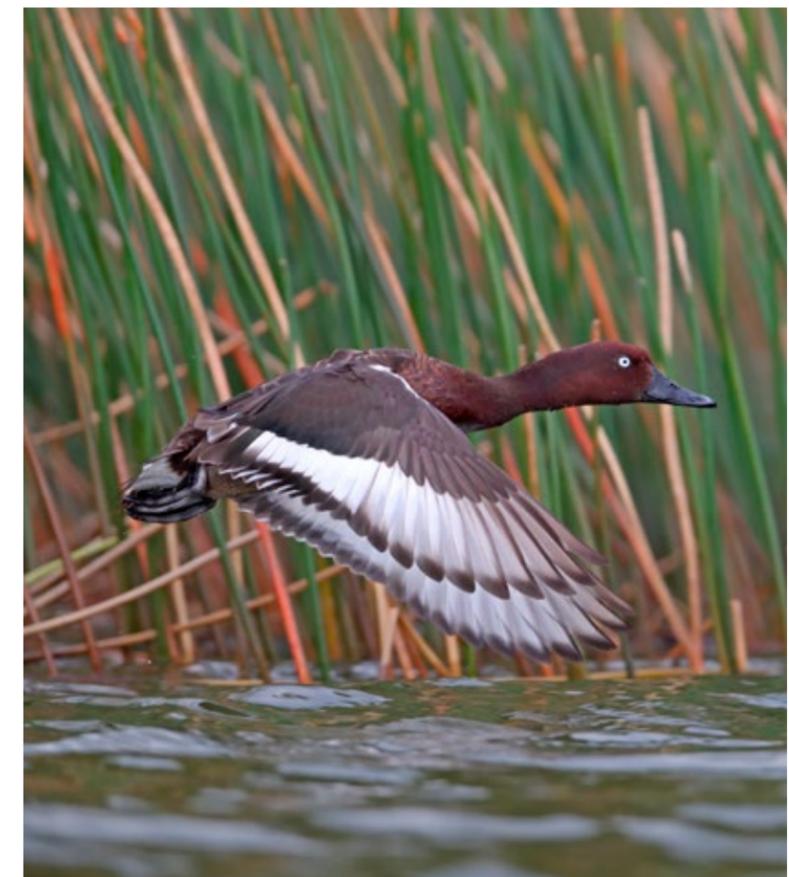
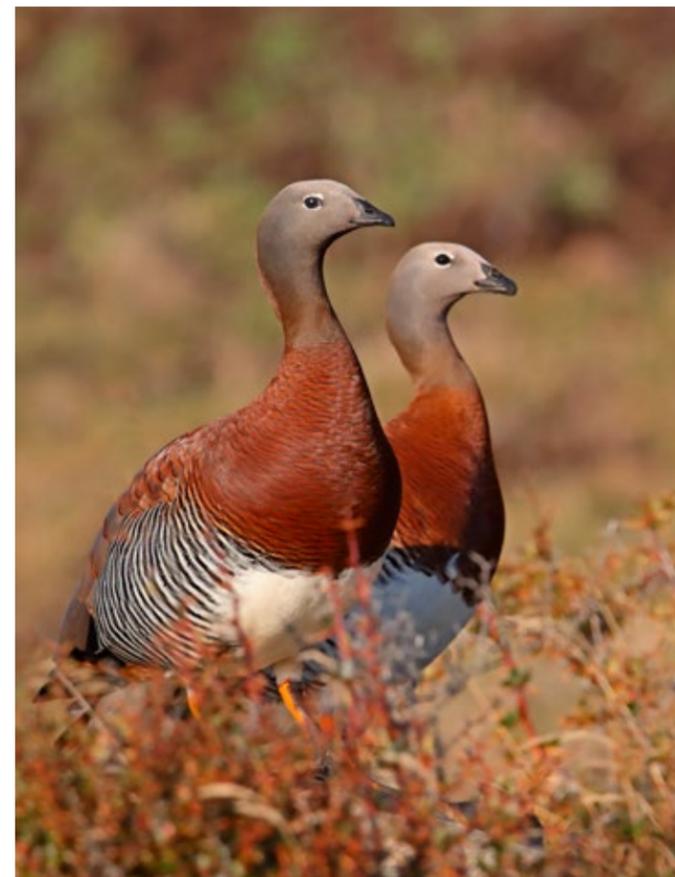
While still a long way from California but much easier to reach, were the wetlands and coastline of southern Chile. Even though it took many hours of airline travel to reach Punta Arenas, Chile, near the tip of South America, the photographic rewards were exceptional. During my eight-day stay, I photographed 10 species of ducks, geese and swans, several of which were my first images of that species. Among them were the endangered Ruddy-headed Goose, the flightless Magellanic Steamer Duck, the seldom seen Bronze-winged Duck, swift water Torrent Ducks, the more common Upland Goose and Black-necked Swan.

There have been several trips within the United States as well. One of the most productive was a road trip that began on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and ended up on the coast near Newport, Rhode Island. My emphasis was Atlantic Coast species or species that are difficult to photograph on the Pacific Coast. They included Atlantic Brant, Common Eider, Greater Snow Goose, American Black Duck and Canvasback.

My trips continue, and while there are only five of the 166 species that I do not have in my photographic collection, for some species I only have one or two images. Therefore, in total there are about 40 species that require additional images for the book, and I always strive to improve on what I already have. For the remainder of 2019, I have trips planned to Australia, Papua New Guinea, Argentina, Ethiopia, New Zealand and the Central African Republic.

In closing, I want you to know that I really appreciate your support in bringing this one of a kind book to fruition. Most importantly, it will raise awareness and further the conservation of waterfowl worldwide at the administrative, scientific, private and educational levels.

Stay tuned for more updates as our project moves forward!



A male Harlequin duck
(*Histrionicus histrionicus*)



by MORAG JONES

Photo by Katie G. Lubbock

Species spotlight:

HARLEQUIN DUCKS

Ducks are pretty perfect but some are more perfect than others! The Harlequin drake has such immaculate plumage you could be forgiven for thinking it cannot be real. Remarkably, they are ducks at home on fast-flowing streams and rocky coastlines with crashing surf. Weighing a pound or so, their unusual call is a squeak and so in some areas, the Harlequin is known as the “sea mouse”. The Harlequin name came from European brightly painted comedy actors, long before we had screens for entertainment.

Harlequin drakes do a cute courtship dance. They shake their tails and heads, whistling as they go. Short bursts of flight close

to the water surface helps to convince the duck that her drake is strong and fit. His bright and carefully sculpted plumage lets her know that he is powerful and can protect her in the mating season. It takes a few years for Harlequins to breed successfully, usually four or five. They have small clutches of half a dozen or so eggs in May and June.

Once the duck starts to sit, she is better off with the plain brown plumage of females. She needs to be constantly vigilant for predators and is best off being inconspicuous. The drakes do help in the building of the nest, but once she starts to incubate he will leave and prepare for molting. When the eggs hatch,

the ducklings stay close to mother and grow strong in the long northern days. Typically, they will migrate to the wintering grounds together.

Their unusual call is a squeak and so in some areas, the Harlequin is known as the “sea mouse”.

The oldest recorded Harlequin Duck was a male, and at least 20 years, 9 months old when he was identified by his band in the wild in British Columbia in 2014. He had been banded in Alberta in 1995. The Harlequin's breeding range is in the north; Alaska and Yukon, Greenland and Iceland. It is in winter-time that we might see them on Northern coasts like Maine and Washington. Some travel further afield to Japan, Korea and China.

In October the molts are complete and Harlequins will begin courtship once more. After all, this exquisitely painted velvet duck has a lot to show off.



Holly, an Australian Shepherd/Setter mix, is the newest member of staff at the Sylvan Heights Avian Breeding Center.

by NICK HILL
Curator of Birds
Sylvan Heights
Avian Breeding Center



Whio, or Blue Duck (*Hymenolaimus malacorhynchos*)



Nick Hill and Molly, conservation dog from 2003 - 2018.

duck dogs for conservation

Specially trained dogs are now helping to save some of the world's rarest species, and they are highly effective.

Wildlife conservation is a challenging battle that often requires creative solutions from dedicated people. In recent years, a different kind of conservation officer has appeared on the front lines. Specially trained dogs are now helping to save some of the world's rarest species, and they are highly effective.

Dogs are being employed for an increasing number of specialized services. It is now common to see dogs scanning luggage at airports, assisting police in drug detection, or helping with search and rescue operations. The same qualities that help dogs excel at these jobs are now being put to use in defense of endangered species. Dogs can detect nests, birds, or predators far more effectively than humans. They can even sniff out poaching activity, illegal wildlife artifacts, and invasive species in the field.

One of the biggest conservation dog success stories comes out of New Zealand. The Whio, or Blue Duck, is an endangered species that lives in remote areas along fast-flowing rivers. Whio are difficult to locate, and their nests are highly prone to predation by stoats and rats. For the past 40 years, the New Zealand Department of Conservation has employed pointers, Labradors, and herding dogs trained to locate Whio nests so the eggs and ducklings can be protected. Tai, a chocolate lab, has successfully sniffed out 64 Whio ducklings on eight rivers. Another famous Whio dog is Khan, whose training enables him to seek out birds in very rough terrain that humans can't access. So far, Khan has located over 300 Whio and about 30 roost sites.

At the Sylvan Heights Avian Breeding Center, we have our very own conservation dogs. Molly, an Australian Shepherd, did 14 ½ years of faithful service before she passed away last year. She was the breeding center's official security dog, alerting the staff if an unknown person turned up. She performed pest control duties, keeping the mouse population under control around the many tons of feed that Sylvan Heights needs to feed the birds each month. Molly also helped aviculturists find secluded nests hidden in tall vegetation in some of the center's larger aviaries. In one instance, we knew a rare Maccoa had a nest, but could not find where she had hidden it. I sent Molly in, and within a few minutes, she had located the nest. If the eggs had been left to hatch, the ducklings would have been vulnerable to predators.

Molly's herding dog instincts were also put to use to help the staff move goslings outside in the morning, and back into the safety of the duckery at night. On one occasion, Molly was able to help direct a pair of swans that had wandered out of their aviary back to their home pond. She is sadly missed, and became quite a celebrity with staff and interns over the years.

But now, we'd like to introduce Holly, the Avian Breeding Center's new "duck dog". She has big boots to fill, but has been doing exceptionally well during her first year in training.

TOAD HALL

— AT SYLVAN HEIGHTS BIRD PARK —

*Thank you, Sylvan Heights members,
for supporting this project!*



Sylvan Heights Bird Park has recently expanded its new event venue and outdoor classroom, “Toad Hall” Pavilion. Surrounded by the park’s aviaries and wetlands, the 4,400 square foot space now features a large outdoor deck, stone fireplace, and seating for more than 200 guests.

The building is designed to immerse students in nature by day, and by night it transforms into a unique and memorable event space for weddings, reunions and parties. The adjacent deck overlooks a woodland, which will soon be the site of new bird exhibits, while the nearby treehouse provides a birds’- eye view of the park’s natural wetland. During spells of cold or wet weather, clear panels can be lowered to protect the pavilion, making it ideal for events and school programs year-round. “Toad Hall has proved to be a tremendous asset to Sylvan Heights, not only for events, but also for education. We’ve been able to accommodate even more students for our education programs in a wonderful natural setting”, says Ali Lubbock, Assistant Director at Sylvan Heights Bird Park.

The pavilion is named in memory of Bill “Toad” Herring, one of Sylvan Heights’ co-founders who was instrumental in the park’s initial development, along with his wife, Hanna. “Sadly, Toad passed away before Toad Hall was complete, but we know he was so proud of what he had

helped Sylvan Heights achieve for his home town of Scotland Neck”, says Lubbock. Many organizations and individuals provided financial support for the completion of Toad Hall, including the Cannon Foundation, Golden LEAF Foundation, Southern Bank Foundation, Dr. Raj and Dana Parikh, Fred and Sue Morris, Don Bulluck, Sandra and Keith Rogers, and Hanna Herring.

Sylvan Heights Bird Park is now accepting reservations for weddings, reunions, parties, and other events at Toad Hall. Inquiries can be made by calling the park at (252) 826-3186, or by visiting the park’s website at www.shwpark.com/toadhall.



park events

view full event details and ticket info at www.shwpark.com



Summer Camps

July 10 - August 2, 2019

Mini camps will be held on Wednesday mornings from 9 a.m.-12 p.m. during the month of July. Each mini camp will feature themed activities, crafts, and games. We will also offer two day camps on August 1st and August 2nd from 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.



Annual Fundraiser

October 12, 2019 | 6 p.m. - 11 p.m.

Sylvan Heights' annual fundraiser for the birds! Proceeds support the conservation and education programs at Sylvan Heights Bird Park.



Trick-or-Tweet

October 31, 2019 | 5 p.m. - 6 p.m.

Trick-or-treat with the birds in a safe, family-friendly environment! Enjoy Halloween-themed educational activity stations and live animal encounters!



Breakfast With Santa

December 7, 2019 | 9 a.m. - 11 a.m.

Join Santa for breakfast at the park! Plenty of holiday activities for children, plus a chance to meet and take photos with Santa.



Oyster Roast

January 18, 2020 | 6 p.m. - 9 p.m.

It's an evening of oysters at Sylvan Heights Bird Park! Your ticket includes oysters, shrimp, beer and wine, and live entertainment. Proceeds support the park's education and conservation programs.



Sponsor An Event!

www.shwpark.com or 252.826.3186

You or your business can sponsor an event at Sylvan Heights! Benefits include recognition on promotional materials and recognition at the event, event tickets, and reserved tables!

A home for HORN BILLS

Meet the Rhinoceros Hornbill (*Buceros rhinoceros*). Native to the rainforests of southeast Asia, the species is named for the conspicuous orange horn, or "casque", that sits atop its bill.

Sylvan Heights Bird Park will feature these remarkable birds in a brand new aviary this year, and we need your help to complete this project!

If you'd like to help us create a home for these hornbills, please consider making a donation using the form below, or online at:

shwpark.com/donate

When donating online, please specify "Rhino Hornbill". Thank you for your support!



Photo ©Joel Sartore/ National Geographic Photo Ark

thank you to our donors

Sylvan Heights Bird Park gratefully acknowledges our donors of \$500 or more since Oct. 1, 2018 through March 30, 2019.

Abrams	Duke Energy	Debbie and Joey Josey	Dr. Rajiv and Dana Parikh	Bobby and Robin Tysinger
Ross Angel Foundation	ElectriCities of North Carolina, Inc.	Nicholas C. Kesick	Tushar Patel	Steven Ulsas
Beth Bailey	Jane and Parks Freeze	Mary and James Kitchen	Poppies International Inc.	UNC at Chapel Hill
Elaine Baillie	The Golden L.E.A.F. Foundation, Inc	Letchworth-Sykes Funeral Service	Anne Marie and Michael Procino	Bonnie Whitehurst
Sandra E. Barnes	Pat Groeger	Ali and Mike Lubbock	Raleigh/Durham Caged Bird Society	Kay and Mike Winn
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Jennie M. DeLagrange		Dr. Robert B. Outland, Jr.	Joe C. Tucker	

A home for hornbills

Your donation will fund the construction of a new, spacious aviary at Sylvan Heights Bird Park featuring the spectacular Rhinoceros Hornbill. Donations in the amount of \$1,000 or greater will receive recognition on the aviary.

Name: _____ Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____ Phone _____ E-mail _____

I pledge \$ _____ for Sylvan Heights Bird Park. Bill me One time. Quarterly for one year, beginning _____

Or, my gift of \$ _____ is included. Or, charge \$ _____ to my Visa Master Card Amex Discover

Account # _____ Exp. Date _____ CVN Number _____

Signature _____ Date _____

(Please send to Sylvan Heights Bird Park • PO Box 368 • Scotland Neck, NC 27874) **Thank you!**



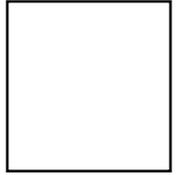
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BIRD PARK**

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INTERNATIONAL
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500 Sylvan Heights Park Way • PO Drawer 368 • Scotland Neck, NC 27874



White-faced Whistling Duck
(*Dendrocygna viduata*)