

words on  
**waterfowl**

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



*a silent spring*

Updates from Sylvan Heights Bird Park's temporary closure in spring 2020

FIRST BREEDING: GREEN PYGMY GEESE

*A Home For Wildlife*

2020 • Issue No. 15

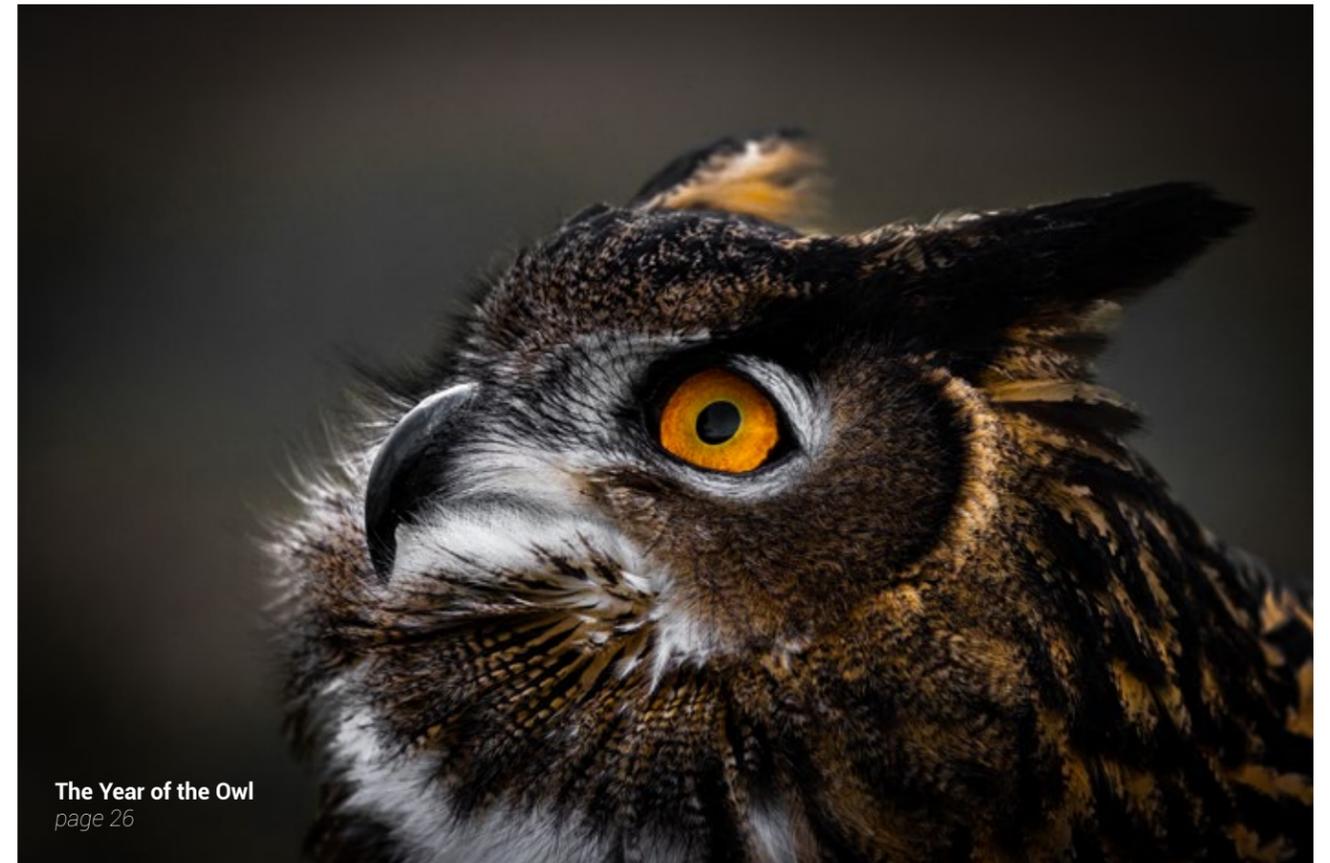
Ring-necked Pheasant  
(*Phasianus colchicus*)



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The Year of the Owl  
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K.G. Lubbock



### ON THE COVER

At just a few days old, a Nene gosling explores its quiet surroundings during the COVID-19 shutdown of spring 2020. (see page 6).

### 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

Many years ago, Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth II announced she had just lived an *Annus Horribilis* - A "Horrible Year". For many of us, 2020 has felt the same, and the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic will leave an impression on the world for many years to come. Sylvan Heights Bird Park was severely impacted by the shutdown, particularly as it coincided with our busiest season for park attendance. Although the park has now re-opened to visitors, the financial toll from lost revenue could affect the park for years.

Despite the shutdown, we were able to open one new aviary featuring East African Crowned Cranes, stocked and funded by Pandemonium Aviaries. It has been a very popular exhibit, as the cranes really enjoy displaying to each other as well as to the visitors. The new "Birds of Paradise" aviary sponsored by Ed and Pamela Taft and the Propagation Center sponsored by Michele Raffin and Pandemonium Aviaries is months behind schedule due to COVID-19 restrictions, but the work is continuing steadily, and, with the wonderful weather we have had during the past few weeks, good progress is being made.

All of the birds and equipment donated by Michele Raffin at Pandemonium Aviaries in California arrived by July. Brent and Katie Lubbock, Dustin Foote, General Curator, and Nick Nees, Assistant Curator, initially flew to California and drove back across country in two large vehicles to Scotland Neck. Soon thereafter, Dustin flew back to California to round up the birds and prepare them to fly back to North Carolina. The birds were flown here by chartered plane funded by members of the Board of Directors from Pandemonium Aviaries and accompanied throughout by Dustin. Dustin did a tremendous job to make the collaboration between Pandemonium and Sylvan Heights successful. With the delay in our construction, the birds have been carefully placed all around the Park as they await the completion of their new homes.

A very special thank you to all our Members, Board of Directors, and Friends of Sylvan Heights Board for giving us their utmost support during hard times. My deepest thanks go to all our volunteers, and especially the staff at the Park and the Breeding Center, who never wavered and managed to come in rain or shine for low financial compensation to care for our 4,000-plus birds. Without all of you, we would not still be here. Let us all hope for a brighter future, and stay safe and strong.

**Mike Lubbock**  
Executive Director  
Sylvan Heights Bird Park

## VIRTUAL LEARNING at Sylvan Heights Bird Park

**ASHLEY HAMLET**  
Education Coordinator



Springtime in the park looked very different this year. Normally bustling with a multitude of children on school field trips, this spring marched on without the buses, the students, and their wide-eyed curiosity. As COVID-19 spread across the country, North Carolina public schools closed in March and transitioned to virtual learning for the remainder of the school year. To say virtual learning presented new challenges is the understatement of the year. The shift to virtual learning plays a key role in keeping our communities safe from COVID-19, but it is not without its limitations. Virtual learning can place an entire world of resources at a student's fingertips while still lacking a crucial piece to the learning puzzle- experience. Learning experiences, like field trips, build connections between the classroom and the real world. There is a lot that can be said for "learning by doing"- especially when it comes to experiences that engage students with the natural world.

Ask any park ranger, biologist, gardener, or bird enthusiast about their passion for nature and chances are it stems from personal experience. Experiences in nature, especially for children, have the power to fuel curiosity, create a mindset of environmental responsibility, and develop empathy for other living things. Watching students in the park, you can witness these interactions as they feed flamingos in the Landing Zone or prod open an owl pellet to reveal a trove of tiny bones. They are bursting with the excitement of all that they have seen, heard, and experienced! These experiences are a priceless opportunity to engage students and teach them about the natural world. However, providing experiences in a time of virtual learning requires a different approach.

Like many zoos and museums across the world, Sylvan Heights turned to virtual content to reach people around the world. We now offer virtual field trips and a library of online programs and resources available through the park's website and social media pages. The virtual library allows visitors to explore topics in aviculture with "Ask an Aviculturist", meet spectacular species, learn alongside our staff with "Keeper Talks", and discover your backyard with "Backyard Science". The "Backyard Science" series was designed to encourage students at home to take a closer look at nature all around them. Each video focuses on nature on a local level- the dandelions, soil, backyard birds, and other creatures that fill our yards and neighborhoods. Students are introduced to each topic and given step by step instructions for a related craft or experiment to encourage self-led learning experiences. Familiarizing students with the "nearby nature" they see every day helps to build their confidence while developing their curiosity and critical thinking skills.

We cannot predict how the months to come will impact the park and our students. We look forward to school groups returning to the park and sharing our passion for the natural world with them. Until then, we hope that the virtual field trips and programs will help students to create their own learning experiences! To view our virtual library or learn more about our field trips, please visit our website at [shwpark.com/resources](http://shwpark.com/resources).

# *a* silent spring

*On March 18, 2020, Sylvan Heights Bird Park temporarily closed its doors to visitors as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic began to take hold in North Carolina.*

*While the human world rapidly changed, the natural world continued in its steady rhythm.*

BY KATIE LUBBOCK





Sylvan Heights Bird Park entered 2020 with unprecedented momentum.

After strong visitor numbers in 2019, park staff were gearing up for a year of record-breaking attendance. The popular Birds, Brews & BBQ fundraising event on March 14th had sold out at a higher capacity than ever before. Spring field trip reservations from local K-12th grade schools were rolling in at a brisk pace, while university students from around the country were already lining up summer internship positions. The park's largest aviary construction project to date was well underway and slated to open in early summer.

Within the span of one week, everything changed.

Sylvan Heights Bird Park had been closely monitoring recommendations from health authorities as COVID-19 crept closer to eastern North Carolina. Two days before the sold-out Birds, Brews & BBQ event on March 14th, the

difficult decision to cancel the event and refund attendees was confirmed by warnings about large gatherings from state officials.

Sylvan Heights staff scrambled to implement safety protocols for park visitors, install hand sanitizing stations, and encourage social distancing measures. The extra effort lasted six days before a statewide stay-at-home order closed the park to the public on March 18th.

With the sudden realization that the park would be losing almost all of its peak-season revenue, staff and board members quickly began devising solutions. Any operational costs not essential to the welfare of the birds were temporarily paused. Some staff members voluntarily reduced their hours or wages. A donation appeal went out to supporters, and was met with wonderful generosity. The park applied for, and received, an emergency loan from the Paycheck Protection Program, preventing staff layoffs.

While most administrative staff worked from home as much as possible, the dedicated aviculture teams at the park and Avian Breeding Center continued to provide the birds with expert care. And although the world around the birds had shifted drastically, they showed few signs of noticing. Without the bustle of school children, families, and photographers nearby, the birds carried on with the breeding season as if nothing was out of the ordinary. Nenes raised goslings in the North America aviary, flamingos built their nests in the mud, and courtship displays were performed enthusiastically. In the fields and wetlands that border the park, flowers bloomed and migratory birds arrived to raise their young, or simply to rest before continuing their journey. At the Avian Breeding Center, the incubators quickly filled with eggs, a pair of critically endangered Hawaiian Ducks successfully raised a brood of ducklings, and an exciting first-breeding event was about to take place (see page 22). From a bird's perspective, one of the most extraordinary years in human history was just business as usual.

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Despite careful cutbacks and the gradual reopening of the park in late May, Sylvan Heights Bird Park is still operating without more than \$300,000 of its annual attendance revenue, and staff continue to work at reduced pay. If you would like to help the park recover, please consider making a donation at [shwpark.com/donate](http://shwpark.com/donate).

An Eastern Bluebird returns to her nest.

# a home *for wildlife*

*While Sylvan Heights briefly closed to guests, park staff welcomed visitors of a different kind with the installation of wildlife-friendly areas and the continued restoration of our natural wetland & meadows.*

PHOTOS BY KATIE LUBBOCK



A HOME FOR WILDLIFE

# Plants for POLLINATORS



A carpenter bee visits a milkweed plant at Sylvan Heights.



Sylvan Heights Bird Park received a grant from the North Carolina Native Plant Society to fund the installation of native perennial gardens that will support important pollinator species and educate park visitors about the benefits of native plants.

Located just outside the park entrance, the gardens consist of a milkweed patch to host monarch caterpillars, and a mixed native perennial garden that will showcase the variety of plants native to this region that benefit pollinators like birds, bees, butterflies, and moths.

The milkweed patch was installed over the summer, and by early September, dozens of monarch caterpillars were inhabiting the plants. Educational signage will be installed early next year to help visitors learn about native plants, the pollination process, and how to help pollinators in their own garden.

Although the plants in the garden are still very small, we look forward to the coming years when they will create vital habitat for wildlife and an immersive educational experience for guests.

A HOME FOR WILDLIFE

# wetlands work

Migratory songbirds, like this White-eyed Vireo, benefited from continued wetland cleanup and restoration at Sylvan Heights. This year, the park received a \$16,400 grant from the Duke Energy Foundation in support of wetland maintenance and education.



Pileated Woodpecker



Rose-breasted Grosbeak

# boxes *for bluebirds*

## DUSTIN FOOTE

General Curator  
Sylvan Heights Bird Park

It has been a unique year, with many challenges and obstacles felt across the world. Yet with everything, there are often opportunities in adversity. I hope many of you took this time to slow down and get outside. Here at Sylvan Heights, we took advantage of an empty park this past spring and focused on improving the grounds in ways many visitors may not notice now that we are open.

Eastern Bluebirds are a common aerial insectivore in the south, however that was not always the case. They have become a popular target species for many individuals who are looking to improve their land and are considered a sign of a healthy habitat. Bluebirds are cavity nesters, which means they readily use artificial boxes. Other introduced cavity nesters like European Starlings and House Finches are more aggressive than Bluebirds, so it is important to construct the appropriately sized box and hole to keep these larger invasive birds out. There are numerous organizations and blueprints for more information on how to properly construct and place bluebird boxes (please email me at [dustin@shwpark.com](mailto:dustin@shwpark.com) if you need more information). This year, we added ten

bluebird boxes throughout the grounds and fledged over twenty-six chicks. Our hope is that these boxes become part of a long-term research study at East Carolina University with Dr. Susan McRae.

We also added three Eastern Screech Owl boxes in the wooded sections of the park. Screech owls are not extremely picky when it comes to boxes and can often be found in wood duck boxes people hang. The boxes we selected are actually meant for American Kestrels, however many prefer to breed farther north. So, we placed our boxes in specific locations that both species would use in case a kestrel decides to stay south for the season!

This coming spring, we plan on adding Purple Martin gourds to the field in front of the park. While many martins prefer to nest near open water, we have seen these birds around the park and hope they will breed on the grounds. As with the bluebirds and Screech Owls, Purple Martins are insectivores who readily adapt to human made nest sites.



Photo by Dustin Foote

*This year, Sylvan Heights Bird Park added ten new bluebird boxes throughout the grounds, from which at least twenty-six chicks fledged.*



# from the **iwwa** president

Dear IWWA members,

I hope this note finds all of you well despite the challenges that we have undergone in 2020. We have each experienced disruption and loss this year in our own ways, and have also found ways to enjoy the bright spots in our lives. For me, I have found watching waterfowl more important than ever. Observing the birds going about their lives has been a valued respite from the uncertainty of the world around me, and I hope you have had a similar opportunity to decompress by means of the birds we all enjoy.

IWWA's annual conference gives us all not only a chance to enjoy waterfowl, but to partake in the company of fellow waterfowl enthusiasts. Unfortunately, we will not be able to meet safely this year. During the summer months IWWA's Board of Directors made the decision to postpone our annual fall conference, planned for Quebec, Canada, until 2021. While this was a hard decision to make, based on the resurgence of the coronavirus in some locations, it was the right move. Fortunately, our gracious hosts in Quebec have agreed to extend the invitation another year and I certainly hope we can take them up on it.

Despite the interruption in our ability to meet in person, the Board of Directors met via video conferencing in early October. The Zoom meeting was certainly a first for our organization, but it was productive in addition to simply being a great opportunity to see the faces we're so accustomed to seeing at the conference each year. Among

the items discussed at the meeting was the funding of grants, the approval of a new multi-year strategic plan, and the election of new officers and committees.

Several longstanding Board Members stepped down this year, and we thank them for their service and commitment to IWWA. They include Lynn Dye, Tim Baird, Jerry Jennings and Nick Tiberio. Tim is one of the founding members of our organization, and we sincerely appreciate the foresight he and IWWA's other founding members had to create and guide IWWA over the decades. We also thank Lynn Dye for her generosity in sharing both her avicultural knowledge and travel coordination skill with many, many IWWA members during her board service. We are in the process of identifying new Board Members now and will share updates in Board composition and assignments in our next newsletter.

I too decided to step down this year from my role as President of IWWA after three years in the role. I will continue to serve on the Board and hope to focus my efforts on fundraising and the auction. The Board selected Clayton Botkin as the new President, a decision that will certainly serve our group well. Clayton has already demonstrated his planning and organizational abilities and I look forward to helping him move the club forward in the years ahead. Congratulations Clayton!

With that said, I will pass the keyboard to Clayton. Thank you all for the opportunity to serve IWWA and I look forward to seeing you all in Quebec next year.

*Ian Gereg*

International Wild Waterfowl Association

## *introducing* CLAYTON BOTKIN, INCOMING IWWA PRESIDENT

Hello,

I would like to begin by thanking my colleagues on the IWWA Board of Directors for their confidence and support in nominating me as president. It is a role I am excited to take on, recognizing the extensive and accomplished history of the IWWA, and those that have held the title before me. I would like to sincerely recognize Ian Gereg, Arnold Schouten, Ed Asper and Walt Sturgeon, all who have preceded me in the role and continue with the organization today. I also want to recognize our presidents who have passed on, Dr. Jean Delacour and Bob Elgas. Without all of their leadership and vision, IWWA would not be in the sound position it is. I look forward to working with the entire board and leaning on them for direction and support as we navigate the rest of 2020 and look towards some hopeful return to normalcy in 2021 and beyond.

As a bit of an introduction, and realising I am likely an unfamiliar face to many, I am currently the poultry industry specialist with the Province of British Columbia in Canada. I have been in this role for 7 years, prior to which I have worked as an equipment operator, railway conductor, and test fishing observer during the Fraser River sockeye migration. My position has me largely focused on working with owners of domestic poultry, both large and small flocks, as well as hobbyists and other entities with specialised domestic and wild species. I work with individuals to promote best practices and develop efficiencies in their operations, as well as emergency preparedness related to awareness of and responding to potential foreign animal disease threats. In Canada, these threats are mainly Avian Influenza and velogenic Newcastle disease, but recognizing there are many other disease threats as well. Personally, I have had a collection of wild and domestic species of waterfowl, Galliformes and softbills for over 20 years. I have had success with most of the species I have kept over that time. I am also involved with a number of other avicultural organisations, serving on the boards of the Prairie Ornamental Avicultural Association and the Canadian Ornamental Pheasant & Gamebird Association.

While the pandemic has posed challenges previously unknown to most of us, we have an opportunity now more than ever to connect with people around the world. Most have more time available and we can look to leverage that into collective progress in many of our shared priorities, whether it be captive propagation, in situ conservation or raising general awareness of waterfowl. I look forward to working together to support this progress as an organisation and the challenges we can take on together in the time ahead. I encourage feedback and ideas and I want to commit to members that we will all continue to do the best work we can with the resources we have.

Clayton Botkin PAg BSc (Hons)



**Philippine Ducks**  
(*Anas luzonica*)

K.G. Lubbock

# have you checked the bill?

by MORAG JONES

Waterfowl have the original multitools - it is really great to see just how different their bills are. Why should they be so different?

Look closely and you can get a big clue as to what the bird eats. Our Spoonbills swish their heads from side to side with their bills just below the surface - they filter out insects and crustaceans from the mud and silt. Shovelers do something similar and flamingos do it upside down! Some geese eat grass, grass and more grass. Their bills are short and strong, ready to slice and pull. The mergansers have saw-like edges to their bills

and once they catch a minnow or a crayfish, there is no escape. All birds need grit of some sort to grind down their food in the gizzard, because they don't have teeth. But they do have one 'tooth', just to help them get out of the shell. It is a tiny, hardened keratin thorn on the end of the bill. This little cone helps them break free from the egg, driven by muscular spasms in the neck. Once the ring of little punctures or 'pips' is most of the way round the blunt end of the egg, a mighty push from the legs helps the bird into the world. The egg tooth drops off a day or two after hatching, leaving it, well, toothless.

The adult's bill itself has a supporting core of bone and it is far from solid. Some may appear quite chunky, but they have a network of strands and airspaces, making them light but strong. As well as air, a network of blood vessels and nerves runs through the spaces. On the outside is a series of thin layers of keratin. Like our hair and nails, it grows continuously and layers are gradually shed. Some of the waterfowl change their bill color through the seasons, like the bright blue of the Lake Ducks, which gets quite dull out of the breeding season. Some change color as they get older.

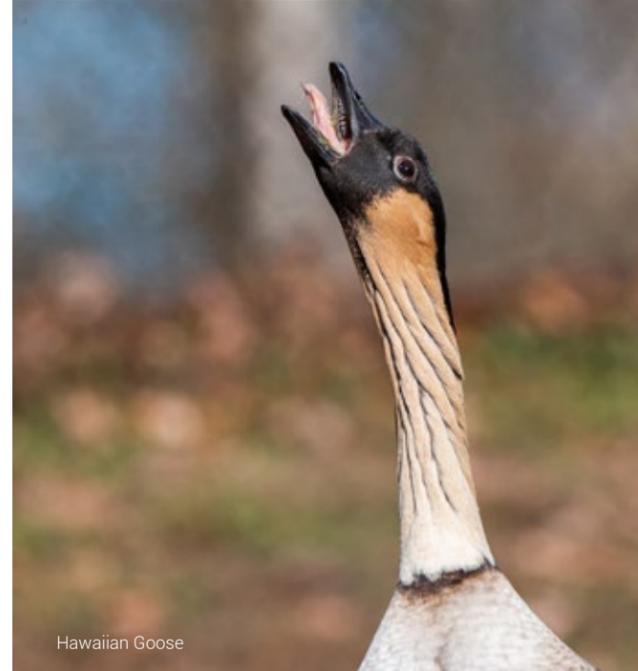
Many of the sea ducks harvest mollusks, sea stars, crabs and other invertebrates along the coastline - it's a tough job. Waterfowl all have a hardened tip to the bill known as the nail or bean. This protects the tip of the bill from all that activity, but it is also extremely sensitive. Even the roughest, toughest bully-bird can be surprisingly delicate. The bill is pliers, chisel, comb and finest tweezers. The information needed for all these tool options is gathered by exceptional nerves that can detect the tiniest vibrations and movement. They are particularly well-developed in the waterfowl.

The sides of a bird's bill can be very different too. The flamingos have a very thick tongue which pumps water out through the sides of the bill, where food is filtered out through lots of fine, hair-like plates. Some of the dabbling ducks have hairy edges to their tongues and this does the same job. The Pink-eared Duck has fleshy flaps at the side that help them channel algae and other plankton efficiently.

If it is larger, slippery prey you are after, hard, sharp, serrated edges with backward-facing points will help keep a grip. No surprise then, that the mergansers are also called the sawbills.

So next time you are here at the park, do remember, it pays to check the bill!

Hooded Merganser



Hawaiian Goose

Pink-eared Duck



Spectacled Eider



# first breeding: green pygmy geese

After years of work, the aviculture team at the Sylvan Heights Avian Breeding Center has achieved the first breeding of the Green Pygmy Goose (*Nettapus pulchellus*) in North America. This small duck, native to Australia and New Guinea, is extraordinarily rare in avicultural collections, and requires expert care to thrive. Five healthy ducklings are now fully-grown and fledged.

*Nick Hill, Avian Breeding Center Curator, answers questions about this season's biggest success.*

**Q: What do you think made the key difference for these birds this season that resulted in breeding success?**

A: Several years ago, a breeder in Belgium acquired a pair of Green Pygmy Geese and bred them for the first time in captivity. He found his pair to be aggressive to the other birds in his aviary, so they were given their own home. He also placed nest boxes very high along the walls of the aviary. Armed with this information, we set to work. We moved our older pair to their own aviary and built nest boxes, which were mounted as high as possible in the aviary. The female immediately went into the nest box, which had never happened before. She laid a clutch

of eggs later that year, which turned out to be infertile. So near, yet so far. In 2019, Sylvan Heights was able to import young Green Pygmy Geese. The combination of the specially-designed aviaries and the importation of younger birds resulted in breeding success for us in 2020.

**Q: Were the ducklings difficult to raise? Did you use any special techniques or diets?**

A: On the whole, no, they weren't especially difficult. They all hatched ok, and that's always a good start. We put them on a diet of Mazuri Waterfowl Starter and white millet. The key, though, is fresh duckweed, which we



provided for them 2-3 times per day. In the wild, they eat a lot of aquatic vegetation and seeds from water lilies. Duckweed grows very well in the wetlands around Scotland Neck. Each season, we collect buckets of duckweed from the wetlands, and place it in our own duckweed growing pond at the breeding center so we have a fresh supply for the ducklings every day. Placing duckweed in their pools also encourages the ducklings to start swimming - ours were on the water the first day after hatching.

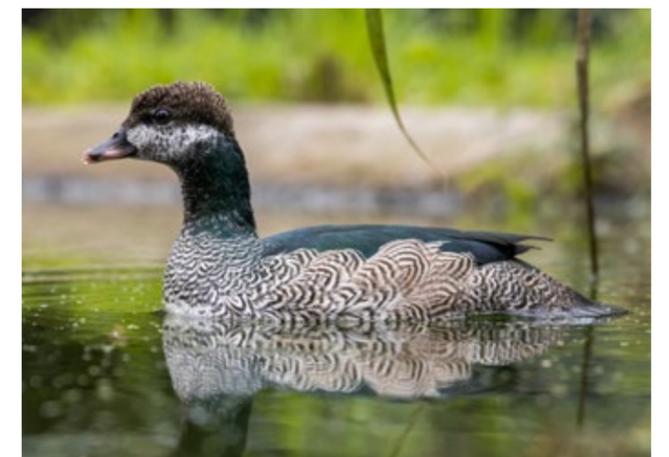
Small stones were also placed in their brooders. Not only are the stones good heat conductors, they give the ducklings a place to rest. The ducklings were often observed sitting on the stones fast asleep.

**Why is it important that this species is bred in avicultural collections?**

Avicultural collections serve as sort of an insurance plan for wild populations. With climate change causing more frequent and intense environmental disasters, such as the wildfires and droughts in Australia earlier this year, there may come a time when captive-reared birds play a major role in the recovery of their species. Birds in avicultural facilities also serve as ambassadors for their species and for biodiversity. Many people can't travel to remote parts of the world to see them in the wild, but if they come to Sylvan Heights and get a first-hand look at how beautiful these species are, they hopefully will want to do more to improve the planet for wildlife.

**Would you do anything differently next season?**

Next season we hope to do more parent-rearing. This year, the breeding Green Pygmy Goose pair were given an African Pygmy Goose egg to hatch and raise while their own ducklings were being reared by aviculturists in the safety of our duckery. The Green Pygmy Geese raised their adopted duckling without any problems at all, so now we know that they have that experience, and that they are very good parents. Recently, we have been putting a much bigger focus on parent birds rearing their own young. I think parent-rearing is very important for the future of aviculture.





# avian alumni

## ALEX LEVITSKIY

Cortland, NY  
Sylvan Heights Avian Intern, Summer 2018

As I sit in quarantine and adjust to university classes online, I reminisce about my internship at the Avian Breeding Center in the summer of 2018. I had visited Sylvan Heights Bird Park multiple times prior, always looking forward to the next visit. I was beyond excited when I had the chance to complete the internship program, where I could live and breathe waterfowl with the incredible people that make Sylvan Heights a reality! I cannot express my gratitude enough to everyone I had the chance to interact with and come to consider my extended family. I learned far more than I ever imagined possible and interacted with species I would never have had the chance to work with otherwise. While what I learned was very useful in its applications to my personal collection, the internship had a longer-lasting legacy—one of inspiration that helped mold my future endeavors.

The efforts at Sylvan Heights Bird Park and the Avian Breeding Center are crucial to help preserve numerous species from an unfortunate end. This mission was especially clear to me during my internship and at the Future of Waterfowl Conservation workshops I was able to attend. Waterfowl conservation is of utmost importance to me as a life-long waterfowl fanatic, and I knew I wanted to play my part in some capacity. As such, following the summer of 2018, I pursued my conservation interests further.

Through a Cornell program during the summer of 2019, I was able to travel to Indonesia and work with partners at organizations like WWF along with two other students. The main goal of the program was to help us gain an appreciation for the multi-faceted nature of conservation. The first component of the program brought us to the buffer zone of Ujung Kulon National Park, the last habitat of the Javan rhinoceros, where we conducted conservation education with middle school children to raise awareness of environmental stewardship and conservation. Don't worry though, I had a chance to give a lecture on birds, even putting my limited Indonesian to good use! The second part of the program involved reviewing rhino pathology cases, which led to literature reviews and translations of necropsy reports (though I missed most of this portion of the program as I had dengue). The hope is that the findings can be synthesized into a scientific paper that informs rhino conservation policy before it is too late.

Prior to the next portion of program, I had the chance to visit an illegal wildlife market, which was undoubtedly one of the

most horrific experiences of my life; Javan tree ducks, flying foxes, civets, macaques, and thousands of pitiful birds were crammed together in horrible conditions. With that context in mind, we then volunteered at the International Animal Rescue location specializing in slow lorises rescued from the pet trade. Many of the lorises are unable to be released back to the wild, as dealers clip their canine teeth. There are simply so many obstacles at every level of rescue, rehabilitation, and release of such animals.

The final part of the program brought us to Kelian Sanctuary in Borneo, home to Pahu, the only captive Sumatran rhino of her subspecies. There we participated in all aspects of her daily care, including hand feeding her twice daily, collecting suitable food plants from the rainforest, observing her in the paddock, watching her receive veterinary care, and patrolling the paddock around the clock. The lush rainforest was exciting enough for me, as I was able to see hornbills, civets, macaques, gibbons, and even a clouded leopard, but there was something magical about feeding a Sumatran rhino by hand after she approached me within the paddock, no protective fence between us. It breaks my heart to think of how many people are completely unaware of the Sumatran rhino and its plight, not to mention the delightful vocalizations they make. Just as the Baer's pochard and scaly-sided merganser should not slip away, nor should the Javan and Sumatran rhinos.

Following my time in Indonesia, I proceeded to China, where I worked with Dr. Valitutto at the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding (by this point, I finally got my

waterfowl fix thanks to the shelducks and swans at the base). It was exciting to see conservation from yet another angle—one of great success and extensive infrastructure. While it is easy to say giant pandas receive too much attention, there are numerous species that indirectly benefit under these umbrella species; one example some of you might be familiar with is the Chinese monal. I was lucky enough to visit a Chinese monal breeding center, and there is a possibility of conducting future work there.

All-in-all, my path since interning at Sylvan Heights has repeatedly reaffirmed my love for conservation. For all of you who invested so much into me from the waterfowl end, have no fear, as avian conservation calls my name. I am wrapping up my undergraduate studies in Animal Science and Biological Sciences at Cornell University, where I have also been concurrently studying an emergent disease in house finches through the Lab of Ornithology. I will be attending Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine starting in the fall of 2020, with the hope that I can pursue a career in conservation and avian medicine. I am not entirely sure where my path will take me, but I really hope that I can come full circle and play a role in waterfowl conservation, just as all of you do, but from the veterinary lens. I want to thank everyone who has invested time and resources mentoring me. As my departing words, I challenge all of you with mentorship capacity to identify budding aviculturists and encourage them to pursue internships such as the phenomenal one at Sylvan Heights, as you never know what doors you may help unlock and passions you may kindle.



# year of the owl

This year, Sylvan Heights Bird Park's Annual Fundraiser transitioned from an on-site gala to an entirely virtual event. From November 1st - 14th, supporters bid in an online auction, donated to help our education and conservation programs, and reserved virtual passes to our live online event, "The Year of the Owl" on November 14th.

Featured auction items included a six-night luxury safari in Botswana, a one-week stay on Scotland's Isle of Islay, and gourmet dining packages.

Thanks to the generosity of our donors, bidders, sponsors, and supporters, the event raised over \$42,000 to help get the park's conservation and education programs back on track for a brighter 2021.



## careers start here

Each year, Sylvan Heights Bird Park trains dozens of aspiring biologists, zookeepers, and aviculturists from around the world to help prepare them for careers in wildlife conservation. However, the park also serves our local communities as a place for students to gain work experience, build real-world skills, and even start their first paid job.

In many cases, Sylvan Heights Bird Park relies on volunteer support during the peak summer season, but we are growing fast! This year, we are asking for your help to sponsor paid summer jobs at Sylvan Heights for local students in Halifax County, NC. These students will have the opportunity to assist visitors in the Landing Zone and help maintain the park grounds while learning valuable skills in customer service and reliability, preparing them for future employment in the field of their choice.

If you would like to help a student gain skills that will launch their careers, please consider making a donation below. Thank you for your support!

## thank you to our donors

**Sylvan Heights Bird Park gratefully acknowledges our donors of \$500 or more since October 1, 2019 through September 30, 2020.**

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|--|---|--|--|
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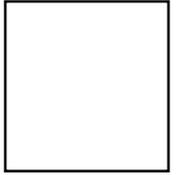
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**Australian Shelducks**  
(*Tadorna tadornoides*)

K.G. Lubbock