



words on  
**waterfowl**

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

**Birds of Africa**

NOW OPEN AT SYLVAN HEIGHTS

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FALL/WINTER 2015 • Issue No. 6



Autumn sunset over the Multinational Aviary at Sylvan Heights Bird Park

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## the director's report

Our “Wings of Tropics” exhibit is now well underway, and thanks to several grants we have almost reached our goal to cover this new exhibit. The hard work in getting these grants, especially from our education staff, has been essential in making the new project a reality. Brad Hazelton provides more details about this new exhibit in the Curator's Report on page 4.

We have also managed to secure 10 acres of land adjacent to the park. Once purchased, the land will ensure the future of Sylvan Heights for expansion in the years to come. Thanks to many generous donors, we have raised more than half of the needed funds, but we still need to raise another \$50,000. Please read page 19 of this newsletter to find out how you can help us reach this goal. Our first use of the land will be a 2-acre parking lot which we urgently need, as there were many days this summer that we had to park people halfway down the entrance road. Special thanks to The Town of Scotland Neck, Halifax County Development Board, Scotland Neck Development Board, Halifax Convention & Visitors Bureau, Michael Steinhardt, and the Sylvan Heights Board of Directors for their contributions.

We'd like to thank the Dvoraks from the Raleigh-Durham Cage Bird Society for donating two very rare and endangered blue-

throated macaws. These beautiful birds are settling in to their new home, and visitors will be able to see them in the South America aviary in the spring.

Ali and I have just returned from the International Wild Waterfowl Association annual meeting in Florida, where we had a great time seeing many of the major attractions. Next year's meeting is going to be in Europe visiting some of the best bird people in the world. This is a great opportunity for any of our members to attend and see things that would not be possible if you were not a member. The conference will be in the fall, but the date has yet to be fixed.

As always, I thank you for your support as a member. It is rewarding to see Sylvan Heights reaching out to so many more people.

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



### ON THE COVER:

African Pygmy Geese (*Nettapus auritus*) and other African species are now on exhibit in “Birds of Africa” at Sylvan Heights Bird Park.

### CONNECT ONLINE!



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

# the curator's report

by **BRAD HAZELTON**  
General Curator, Sylvan Heights Bird Park



African Jacana



African Pygmy Goose



"Birds of Africa" Aviary

Although native to Australia, this male green pygmy goose now lives in the new "Birds of Africa" exhibit. Pygmy geese are too delicate to house in the park's larger aviaries, so the new exhibit provides an ideal place to show visitors these tiny, colorful ducks.



This year I've had the great fortune to travel...a lot. Since January, I have been to Colorado, Ohio, and Bolivia, and to Arizona and Texas twice. I'm thankful for the great and dependable staff here at Sylvan Heights, which has made all of that traveling possible. Over the last 10 months, we have completed the new Birds of Africa aviary, which is a vast improvement over the crowned pigeon exhibit that was there previously. This exhibit also has a large winter shelter attached, which should allow most of the birds to remain in the exhibit throughout the winter months. We are currently housing two pairs of African pygmy geese in this exhibit, a species that we have not had in the park for several years now. I am frequently asked what my favorite species of bird is (I try unsuccessfully not to have favorites) and while I have many that I'm especially fond of, these pygmy geese would have to be at the top of the list. This exhibit also houses a green pygmy goose, long-toed lapwing, an African jacana, mountain witch doves (these are not African, but we needed somewhere to put them temporarily), and snowy-crowned robin chats. Come and check it out if you haven't already seen it.

We currently have three major new projects all being worked on at once. The first is a nature walkway that will allow visitors to

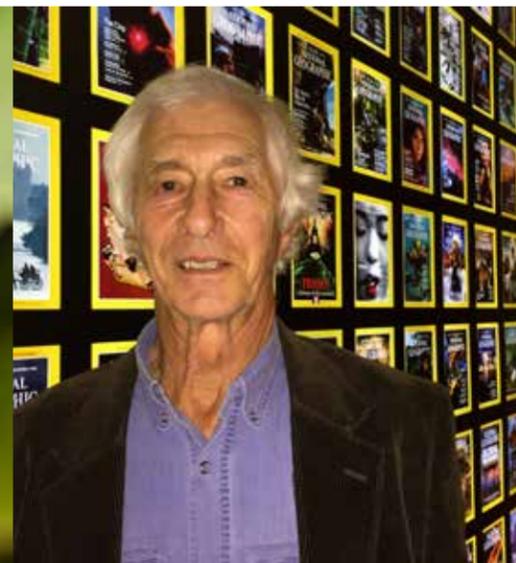
see some of the beautiful swamp land we have here around the park. This area is badly in need of restoration since the invasive Asiatic privet has completely taken over this wetland. We are very grateful to the six volunteers with AmeriCorps who assisted me and the staff with cutting the privet and burning it. As we have seen in past restorations, once the light-stealing privet is removed and controlled there are numerous native seeds just waiting to sprout to life. This area will have an elevated walkway through the wetland with access points provided for education groups who are studying the wetland. It should be a real asset to the park.

We are also in the process of building a nature playground, sponsored by Halifax EMC, adjoining our existing playground. This area will have a large pipe for kids to run through and climb over, as well as an elevated bridge, sand box, natural log building blocks, monkey bars and several balance components.

Our third (and most involved) project is the Wings of the Tropics. A large portion of this project has been funded by the Cannon Foundation. This exhibit will replace the small row of exotic bird aviaries that were on the west end of the park. In July, we

started demolishing this outdated exhibit and removing several ominous trees that had been leaning since hurricane Irene. After this, we began hauling in several loads of fill dirt to try to level off the work site. Once we completed the grading, we put in drains and water lines. This took us through the first week in September when I traveled to Arizona for two weeks. I intended to hit the ground running when I returned, but unfortunately it started raining on the day I returned and we had rain every day for the next 12 days in a row. It took a week for everything to dry out enough to pour concrete, but we were finally able to get the floor for the shelter poured and then we brought in block layers immediately after that. Fortunately, these guys were so fast that they were able to come close to getting me back on schedule. We were trying to get this shelter completed before our first freeze and I am not sure we will make that, but hopefully we will not miss it by much.

As you can see, we have little down time here at the park and I'm thankful for all of my hardworking staff. Without them, we couldn't achieve our goals with regards to new exhibits. Now that cooler weather is here, we invite you all to come out and see the progress we're making around the park.



Eggstravaganza!  
March 12th, 2016

## Hummingbirds Now On Exhibit

Visitors to Sylvan Heights Bird Park can now see colorful broad-billed hummingbirds buzzing around the African Finch Aviary in the park. The tiny, energetic birds are native to Mexico and southern Arizona. Males have shimmering green and blue plumage with bright red bills, while females have duller green and brown plumage that provides good camouflage while incubating eggs on a nest. Like other hummingbirds, their diet consists of flower nectar and tiny insects.

Several more hummingbirds are currently being housed in an off-exhibit greenhouse that will keep them warm during the upcoming winter weather. Upon completion of the park's new "Wings of the Tropics" exhibit, they will join toucans, finches, curassows, tinamous, tropical jays, and others in this spacious new walk-through aviary. In the meantime, look closely in the finch aviary next time you visit to see if you can spot the park's tiniest residents!

## AmeriCorps visits Sylvan Heights

In August, we received news that our application was accepted to receive an AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps) team of six to assist in wetland restoration at Sylvan Heights Bird Park. AmeriCorps NCCC is a federal government leadership program for environmental stewardship and conservation projects, helping preserve and enhance a community's natural resources.

With the help of AmeriCorps NCCC, we initiated our wetland restoration by eliminating invasive plants to prepare for the development of the Native Nature Walkway. The Delta 7 Team arrived on October 20 and served our community through November 10. They have been traveling around the southern region for the past 9 months, and working at Medoc Mountain and Sylvan Heights will be their last project for the year before they head back home. The Delta 7 team is based out of Vicksburg, Mississippi but consists of members from New Hampshire, New York, Massachusetts, Washington, and Kansas.

## New Endangered Macaws at Park

Sylvan Heights Bird Park recently acquired two blue-throated macaws, considered one of the world's rarest birds. Although they are not uncommon in captivity, wild populations of this species are estimated at only 250 to 300 individuals. As with many parrot species, legal and illegal trapping for the cage bird trade in the 1970s and 1980s is the primary reason behind their decline in the wild. (The macaws at Sylvan Heights were captive-bred pets and were not caught from the wild).

Live export of blue-throated macaws was officially banned in the mid-1980s, and although populations have since stabilized, their recovery has been slow.

The two blue-throated macaws at Sylvan Heights are currently settling into their new winter home, and will join our other macaws in the South America aviary next Spring to help educate visitors about the plight of endangered birds.

## Sylvan Heights in NatGeo Museum

We are so pleased that Mike Lubbock and many of the birds at Sylvan Heights are part of a beautiful new exhibition by photographer Joel Sartore at the National Geographic Museum in Washington, D.C! Joel's stunning wildlife portraits (nearly all 5,000 of them) will be on display at the museum until April 2016. Mike's story is highlighted in one of the exhibition areas, and photos of our birds join many others in conveying an incredibly important conservation message.

Joel Sartore's goal is to create detailed photographic portraits of all 12,000 species currently in captivity before they disappear forever. He has visited Sylvan Heights Bird Park twice to photograph approximately 140 of the species housed at the park and Avian Breeding Center. Joel's work also reinforces the important role of captive breeding programs in zoos and private facilities in saving endangered species from extinction.

## Pig in the Park March 19, 2016

Welcoming Spring in Eastern North Carolina typically means strolls through beautifully maintained gardens, music festivals, and long awaited fishing on the river. At Sylvan Heights Bird Park in Scotland Neck, we welcome the season a different way - by filling the air with the smells of BBQ pork, the sounds of laughter and sweeping views of the scenic Bird Park.

For the third straight year, Sylvan Heights is hosting its annual Pig in the Park event. Growing from just 6 cooks the first year, the park is hoping to place a whopping 12 cooks from around the region. Each will compete to be the best whole hog cook and showcase his or her finest southern BBQ style. Entertain the whole family with music, food, games and fun! This year's event will take place on Saturday, March 19, 2016 at 5pm. Tickets can be purchased in advance for \$20, or for \$25 at the door. Contact the Park for more information about the event or if you wish to compete.

## Upcoming Events

### 12 BIRDS OF CHRISTMAS Dec 1-31st, 2015

Holiday-themed scavenger hunt. Can you find them all?

### WEBBED WONDERS January 30th, 2016

Activity stations, birds, crafts, games, and stories.

### EGGSTRAVAGANZA! March 12, 2016

Learn all about eggs! Story, crafts, and egg hunt.

### PIG IN THE PARK March 19, 2016

Join us as local cooks compete to be Pig Cook-Off Champion!

### EARTH DAY CELEBRATION April 16, 2016

Educational booths and activities set up throughout the park.

### DUCKLING DAY May 7, 2016

Aviculturist-level members and higher are invited for a tour of the breeding center.

### WATERFOWL REUNION June 18, 2016

All members are invited to come meet the newest hatchlings up close!



◀ A tiny juvenile Ruby-throated Hummingbird stretches his wings in the wetlands at Sylvan Heights Bird Park in September. Those wings may carry him across the Gulf of Mexico a few weeks later.

# migration madness

by **DUSTIN FOOTE**

Assistant Curator, Sylvan Heights Bird Park

What does the word extreme mean to you? For the Ruby-throated Hummingbird that weighs as much as one penny, extreme is crossing the 500-mile wide Gulf of Mexico in under 20 hours. For the Bar-headed Goose, extreme is flying at altitudes of up to 29,000 feet over the Himalayas. (In case you need a frame of reference, 32,000 feet is cruising altitude for most commercial jets.) For the Arctic Tern, extreme is flying over 50,000 miles a year when moving between its breeding and wintering grounds. (That is equivalent to two trips around the world!) For the Bar-tailed Godwit, extreme is flying nonstop for over 7,000 miles in less than ten days. These statistics redefine the word “extreme”, blurring the line between astounding and impossible.

To take a step back from extreme, all birds fall into two categories: residents or migrants. In North Carolina, many of our Blue Jays are permanent residents, and do not leave during the winter. However, other species, such as the Prothonotary Warbler, are migrants. Once the summer breeding season is over in North Carolina, they fly to Central and South America for the winter. A migration is simply a seasonal movement between a breeding range and wintering ground. Only about 40% of all bird species migrate.

Many people believe that cold weather is what drives birds south, but that’s only a small part of the picture. Food is the major driving factor behind migration. Generally speaking, the equator has food year-round, but in low concentrations. However the higher latitudes have huge spikes in food during the spring and summer. Birds breeding in the north are taking advantage of these large booms in food availability to raise their offspring. Once their chicks are raised, they head south before their food supply runs out. That being said, if your food is freezing, chances are you are too!

When migrating, birds use the following methods to navigate: topographic landmarks, solar compass, stellar compass, magnetic compass, and polarized light. As humans, we often use landmarks like the sun and the stars to help us gain direction. Birds actually have cells that allow them to use both the earth’s magnetic field and polarized light to enhance their navigation. Imagine having an internal magnetic compass! Human eyes only have three types of cones (the cells in your eye that see color); we are sensitive to red, green, and blue. That means that all the colors you see are made up from just three colors! Birds have additional cells that allow them to see both ultraviolet and polarized light, the latter of which is used in navigation.

From a conservation standpoint, bird migration poses a unique challenge. How do we protect something that has no boundaries, crossing state and international lines? Take for instance the Yellow Warbler, a species that breeds here in North Carolina. This species breeds across the northern half of the United States and up into Canada, before returning to Venezuela and Columbia via Mexico to spend the winter. Many species of birds require serious domestic and international cooperation in order to fully address their conservational needs. Challenging as this may be, it poses a unique opportunity of connecting people across the world.

Birds are amazing and sometimes extreme organisms. In North Carolina, you might be lucky enough to hear a Bobolink call when walking by a field. These birds are on their way up to north to breed, and will later return to Argentina for the winter. They are a marker of ecological health across North and South America. Birds and their migrations connect people from across the world, a critical component when uniting people and causes for conservation.

# parent-raising waterfowl

One of the questions frequently asked by our visitors is, “Why don’t we let all of the birds hatch and raise their own cygnets, goslings and ducklings?” In short, we raise young birds when we can do a better job than the parent birds, and the parents raise them when they can do a better job than we can.

Often, we can produce more young successfully if we hand raise them in the duckery at the Breeding Center. In the wild, a pair of ducks with a clutch of seven eggs may only manage to rear three or four ducklings if they survive possible predation from other animals. In the Park and at the Breeding Center, there can be competition from other species for food and space, and aggression towards each other when young birds are around. In the duckery, we can ensure the survival of young birds by monitoring food, heat and water supply in a protected area without the harassment from other birds in their aviary.

For some rare and endangered species, removing the first clutch has the added benefit of encouraging the birds to lay a second clutch in the same year, further increasing the numbers of these important species in captivity.

Sometimes, if the conditions in the aviary are favorable, we choose not to remove eggs from the nest and allow the birds

to “parent raise” their own young. We will sometimes parent raise when we have birds that have never bred before. It does the birds a lot of good and reinforces their parental instincts. If one continuously removes eggs time and time again, the birds may give up trying. So, if they can raise a clutch of young one year, they will almost always do better the next year. This is an important strategy with endangered and rare species, although we’ll often do a sneaky swapping of eggs! The endangered ducklings are too important to risk losing, so we’ll raise the rare birds in the duckery and replace the eggs in the nest with a more common species for the unsuspecting parents to raise. For example, we will let endangered White-headed Ducks hatch eggs and raise young from the more common North American Ruddy Duck. Pink-eared ducks will raise Sharp-winged Teal while their real ducklings are carefully monitored in the duckery. We will also parent raise with some specific species. This year we let the Common Whiteeye and the European Wigeon raise their own. Last year, we had a pair of endangered Madagascar Teal that only raised three ducklings. However, the experience of raising their own ducklings seemed to benefit them greatly, and the same pair raised a clutch of nine ducklings in the 2015 season. We also let all of our Black-necked Swans raise their own young, as they have great parenting skills.

by **NICK HILL**

Curator, Sylvan Heights  
Avian Breeding Center



Black-bellied Whistling Ducks protect a clutch of young ducklings at the Avian Breeding Center

# 2015 IWWA CONFERENCE

## florida

by ANNE LEMENAGER

Photos by Debbie Schouten & Anne Lemenager

The IWWA conference in Orlando, Florida was anticipated with excitement not so much for the location but for the gathering of friends from all over the continent and Europe. But the location, itinerary and great weather exceeded expectations and the week was - in a word - excellent. Kudos to Lynn Dye for all of her planning and hard work.

The Marriott Suites hotel was our headquarters for the conference and its proximity to all of the destinations for the week was perfect. We had a great time reuniting and meeting new friends on Tuesday evening at the social, and on Wednesday morning we departed for Gatorland. We were at the park for an hour before the public arrived and it was a lovely morning. The birds and reptiles provided great photo ops and before we knew it we were headed to Gene and Cathy Goss' home to view their collection and beautiful property. Thank you to them for their hospitality.

Thursday was devoted to Sea World and learning. Thanks to our host Sherry Branch for the great welcome. The place is designed for conferences and I am not sure whether we'll ever

have another venue as nice or professionally staffed for our audio/video presentations. Keith Lovett of Buttonwood Park Zoo in New Bedford, MA led off the morning with a report on the captive breeding and inventory of waterfowl in zoos. He administers the diversity of waterfowl in zoos and noted that numbers of birds has decreased as has the diversity of species on exhibit. He thinks that there needs to be more mentoring and education of young aviculturists and the ultimate goal is to increase waterfowl presence in zoos.

Frank Todd rose to the occasion, as only he can do, to talk about the impact of climate change on the arctic wildlife scene. His photos were spectacular as usual - and evidence of the reality of the melting ice up north. He also showed us how his new book is coming along and the enormous amount of work that he has done to get it published. It will, without a doubt, be the best and most extensive volume of North American waterfowl information ever. EVER!

Following a Frank Todd presentation is always a daunting task, and when the topic is Avian Influenza even more so. Nothing

pretty about that topic either, but I must say that Clayton Botkin of Vancouver, B.C. did a masterful job in his frank discussion about the impact of the epidemic on all who work with or own birds - or love them like I do. The epidemiology of the virus is really unknown and waterfowl are an easy target. Mike Lubbock of Sylvan Heights expressed concern for the future of his life's work, to say the least. All of the people who have private collections, as well as zoo keepers, must stay on top of this topic.

Sea World may be known for its exhibits and educational work but it also is the go to group for avian "Rescue-Rehab-Return" in Central Florida. As of October 15th they had answered 383 calls - 90 of which were sandhill cranes. Dean Moberg demonstrated the net launcher used to catch the birds. During lunch, a slideshow of Walter Sturgeon's birding trips to Japan was drawing oohs and ahhs from the group. The afternoon was spent touring behind the scenes at the rehab pens and pools along with the new penguin exhibit at SeaWorld.

Friday was another educational day as we went (after a pretty intensive security screening) behind the scenes at Disney's Animal Kingdom. Ever want to know how the animals are cared for while in captivity? We learned about the nutrition of the animals - down to the micro gram - and the ins and outs of the animal hospital and vet clinic.

Friday night was auction night. Maynard Axelson and Laurie Christofferson had been selling raffle tickets during the week and, along with Debbie Schouten, had things organized for bidding. Sir Christopher Marler led off the evening with his ivory gavel before handing it over to Maynard to finish things off. Veteran item displayer Morag Jones and "youngbloods" Matthe Groot and Sam Artaiz helped boost the sales up quite a bit. Once we tallied up the raffle and auction income, some \$4,000 was raised for educational programs.

It was off to Tampa and the Lowry Park Zoo early on Saturday. It was a weekend in October but the crowds were not as crazy as one would have thought. We all spread out, wandered around, and took in the sights in a well designed zoo. We headed back to the hotel and prepped for the banquet and awards presentation. President Arnold Schouten announced a new initiative designed to foster collaboration and knowledge for young aviculturists, and the plans are in the works for a conference specifically for those professionals to be held at Sylvan Heights in the near future. Mike Lubbock presented the annual Awards and although the recipients were not in attendance, congratulations are warranted.

It was a mixture of goodbyes and see you next year as the night wore down, but 23 of us were meeting at 5 the next morning to caravan (literally) to the first leg of our post convention adventure. It was still dark as we navigated our way to Giraffe Ranch - in the middle of nowhere, it seemed - north of Tampa. And what a worthwhile stop. Lex Salisbury and wife Elena Sheppa led us on our own private safari. From camels trying to drink Frank Todd's coffee, black rhinos, zebras, Dexter cattle, giraffes taking cabbage out of your hand, to cranes and wood storks and native birds feeding in the lush green swamp, this 47-acre preserve adjacent to the second largest wildlife preserve in Florida is a must stop for anyone in the area. One of the highlights of the entire week for sure.

Busch Gardens was next and I must admit that it was not the same place I visited 25 years ago. The rides and amusement park atmosphere was different, although they still have the train that tours through the "serengeti".

On Monday morning, we loaded into our vans/SUV's and headed to Sanibel and Captiva and Ding Darling Wildlife Preserve for a morning of birding, which was fabulous. Frank Todd got his close ups of the Florida mottled duck to add to his book, Chris Marler saw a flock of about 150 white pelicans, hundreds of herons, ibises, spoonbills, and egrets were feeding, and osprey were catching the fish as they jumped out of the water. Our 4 vehicles headed down Route 41 and arrived in Naples at about the same time. We went to the Naples Zoo and had the place to ourselves and watched hundreds of birds come into roost as the sun set. Seeing very large gators was the norm on the trip and a snowy egret decided to take a perch on a branch just above the pond. One splash and that was it. A sharpshinned hawk was making runs into the roost. A Pileated woodpecker headed into its tree hole for the night. Cameras were whirring and I think about 500 photos were taken - along with some video. John and Diane Nuccitelli had arranged for all of us to have dinner at a great restaurant on the docks in "Tin City".

We scattered about the Everglades on Tuesday. The Vineyard gang went on an airboat ride with a great guide who shut the boat off if we saw birds. Some folks went to another site for airboat tours, others explored the southwest corners of the state and Marco Island. We all convened for a cocktail hour before dinner in the hotel (actually one room...) and headed to dinner. Goodbyes were hard to do as we knew that we had spent 7 days together having a lot of fun and laughs and experienced things that none of us had before - at least with each other. I for one am already saving up for next year's adventure in Europe.

## 2015 AWARDS

### McQUAID AWARD

Shane Austin Sease

### HANCOCK MEMORIAL AWARD

Robert Kooy

### CHUCK PILLING MEMORIAL AWARD

Nick Tiberio

### MOSFORD/MICHEL AWARD

Martyn Croson

### FIRST BREEDING IN NORTH AMERICA

Sylvan Heights Waterfowl  
*Goosander (Mergus merganser merganser)*



# from the **iwwa** president

This is the sixth newsletter that I have written since the SHWP/IWWA alliance was formed in 2012. The time has passed quickly, as has the lead up to this year's conference. The annual conference is always a much looked forward to event. This year turned out to be another excellent time of meeting up with old friends, making new friends, going to places that have long been on the wish list, and a time to move forward with some of our Association's goals. There are so many people to thank for the success of this conference. Lynn Dye did an excellent job of planning with the help of our members who had contacts at the places we visited. There are many people to thank for hosting us, planning the conference, organizing the raffle and auction, and those who financially supported the event through purchases and or donations. Without them we could not have had such a successful outcome. A special thank you to Anne Lemenager for her recap in this newsletter of our time spent in Florida.

At our Board meeting we nominated two new directors: Kris Carrein and Chuck Cerbini. They replace Jeff Sailer and Mark Rubery who have resigned from the Board. We thank Jeff and Mark for their contributions while on the Board and hope to see them at future conferences. We recently applied for a \$5,000 grant from SeaWorld to help fund our bird import project. They awarded us the grant and we are now starting the process of importing several species of waterfowl that have been identified as very poorly represented in captivity or in need of genetic diversity here in North America. Once the birds are imported and cleared through quarantine they will be held at Sylvan Heights Waterfowl. Following successful reproduction, offspring will be distributed to facilities willing to help support this very important program. The Board has approved financial support for three internships at SHW in 2016. We continue to fund support of the White-winged Wood Duck breeding program at SHW and we will be financially supporting the work that Robert Kooy is doing in Brazil with the Brazilian Merganser captive breeding project (see page 18).

Early next year, SHW and IWWA will be sponsoring a young aviculturist conference. The goal of this conference is to encourage and support interest in aviculture, share husbandry techniques, discuss career opportunities and explore options for expanding global opportunities to protect waterfowl of the world. This is an exciting idea and will hopefully include participation from overseas.

There are two Waterfowl Survey results on the IWWA website. Those two surveys have helped guide us in the decision making process of identifying captive species in decline that should be imported. These surveys have also been of benefit to zoos and private facilities in targeting some of their waterfowl species and reproduction goals. The Board has decided that it is time to do another survey, which will put us on track for roughly a 5-year cycle. We will be mailing out the survey in the coming months. Please fill out the survey, even if you have only a few birds. If you know someone who might not know of the survey please give them a copy. Including your name on the survey is not necessary, and all responses are confidential.

The planning process has already begun for our 2016 Conference. Next year we will be travelling to Europe. We will post dates and the itinerary on the IWWA website as soon as some of the details are available. Watch for the spring newsletter for complete details. This will be an excellent opportunity to visit Europe and see some fantastic bird collections.

*Arnold Schouten*  
**President**

International Wild Waterfowl Association

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# education update

by LEE PEOPLES

Education Coordinator  
Sylvan Heights Bird Park

The hard work we've put in to grow our education and outreach programs at Sylvan Heights has paid significant dividends and kept us quite busy this past year. We experienced increased interest in field trips to the park overall and additional bookings for hands-on education programs and educational guided tours. Additionally, through the creative work of many staff members, we have introduced new ways for the public to engage with and experience the park.

One of the new activities I would like to highlight includes our recently introduced Sylvan Heights Endangered Species Passports. These have been well-received by students and adults. As visitors explore the park with their Endangered Species Passports, they can check off the endangered species they find throughout the exhibits using the signage with symbols indicating conservation status & answer the questions concerning natural history and threats to these birds. Once complete, they receive the "Sylvan Heights Conservationist" seal and the passports serve as informative references and make great souvenirs.

Another recent undertaking at the park involves our work on a two-part project that includes wetland restoration and development of education programs centered on the visitors' role as environmental stewards, and how wetland ecosystems are essential to global health. Restoration work includes removing invasive plants and planting species native to and appropriate for the site. We will soon begin construction on a Native Nature Walkway where students will be engaged in a Living Laboratory. Experiencing this natural area along the Native Nature Walkway will give students and the visiting public the rare opportunity to experience a wetland and learn the role wetland habitats serve and how these habitats support the majority of North America's

threatened and endangered species. New signage will explain the negative impacts of invasive species on ecosystems. And, as a side note, students will have the opportunity to observe neo-tropical migratory birds in the forthcoming Wings of the Tropics exhibit, and discuss the importance of how these birds are dependent on North American forested wetland habitats for breeding grounds. By utilizing natural wetlands within the park, our programs and new signage convey the significance of local habitats and connections to global biodiversity.

In support of Sylvan Heights' unique experiential learning opportunities, we have recently been awarded grant support from several funders. The Dominion Foundation notified us in July of their contribution in developing the Native Nature Walkway and Living Laboratory. On September 1, the Burroughs-Wellcome Fund announced Sylvan Heights Bird Park will be awarded the Student Science Enrichment Program Grant over the next three years for Sylvan Heights' new Soaring into Science Program. In a collaborative partnership between Sylvan Heights Bird Park and KIPP: Eastern North Carolina Public Schools (KIPP: ENC), the Soaring into Science Program will engage rising 9th graders from KIPP:ENC in an intensive two-week summer program of hands-on scientific and mathematical discovery, followed by autumn and spring Saturday academies. This is the first time any organization in Halifax has received this prestigious award.

In October, Duke Energy committed their support to further develop the Sylvan Heights' Native Nature Walkway and Living Laboratory. This additional funding helps develop the Native Nature Walkway boardwalk, and expand our wetland ecology and biology programs.



## Carrying Sylvan Heights into the future.

The Swan Legacy honors donors who have taken steps to ensure the future of Sylvan Heights. This organization recognizes donors who have named Sylvan Heights Waterfowl Society in their wills, on a life insurance policy, or in some other estate planning arrangements.

The Waterfowl Society recognizes their generosity by presenting Swan Legacy members with a commemorative swan and by inviting them to a private Swan Legacy luncheon or dinner each year. The meeting includes a behind-the-scenes tour for members and guests and offers them the opportunity to hear firsthand about Sylvan Heights programs and plans.

Your Swan Legacy membership lets us thank you today for the benefits your gifts will ensure tomorrow. It also lets us share our hopes for the Park with the friends and the families who care about it most.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss your gift plans, please contact Brent Lubbock at 252-826-3186, or e-mail at [brent@shwpark.com](mailto:brent@shwpark.com).



Black-necked Swan cygnet at Sylvan Heights Bird Park

# avian alumni

Updates from our former interns and aviculturists

Animals have been a big part of my life, and I have always been particularly fascinated with birds. As a young teenager, I started raising upland gamebirds with my father. I eventually started focusing primarily on pheasants. During my senior year of college, I had the opportunity to participate in an internship at the Sylvan Heights Breeding Center. This was my first real experience with waterfowl breeding and husbandry. This experience helped shift my future goals toward a career working with waterfowl. After graduating college, I was offered a position as Assistant Curator of Aviculture at the breeding center, a position I held for nearly four years.

I gained vast amounts of knowledge and experience from working closely with Mike Lubbock and Nick Hill. They taught me various avian husbandry and propagation techniques, and I gained a great deal of knowledge regarding avian incubation and rearing. I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with such knowledgeable people at such a diverse avian collection. I also gained valuable knowledge about aviary construction and design.

During my time at Sylvan I met my wife, Claire, who was working at the park as an aviculturist, and our son Lee was born in 2013. Later that year, I took a job at the Alaska SeaLife Center in Seward, Alaska as their Eider Research Aviculturist. At the SeaLife Center, I work with the captive flocks of Spectacled and Steller's Eiders. We are currently working to enhance artificial incubation techniques and promote natural hen incubation in our captive flock. The knowledge I gained at Sylvan has helped me make improvements to our incubation techniques and overall breeding success. Steller's Eiders are the main focus of our program, due to decline throughout their historic nesting range in Alaska. In 2016, we hope to start supplement-



ing the wild populations through reintroductions of offspring from our captive flock into their historic nesting range on the Yukon-Kuskokim Delta in Western Alaska.

This past summer, we did a pilot study to test the feasibility of hatching, rearing and releasing ducklings on the tundra. For this study I designed and constructed a duckling rearing facility and aviary at a very remote site on the lower Kashunuk River. The remoteness of the site made logistics challenging, as all our supplies had to be brought in via floatplane or boat. Construction of the aviary was also challenging, due to the permafrost and harsh weather conditions. The SeaLife Center Eider team tested the effectiveness of our facility using Northern Pintail eggs we collected from nearby site. Although we encountered challenges and many unexpected obstacles, we were able to successfully incubate, hatch, rear, and release all the Pintails we collected. We learned a tremendous amount from this pilot study and hope to apply what we have learned to Steller's Eider reintroduction next summer.



**NATHAN BAWTINHIMER**

Eider Research Aviculturist II  
Alaska SeaLife Center

## raising SERIEMAS

by **TAYLOR SILCOX & MOLLY SATTERWHITE**  
Aviculturists, Sylvan Heights Avian Breeding Center

The Red-legged Seriema (*Cariama cristata*), is a terrestrial bird from the family Cariamidae. Indigenous to South America, they live primarily in grasslands where they forage for small rodents, snakes and insects. They nest on the ground or low in trees, about six feet up.

This year marked the first successful breeding of seriemas at the Sylvan Heights Avian Breeding Center. The seriemas made a nest out of sticks and bark held up by a basket. The pair laid a clutch of eggs that were left with the parents for the majority of the incubation period; which normally takes 24 days. The eggs were removed a week early, placed in an artificial incubator, and monitored daily to ensure that they hatched safely. Chicken breast and crickets were the primary diet for the chicks. To track proper growth rate, the chicks were weighed daily. At this young age they needed to gain 10% of their body weight every day. Due to human hand-raising, the baby seriemas became imprinted and as such are more social with people compared to parent-raised seriemas.

Molly Satterwhite, an aviculturist at the breeding center, is the primary trainer of the seriema, Dagget. Dagget is taken on walks around the park grounds to socialize and interact with visitors. He is also trained in recall, returning to Molly on command, and targeting; which involves pointing at an object - generally a stand, post, or platform - for him to jump to. Due to Dagget's training, he is occasionally used for educational programs and has even appeared on television a couple of times.

Birds will often re-nest in the event that their previous clutch is unsuccessful or is removed. As the breeding pair had their first clutch removed, they laid a second clutch. This second clutch was left to be parent-raised. Parent-raising gives the parents a satisfaction of successfully hatching their clutch. This leads to increased successes in future breeding seasons. The parents, however, were inexperienced in raising chicks and needed assistance in feeding them. This meant the aviculturists, Molly and Taylor Silcox, needed to feed them four times a day to ensure proper growth. A similar diet as with the first clutch - mice and crickets - was offered to the parents to try and enforce feeding habits. This technique worked well and the parents began to feed their young on their own, and were recently weaned.

Using their experiences from this year, the aviculturists hope to have more successful clutches with the seriemas in future breeding seasons. With Dagget entertaining visitors at the park, we aim to increase awareness of the species. So look out for him and Molly on your next trip to Sylvan Heights Bird Park!



Aviculturist Molly Satterwhite works with Dagget, a young Red-legged Seriema. ▶



photo by Robert Kooy

## Endangered Species Report: BRAZILIAN MERGANSERS

For the past seven years, Sylvan Heights Bird Park and the International Wild Waterfowl Association have been involved in efforts to prevent the extinction of the critically endangered Brazilian Merganser by providing funding, training, and advising to the Brazilian organizations working with this species.

We have recently received an update from Robert Kooy, manager at Zooparque Itatiba in Brazil. Conservation teams have been continuing their efforts to locate and track breeding Brazilian Mergansers through some of the most remote river habitat. When a healthy nest is discovered, the teams remove a few of the eggs and transport them back to Zooparque Itatiba, leaving the rest to hatch with the parents in the wild.

This year, the teams were able to collect a total of eight eggs from two different nest sites, and successfully raised all eight ducklings back at the zoo. Should the habitat for wild Brazilian Mergansers continue to degrade, the birds housed at Zooparque Itatiba will ensure that this species does not disappear altogether. Ideally, their offspring may also help bolster wild populations in the future.

In addition to collecting and raising these birds, Robert has been building a large new aviary and pool to house the adolescent birds. At the October 2015 IWWA conference, a grant from the IWWA was allocated towards the completion of this project. We'd like to congratulate everyone involved in the conservation of the Brazilian Merganser on a very successful year!

## sylvan heights bird park is *growing!*

With an ever-increasing number of guests and school groups visiting Sylvan Heights, the need for additional land has become very apparent over the past two years. This year, we have been working hard to raise the funds needed to purchase ten acres of land adjacent to our parking lot. Thanks to many generous donors, we are nearly halfway there, but we need your help! Please consider making a donation to help us complete this land purchase and ensure that Sylvan Heights has room to grow for the future. As an extra incentive, the Sylvan Heights Board of Directors will help raise funds to match all donations up to a total of \$25,000, so any contribution you make will effectively be doubled.

Once the land is secured, our first project will utilize two acres to expand our parking lot. The current gravel lot in front of the Visitor Center can no longer accommodate all of the school buses, tour buses, and family vehicles that come to us during our busy spring and summer season. This additional land will allow us to give our visitors a more pleasant experience and better first impression of the park. In the future, it will also allow us to expand our education department and classroom facilities.



## *ten acres*

will ensure that the park can welcome more visitors for many years to come.



## thank you to our donors

Sylvan Heights Bird Park gratefully acknowledges our donors of \$500 or more since April 1, 2015 through September 30, 2015.

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## HELP SYLVAN HEIGHTS GROW INTO THE FUTURE.

We need your help to ensure the park's ability accommodate an increasing number of visitors and school groups. Your contribution will help us purchase a tract of land adjacent to the park, giving us room to grow!

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

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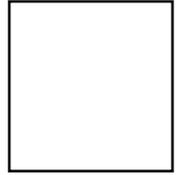
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(Please send to Sylvan Heights Bird Park • PO Box 368 • Scotland Neck, NC 27874) **Thank you!**



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## membership **matters!**

Your support helps provide care for rare  
and endangered waterfowl species.

Thank you.



Flying Steamer Ducks (*Tachyeres patachonicus*)  
at the Sylvan Heights Avian Breeding Center.