

words on
waterfowl <sup>and
flamingos!</sup>

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



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SPRING/SUMMER 2017 • Issue No. 9



American flamingos at the Sylvan Heights Bird Park Visitor Center.

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the director's report

Mike Lubbock
Executive Director
Sylvan Heights Bird Park

Spring has come early this year, and the exceptionally nice weather in February helped us to double our normal visitation figures. Over the winter, Brad Hazelton and his staff worked tremendously hard to finish off our new exhibit, "Wings of Tropics", in order for it to be ready to open on April 29th. It is now open, and as you will see, it turned out to be better than one could have dreamed. Their work was so professional, and the whole structure apart from the brick work was done in-house by our staff and volunteers. Doing it this way, we know that it will be built with the birds in mind and the savings run into hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Recently, we welcomed two new staff members: our new Retail Manager, Tasha Davis, and our new Education Coordinator, Ashley Hamlet. They both have arrived in the height of our busy season and are already proving to be great additions to our team.

We are heading towards 2000 members and families supporting our work, and enjoying the Park and benefits from their memberships. One thing we are finding is that visitors are so thrilled to be able to bring their picnics to the Park and, especially with our location, it really helps families that might not be able to afford to spend the day without this opportunity. Very few places allow people to bring their own food and drinks, and it is nice to see the rebirth of picnics instead of fast food.

This winter, we were all extremely sad to lose one of my closest friends, Frank S. Todd. We had known each other since 1969. At that time, he was curator at Los Angeles Zoo and had the only Californian condor in captivity before the remaining few birds were collected from the wild to start a breeding program, which has been very successful. That condor, "Topa", has produced more young than any of the other birds. I remember asking Frank how long they lived and he replied, "They can live a long time - Topa will probably outlive me". Topa is still alive and still breeding. In over 40 years, Frank and I have done a tremendous amount of work together with waterfowl, constantly communicating while he wrote his first book, *Natural History of Waterfowl*, and subsequently the *Handbook of Waterfowl*. We have done many trips together and I will miss him greatly, as will all the staff at Sylvan Heights. He was working on his latest book on the waterfowl of North America when he died, and a team of his friends are working to get it published this year.

I'd like to give a special thanks to all our amazing volunteers. They help greet people, staff the Landing Zone, make seed sticks and duck feed bags for visitors, and generally offer back up to all the staff at Sylvan Heights. Last year we had over 130 volunteers and they are the backbone of this organization.



ON THE COVER

American Flamingos bathe in the Multinational Aviary at Sylvan Heights Bird Park. Flamingos have been the focus of several projects at the park over the past six months. (Page 8)

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

Photos by Katie G. Lubbock

A male Costa's Hummingbird in the new "Wings of the Tropics" exhibit.

It is an exciting time of the year here at Sylvan Heights, and as always seems to be the case, the park is keeping us running at full speed. Besides this being the time of the year when the majority of our species are breeding, we have just completed and opened to the public our new "Wings of the Tropics" exhibit. It seems to be a wonderful success and it gives me and my staff a great feeling of satisfaction to see everybody enjoying it and to hear all of their kind comments. This new exhibit has allowed us to add several new and exciting bird species to the collection, including Inca Terns, Gambel's Quail, Red-legged Seriamas, and African Fish Eagles. It has also given us the opportunity to put on exhibit numerous species that have been in the collection, but off exhibit, such as the Costa's Hummingbird.

Additionally, we've already had two Eurasian Eagle Owl chicks hatch this season, as well as Black-necked Swans, Black-necked Stilts, European Blackbirds, and numerous waterfowl species.

Finishing "Wings of the Tropics" now gives us the opportunity to finish off some small jobs around the park before we jump full force into the next major project: our new pavilion. We have already started clearing trees at the site between the tree house and the Ruff Aviary, so please excuse our work now and in the future as we begin making progress.



Visitors enjoy the new sights and sounds of the "Wings of the Tropics" exhibit.



Gambel's Quail



Pin-tailed Whydah



Inca Tern



Broad-billed Hummingbirds buzz around visitors in the walk-through portion of the new aviary.



Park Sees Record-Breaking Attendance

Just after Sylvan Heights Bird Park celebrated its 10th anniversary last October, the park reached another milestone. In December, we welcomed our 50,000th visitor of 2016, marking the highest annual visitation since the park opened.

Attendance continues to grow in 2017. Unusually warm winter weather brought flocks of visitors to the park in January and February, and the spring months ushered in field trips and education programs for schools around eastern North Carolina, southern Virginia, and the Raleigh area. In April 2017, the park saw nearly 10,000 visitors, smashing our previous monthly visitation record.

We'd like to thank you, our members and supporters, for your part in the park's tremendous growth. By joining the Sylvan Heights Waterfowl Society, donating to our projects, telling your friends and family about the park, and even sharing our social media posts, you are contributing to Sylvan Heights Bird Park's continued conservation and education efforts.

Female Whooping Crane Arrives

One of the world's most endangered birds finally has a mate. In April, Sylvan Heights Bird Park received approval to house a non-releasable female Whooping Crane. After an introduction process, she will hopefully join our male in the Whooping Crane exhibit.

Sylvan Heights Bird Park's male whooping crane arrived from the International Crane Foundation as a fledgling in 2009. Originally meant to join a new eastern migratory flock, it was determined that a mild health issue would make the arduous journey from Wisconsin to Florida too risky for him. Instead, he was sent to Sylvan Heights Bird Park to help teach students and visitors about the conservation challenges facing his species.

It is our hope that the two cranes ultimately form a pair and begin nesting. To learn more about the Whooping Crane's story, be sure to read *Whooping Cranes: An American Voice That Was Nearly Lost* on page 13.

Nests For Local Wild Waterfowl

Sylvan Heights staff and volunteers have been lending a hand to help local populations of North American Wood Ducks. In February, staff cleaned and replenished more than eighty Wood Duck nest boxes on local private farmlands.

One month later, aviculturists returned to the sites to monitor and record nesting activity in the boxes. Continued monitoring and maintenance of these boxes could provide valuable information about nesting success of North American Wood Ducks in Halifax County, NC, as well as the impact of waterfowl habitats on private land.

The Wood Duck nest box project also gives our interns and students real-world experience in aviculture and data collection in the field. The program has the potential to grow into a great opportunity for biology internship and community service projects.

Hamerkops Build Nest In Africa Aviary

The park's Africa aviary is now the site of a major avian construction project! Our pair of Hamerkops wasted no time in starting their nest this year, and they chose an unusual location: the roof of the Africa sign inside the aviary.

Hamerkops are well-known for their large, dome-shaped nests made of sticks, vegetation, and mud. The nests can reach nearly 5 feet in diameter, with walls, a roof, and an entrance tunnel.

In the wild, the nests are built in the forks of trees, on cliffs, or on man-made structures. Wild Hamerkop nests also provide shelter and nesting habitat for many other African bird and mammal species.

Hamerkops may build several nests in a given season, even if they are not breeding. Our aviculturists will be monitoring our pair closely to see if they lay eggs, or if this nest is just a practice run!

2018 Conservation Workshop Planned

Sylvan Heights Bird Park and the International Wild Waterfowl Association have started the initial planning for the next Future of Waterfowl Conservation Workshop. Designed to inspire collaboration and create a professional network among young waterfowl conservationists, biologists, and aviculturists, the first Future of Waterfowl Conservation Workshop was held in February 2016 at Sylvan Heights Bird Park.

In an effort to increase the number of attendees the workshop can accommodate, Sylvan Heights and the IWWA have partnered with East Carolina University for the next workshop, tentatively scheduled to coincide with the fall 2018 IWWA conference. A portion of the workshop will take place at ECU, utilizing the university's conference facilities and technology. Attendees will then travel to Sylvan Heights Bird Park for a hands-on aviculture workshop. More details about the workshop will be published as plans progress.

Beavers Move Into Park's Wetland

A family of American beavers made their home in the park's wetland over the winter. The beavers constructed a dam across the stream near the park's tree house, flooding the low-lying areas in the forest and dramatically enlarging the size of the wetland around the end of the Nature Walkway.

The beavers have created an incredibly diverse wetland habitat that supports a variety of wildlife, and a unique education experience for our school groups studying wetlands. Great Blue Herons, egrets, Wood Ducks, turtles, muskrats, mink, and many other native wildlife species have been seen in greater numbers since the beavers began their work.

Although the beavers are primarily nocturnal, they can occasionally be seen in the park's wetland during the day. A family of nutria also inhabits this area, but can easily be distinguished from beavers by their thin, rodent-like tails.

flamingos

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Two Bolivian conservation expeditions, ninety-eight new Chilean and Caribbean Flamingos welcomed to the flock, and one very rare hatchling. In the past six months, flamingos have certainly been in the spotlight at Sylvan Heights Bird Park.



Visitors to Sylvan Heights Bird Park can't help but notice some of our more flamboyant residents. More than 160 flamingos are on exhibit throughout the park, and they represent three of the six flamingo species found in the world: the Lesser Flamingo from Africa, the Caribbean Flamingo from Central and South America, and Chilean Flamingo from South America. What visitors may not know is that Sylvan Heights Bird Park has a long history of working with flamingos, and we've recently expanded those efforts by teaming up with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) to help grassroots organizations in La Paz, Bolivia conserve the James's Flamingo and the endangered Andean Flamingo.

One of those organizations is Centro de Estudios en Biología Teórica y Aplicada (BIOTA), headed by Omar Rocha and Sol Aguilar, who have dedicated their lives to preserving birds in Bolivia and have over a 25-year history studying flamingos. Omar and Sol have been banding young flamingos at Laguna Colorada for over 15 years, trying to understand their seasonal movements to better conserve these species. Located in southwest Bolivia at over 14,000 feet above sea level, Laguna Colorada is one of the most important nesting sites in the world for James's Flamingos and holds large colonies of breeding Andean and Chilean Flamingos.

The local indigenous communities surrounding Laguna Colorada have collected flamingo eggs as a cultural food source for hundreds of years. The Bolivian government and BIOTA have worked with locals to reduce disturbance to these rare flamingos. Locals now go into the colony early in the nesting season on only one day of the year, and they can collect as many as 50 eggs per family during that time. By restricting egg collection to the early part of the nesting season, Omar and Sol believe that many of the birds have the chance to re-nest, and go on to lay a second egg and successfully raise a chick that season.

The indigenous communities are only interested in collecting fresh eggs. Any eggs that have a developing embryo inside are discarded, as they are considered less edible. BIOTA, Sylvan Heights, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and several other organizations have teamed up to rescue those discarded eggs and transport them to one of Bolivia's only zoos, Zoológico Municipal Vesty Pakos Sofro located in city of La Paz, with the goal of establishing Bolivia's first captive colonies of Andean and James's Flamingos.

In December 2016, Mike Lubbock and I had the opportunity to travel with Omar and Sol to Laguna Colorada and help train individuals from the zoo, BIOTA, and the indigenous community on how to safely transport the eggs back to the zoo. Portable incubators provided by WCS and Sylvan Heights allowed the eggs to make the two-day journey back to the zoo, as Laguna Colorada is located high in the Andes and the "roads" leading up the lagoon take a full day to navigate.

Prior to this trip, Sol and Omar had visited Sylvan in 2015 to learn how to hand feed and raise baby flamingos. They returned to Bolivia with photos and a handful of electrical parts from a dismantled incubator at Sylvan Heights, as it is almost impossible to get an incubator in Bolivia. Using limited resources and tools, La Paz Zoo did an amazing job of reconstructing the incubator. During our trip, Mike and I helped install the electrical parts and instruct staff about how to regulate temperature and humidity while checking on the health of the embryos. Sylvan Heights is excited to continue to work with this conservation project, and has high hopes for its continued success.



James's and Andean Flamingos in Bolivia
photo by Dustin Foote

Bolivia

DECEMBER 2016

by **DUSTIN FOOTE**
Assistant Curator & Research Coordinator
Sylvan Heights Bird Park



Brad Hazelton returned to Bolivia in January to train La Paz Zoo staff in the care and rearing of flamingos.

photo by Sol Aguilar

Bolivia

JANUARY 2017

by BRAD HAZELTON

General Curator
Sylvan Heights Bird Park

In January of this year, I was able to travel to La Paz, Bolivia, to assist Omar Rocha, Sol Aguilar and the very dedicated staff at the La Paz Zoo in rearing both James' and Andean Flamingo chicks. Fortunately, Sol and Omar had already been to Sylvan Heights for two weeks last summer to learn how to rear flamingo chicks. This was a very good thing since the chicks started hatching about five days before I arrived in Bolivia. This project has had numerous challenges, and possibly the biggest one was related to the incubation and evaluation of the collected eggs. My own expertise in egg incubation was put to the test as the staff in La Paz took pictures of eggs being candled and then emailed those images to me so that I could determine viability and a hatch date.

From the very beginning when the eggs were being collected and transported back to the zoo, there were difficulties. An uprising in one of the towns resulted in a blockade of the only major North-South road in Bolivia, allowing no one to pass – including our team of egg collectors. This also blocked the only access to fuel for hundreds of miles. After some quick thinking by Sol and Omar, they were able to take smaller, rougher roads to circumnavigate the blockades... only to have car problems resulting from the poor fuel that they were able to locate. As a result, the two-day trip ended up taking four and a half days to complete. After such a long time in a portable incubator, I did not think there was any chance of hatching chicks successfully, but fortunately, I was wrong and many did.

Another challenge we faced related to the actual raising of the chicks in Bolivia was finding the correct ingredients for the chick formula. Our formula is a carefully measured mixture of baby food cereal, shrimp, fish, eggs, and calcium carbonate. However, Bolivia is a land-locked country without a coast, so shrimp is almost impossible to find and it is very expensive when it is found. Numerous hours were spent driving from one pharmacy to another trying to locate calcium carbonate, and when it was found, they usually only had enough for a couple of batches which meant that within a couple of days you were doing the same thing all over again. This search for the correct ingredients happened in addition to feeding chicks every two hours from 6:00 am until 12:00 pm, which cut short our travel time.

We also learned that all fish are not created equally. We started off using Tilapia that is found in the local markets, but we were not happy with the weight gains that the chicks were having. There is a small minnow-sized fish called "ispi" from Lake Titicaca that is fried and eaten by the Bolivians and we thought this might be a better choice for our fish protein. We tried ispi and were very disappointed when our chicks lost weight instead of gaining at an even greater percentage. In the end, the best fish turned out to be the carp that were captured out of the lagoon in the zoo.

It was also a challenge finding a similar baby food cereal that resulted in appropriate weights gains. We attempted to find solutions to all of these problems while trying to train zoo employees in rearing techniques and in between shuttling back and forth between Sol and Omar's house and the zoo as we had chicks in both places. I don't have time in this article to discuss the altitude sickness or the car wreck going to the zoo or the crooked policia looking for a bribe or the many other obstacles that arose, but I am very glad to say that despite all of these setbacks, we managed to raise eight James's chicks and one Andean chick. And we have very high hopes for our next attempt, since we have already solved many of these problems and will have much of the staff at the zoo already trained in the rearing of these rare flamingo chicks.

flocks of flamingos at sylvan heights

by BRAD HAZELTON

Over the past several months, we have welcomed nearly 100 new flamingos to our flocks at Sylvan Heights Bird Park. We added about 50 new Chilean Flamingos to our existing 24 birds, as well as 50 new American Flamingos to the 12 that we were already exhibiting.

One of the most exciting additions to the collection is a new baby Lesser Flamingo that has only just hatched. It has been a couple of years since we have hatched any Lesser Flamingos and it feels good to be making progress with that species once again. Last year, we had nine infertile eggs. So far this year, we have already had two fertile eggs laid and we have the potential for more before the season ends.



Lesser flamingo chick



soaring into science

by LEE PEOPLES

Interpretive Naturalist & Program Director
Sylvan Heights Bird Park



Soaring into Science has successfully completed its pilot year with the first KIPP: GCP class of students, concluding with their March 25 Saturday academy. Participating guest scientists from the NC Museum of Natural Sciences and the US Fish & Wildlife Service joined Sylvan Heights in research and natural history presentations, experiential learning activities, and mentoring students in the steps necessary for career paths in their fields of expertise.

Dustin Foote, Sylvan Heights' Assistant Curator & Research Coordinator, began with a discussion of the biology and ecology of raptors and conducted an owl pellet dissection demonstration and activity for students. Naturalist, herpetologist, Emeritus Research Curator, and past Deputy Director with the Museum of Natural Sciences, Alvin Braswell, presented his research concerning acidity in ephemeral wetlands and the relationship to amphibian usage in North Carolina. Equipped with nets and rubber boots, students continued their inquiries from the research into the wetlands along the Duke Energy Nature Walkway, where they engaged in measuring pH and collecting water samples teeming with macro-invertebrates, mosquito fish, plants, algae and more. In this living laboratory, students learned how varying levels of pH affect the biodiversity in a freshwater ecosystem. Next, they learned the natural history of North Carolina herpetofauna by observing preserved and living specimens from Alvin Braswell's collection.

US Fish & Wildlife Service Ecologist, Tom Augspurger, defined environmental toxicology and how this field of study is essential in determining water quality. In a discussion on risk assessment, students learned that both components of hazard and exposure have to be present to indicate risk. Students had the opportunity to apply this knowledge as they were given statements from news reports and had to assess if the information provided determined whether or not a risk was indeed present. In the pursuit of becoming scientifically literate citizens, this exercise also helped students separate fact from fallacy. Next, we discussed the history of oil spills, techniques used for clean up and reviewed a seven year study on the recovery of biodiversity of a microhabitat following the Exxon Valdez oil spill. Students participated in an oil spill lab in which they tested the efficacy of different sorbent materials, and explored new techniques by combining sorbent materials in creative ways to clean up oil spills.

It has been a great year with KIPP GCP's Soaring Into Science participants as we have come to know them personally and been honored to watch them embrace the natural world in wonder. While sharpening their critical thinking skills, the students have also grown in confidence as they now consider careers in science and math as real and possible pathways to follow. They will keep their boots for future wetland explorations, while Sylvan Heights and our guest scientists will keep the lines of communication open for their future questions and the opportunity to guide them towards careers in science. Meanwhile, we are preparing for the next class of Soaring into Science participants. For year two of the project, we are excited to be serving two cohorts of students: two week summer sessions will begin in June for the first group and in July for the second group. It is only through continued member support that Sylvan Heights is able to perpetuate its unique experiential learning environment, natural resources, diverse bird collection and education animal ambassadors, and maintain highly specialized staff, giving these students and many more the opportunity to embrace our role as environmental stewards and become scientifically literate citizens. Thank you.

whooping cranes

An American Voice That Was Nearly Lost

by NICK NEES

Aviculturist
Sylvan Heights Bird Park

The Whooping Crane's whoop can be heard at distances of up to several miles. Their whooping call goes perfectly with their stature; Whooping Cranes are the tallest flying bird in North America, standing in at just over five feet tall with a wingspan of up to eight feet. They may be audible for miles at a time, but their voice was once all but lost.

Though today we fully understand the importance of these birds, back in the early to mid 1900's conservation wasn't the predominant thought. In the 1940s, the population of Whooping Cranes had dwindled down to a mere 15 birds, which is astronomically low. How did this happen? Well, as settlers moved westward in the 1800s they converted habitat into farmland, and they also partook in unrestricted hunting of these large birds. Basically, you could say the cranes were going the way of the Passenger Pigeon. Luckily though, Franklin Roosevelt happened to be a big fan of our beautiful lands and helped usher in an era of environmental land protections. In 1937, the coastal wetland in Texas where the Whooping Cranes would winter was protected, though at the time it wasn't known that the wetland was also the cranes' wintering grounds. Canada beat us to the punch in the environmental protection game, and nearly three decades before we knew where they nested, a wetland refuge was created in northern Alberta/ southern Northwest Territories. The wild population that still migrates between these wetland habitats has grown to around 300 individuals at this point, a small number still, but a huge leap from where they once were.

If you know Sylvan Heights, then you know how much we focus on captive breeding of endangered species. Director Mike Lubbock has helped first hand with reintroduction of species

in the past, such as the Nene in Hawai'i and the White-headed Duck in Spain, and currently we are helping support a very important captive breeding effort for the Brazilian Merganser at Zooparque Itatiba. This type of conservation technique is also being used with the Whooping Cranes in three different locations to help bolster the natural migrating populations' numbers. However, these three populations aren't directly correlated with the naturally occurring one. There are two non-migrating populations on the Gulf Coast: one in Florida and the other in Louisiana. The third is referred to as the Eastern Migratory Population, which was put into place through a program up in Wisconsin known as Operation Migration.

Sylvan Heights has just added a female Whooping Crane to the collection. This is beyond exciting for a multitude of reasons, not least being the potential offspring possibilities. We have installed a barrier within our male Whooping Crane's exhibit so that we can go through the introduction process without worry of aggression. Obviously, our hope is that the two hit it off and are able to coexist with one another. That being said, cranes, like people, don't always just accept any old partner like many of the ducks and geese might.

From the brink of extinction to a steady, healthy, upward trending population is wonderful news for these majestic birds. Luckily for them, the cries for help from conservationists (and bird lovers alike) from across the United States was equally as loud as the cranes themselves. As our country continues to grow and change, so too will the struggle to protect these birds and their habitat from human disruptions.



from the **iwwa** president

Spring has finally sprung from the grips of a very harsh winter that we experienced here in the Pacific Northwest. We had been spoiled by several mild winters to the point where I had begun to forget about the challenges of ice and snow. With that refresher course behind us, we look forward to a good breeding season which often follows a harsh winter. No matter when spring arrives it is always an awe inspiring time of year. The explosions of life and never ending signs of activity makes me appreciate the amazing world we live in.

IWWA's mission to protect, conserve and disseminate knowledge for the benefit of birds globally currently seems extremely important. Current political decisions have resulted in risks to water quality and habitat destruction due to a renewed interest in fossil fuel exploration and transportation. Scientific evidence is being challenged to the point that the science community has been putting on public awareness marches around the world. Now is a time for us to work even harder to share our passion for birds by engaging as many people as possible, for their own future well-being. The known facts about threatened and endangered birds and the role of a healthy ecosystem need to be delivered to our communities especially in places where natural wildlife areas do not exist. Without real life nature experiences it is very difficult to grasp the intricate relationship of a healthy functioning ecosystem.

During our 58 year history we have had many very active and talented members who achieved great success through their

work with wildlife. Recently we lost two very special members and strong IWWA advocates and supporters. Frank Todd passed away last November and Glen Smart passed away in January. They both had a passion for birds and animals and we all benefited from their shared knowledge and experiences. Frank and Glen will always be missed and certainly never forgotten. Having known and learned from them both, I know we can keep their legacies alive by continuing to keep the mission of IWWA succeeding with the same passion and devotion that they shared.

This October our annual conference will be in Connecticut. Thanks to planning efforts from Lynn Dye, Ian Gereg, Mike and Ali Lubbock, and Nick Tiberio, it looks like an excellent fall conference in a very beautiful part of the country. Please check our website for conference details and registration information. You will also find information about a post-conference opportunity to visit New York City attractions along with the Bronx and Central Park Zoos. I hope to see you at the conference. Until then, as Frank would often say, "Keep the Faith".

Arnold Schouten
President

International Wild Waterfowl Association



iwwa conference **2017**

CONNECTICUT

Oct. 18th - 22nd

**Livingston Ripley
Waterfowl Conservancy**

**Steinhardt Garden Tour
& Frank Todd Memorial**

**Maritime Aquarium at
Norwalk**

Birding Cruise

**Annual IWWA Auction
for Conservation**

OPEN TO ALL IWWA &
SYLVAN HEIGHTS MEMBERS!

*For more information and
registration, please visit*

wildwaterfowl.org



the white- headed duck

by MORAG JONES

Photos by Katie G. Lubbock



“It is hard not to watch a White-headed Duck proving his worth to a mate... he is a proud and distinctive duck.”



It is hard not to watch a White-headed Duck proving his worth to a mate. The familiar cocked-up tail starts a fascinating sequence of hunching, kick-flaps and turning postures. Sometimes he shakes his tail and flicks his head, making little piping calls, all to impress his ladies. He is a proud and distinctive duck with an obvious white head, small black cap and a curiously humped blue bill. Those blue bills are at their brightest for the breeding season. By July, the bill fades to a slatey gray.

A little larger than the North American Ruddy Duck, his chestnut plumage is paler and faintly pencilled. The White-headed Duck has the longest tail of all the ‘stiff-tails’, getting on for four inches. They weigh in at around 25 ounces, with males a little heavier than females. It is hard for these dumpy birds to move on land, and getting airborne is a serious effort. Their legs and huge webbed feet are well back on the body, not neatly balanced like the dabbling ducks. No wonder they prefer to spend all their time on the water.

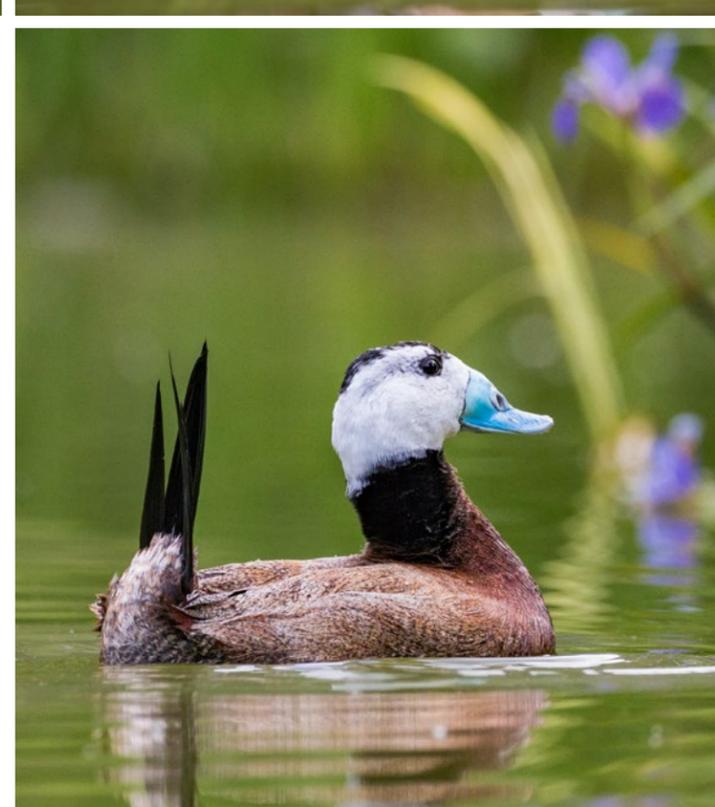
White-headed Ducks nest where reeds and rushes emerge from the water on the margins of small lakes. They may draw vegetation together to make a cupped platform nest, sometimes even pulling overhead leaves to form a roof. Old nests of other birds, such as coots or ducks might be taken over instead. The young are able to dive a few minutes after first taking to the water. When under threat or alarmed, down they go. Diving is the primary method of feeding. Their diet is mainly invertebrates such as midge larvae and small snails. Seeds and floating vegetation are also eaten when they are available.

When they are not breeding, White-headed Ducks are quite sociable. On larger areas of water they can be seen in groups. As spring is in the air, flotillas of adults start a communal courtship, swimming in a neat formation. As nesting approaches, breeding birds prefer a little seclusion and they move to smaller lakes and ponds.

These are ducks of the Western Palearctic, with very small stationary populations in southern Spain, Turkey and North Afri-

ca. Slightly larger groups are found in the former Russian states, central and eastern Asia. These eastern birds migrate, but all are under threat from climate change and habitat loss at the hand of man. The number of wintering birds in Europe is estimated at 7,500-15,900 individuals. The trend is not good, their numbers are still declining. Since 2000, the White-headed Duck has been classed as endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. The rate of decline of the White-headed Duck is possibly slowing. In Spain, a conservation programme has been ongoing for several years. In other countries within its range, there are hunting bans and legal protection.

Small pockets of the North American Ruddy Duck from captive collections became naturalised in southern England last century. Some were believed to have made their way to Spain. The ruddy duck and its hybrids are socially dominant in the mating game, threatening the fragile populations even further. Evidence that these interbred with the White-headed Duck led to a concentrated effort to eradicate the ruddy duck from the UK. It remains a restricted species there today.



helping or hindering

When should humans step in to assist injured wildlife?

It's spring, and you know what that means: lots of our native species are breeding and raising their own young. It can be fun and educational to watch these natural phenomena unfold, and sometimes humans may be tempted to interfere. However, we should consider a few things before we get involved with native fauna.

If you're concerned about the well being of a duck, goose, swan, or their young, first watch them. Do they look injured? Are they alone? If the bird looks injured, watch it for a few moments before you call someone for help. Sometimes, what seems like an injury could just be a natural behavior. For example, the killdeer, a native shorebird of this area, feigns a broken wing to lure predators away from their nests. If you still think the bird is injured after further observation, find a local wildlife rehabilitator or call animal control.

Many people feel the need to collect the animal and nurse it themselves, but without proper training and permits, this could endanger the animal even more, and may even be illegal. A licensed rehabilitator will know the proper protocols for treating and feeding the animal, and will have a much higher chance of success.

by **TAYLOR SILCOX**
Aviculturist, Sylvan Heights
Avian Breeding Center



People often mistake the killdeer's natural behavior for an injury, and may unnecessarily try to rescue a healthy bird with a nest.

Photo by Katie G. Lubbock

If you think the animal is abandoned, do some more observation. If it is an adult, it's likely just foraging and will fly away on its own. Fledglings, or fully feathered young birds, fall from their nests and learn to fly quickly thereafter. It's a natural and important step in their growth, and one they must learn on their own. A huge predator-like creature trying to help would just cause the animal stress. If the bird is young, such as a downy duckling, wait for a bit and watch to see if a parent returns. Sometimes when threatened, the mother will fly away from the young ones. This could be in an attempt to lure you, a potential predator, away from their offspring. If this happens, the mother is likely watching and waiting nearby for the danger to subside so she can return to her young. Only if you truly think the mother isn't returning to the young, follow the same steps we outlined above and call your local animal control or wildlife rehabilitator for advice on what to do next.

Nature is a lovely gift and we are welcome to bear witness to its beauty and resilience. Except in rare cases when human assistance is absolutely necessary, many of these animals will sort themselves out on their own and leave in their own time. Make sure you take the time to appreciate these wonders of nature and spring while they're here. Look up information about native wildlife you see that you don't know much about. Sometimes the best educational resources are in our own backyard, so take advantage!



KAT MACPHERSON

Avicultural Warden
Pensthorpe Conservation Trust, UK

avian alumni

Where are our interns now?

I first heard of the opportunity to become an intern at Sylvan Heights Breeding Centre from Chrissie Kelley, Head of Species Management for the Pensthorpe Conservation Trust, and a friend of Mike and Ali Lubbock. I was coming to the end of a six-month contract working on a captive breeding and release programme of Corncrakes (*Crex crex*) and with the captive collection of waterfowl kept at Pensthorpe Nature Reserve in Eastern England and wondering where to go next. The possibility to go to Sylvan Heights was one I couldn't miss, with the ability to travel using the IWWA Liz Hudson Memorial Grant being hugely beneficial. I have had an interest in conservation for many years. I graduated from the University of Aberdeen with a degree in Zoology and, before starting working at Pensthorpe, I did volunteer work for the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust with their captive collection which is where my interest in captive waterfowl really began. Working at Sylvan Heights gave me the opportunity to experience an exciting and varied collection of waterfowl and other bird species. The scale and variety of the collection is unparalleled and it was an honour to work with the dedicated staff and learn so much from them. Almost as important was the pleasure of staying with Mike and Ali in their home where, apart from being made extremely

welcome, the conversations and stories around the dinner table added not only to the knowledge gained, but the enthusiasm for conservation. The experience and training in all aspects of avian husbandry and breeding gained at Sylvan was invaluable and when my time ended I headed back to Pensthorpe for another seasonal contract.

Years later and I am still at Pensthorpe, working for the Trust with the collection birds and on the Corncrake release programme. The training and experience gained at Sylvan Heights in aviculture has been invaluable as, over the years, I have taken more responsibility within the exotic collection as well as being heavily involved in the conservation work. The work done by the Pensthorpe Conservation Trust is now mostly focused on the in-situ conservation work through the "Actively Saving Species" programmes. The Corncrake programme has grown immensely from when I first started at Pensthorpe. We have gone from rearing 20 birds in a year to over 120 and, from being a small part of a bigger programme, we now have our own release based locally to Pensthorpe. In addition to this, I have been running a two-year feasibility study as part of Operation Turtle Dove, foster rearing turtle doves using captive barbary doves. The aim of this study is to use this technique for a future re-enforcement programme, again based locally to Pensthorpe to help stop the decline of this iconic species in the UK.

Keeping updated with news on aviculture is particularly important, and the opportunity to take part in the first "Future of Waterfowl Conservation" workshop gave me the chance to meet people working in this field and to hear about ongoing work in conservation. This workshop included some hugely beneficial and interesting discussions focusing on key points of aviculture and conservation. This most recent trip also allowed me to re-visit Sylvan Heights, all their birds and so many fantastic people committed to this field.



INTERN SPOTLIGHT

(Not a) Bombay Duck

by DEEPAK SINGH RAWAT
Mumbai (Bombay), India

'Bombay duck' or Bombil (Hindi for Bombay duck) is what the younger me was called by my neighbours back in Bombay, India; it being a funny way of addressing someone who is skinny. Slightly derogatory a term, yet, I did not mind being called a Bombay duck thinking it had something to do with characters from Duck Tales, whose buffoonery always amused me. That really was the extent of my knowledge about ducks back then and I started enjoying being addressed as a Bombay duck. Totally different from my life in slums of Bombay was my life at my paternal home up in the Indian Himalayas, where I was surrounded by humans, cattle, birds, Himalayan bear, tigers, leopards and snow leopards. Seeing your cattle being hunted down by a predator at night and watching the remains of its carcass being scavenged and mooched over by vultures wasn't unusual; but at the same time it explained to me the beauty and importance of nature and wildlife around me, and may have influenced me to some extent work closely with it. I was fortunate enough to experience best of both worlds up in the Himalayas and by the coast in Bombay, and a passion for exploring and observing wilderness and returning back to tell stories about it kindled in me. It was somehow still a distant second compared to my passion for sports back then.

After getting a Master's degree in Life Sciences, I started working as Research Biologist in a project dealing with the Asian vulture crisis. Even though I had always loved to watch and observe birds, I really did not think about them very seriously until then. Maybe that was the most selfless passion, which is why I chose ornithology as my career; by the decision of subconscious and also influenced by a lot of other factors, one definitely being my love for observational field work and other being the threat of working indoors in an office cabin. It wasn't long before I realised I was at the right place professionally, and I was able to work on raptors which I could say are my favourite family of birds, with Bar-headed geese being a very close second. After working for 2 years in the Himalayan foothills and Thar desert

in India, I was on my way out from the vulture project and still looking for other opportunities. A colleague and friend of mine who was an intern at Sylvan Heights informed me about this place. It was perfect timing and I applied for the Avian Husbandry Programme at Sylvan Heights and not long after that I began my internship. Right after having worked with best of ornithologists and raptor breeding specialists in India, now I was here at one of the elite waterfowl parks in the world with many respected names in the field of waterfowl breeding. Time and opportunity presented themselves in a way that matched the magnitude of my willingness to learn.

In terms of work, I arrived here with an almost clean slate, as working conditions and ethics back home are completely different compared to here. Unlearning these things helped me to avoid any hesitation or hindrance in trying out anything at work, which has worked very well in my favour. Reading about and watching videos of all the birds at Sylvan Heights was one thing, but being here and seeing it for the first time was a completely different feeling - in my initial days here, I tried hard to not look dumbfounded. Watching the birds that I had never seen before in my part of the world and seeing birds from my part of the world in a different set up at the park; all of it left me awestruck. My major objectives here were to understand the functioning of such a place and to work with different birds before I decide on a species to focus on while getting my PhD. This was accomplished during my time here. In my very first few weeks here my love and adoration for flamingos and Bar-headed geese were rekindled, and it filled me with energy to work on these birds in near future.

Sylvan Heights as an organisation is just as its ducks here, calm and presentable on the surface, but paddling like the dickens underneath. The staff has people from all walks of life, and everyone has respect and consideration towards the vision and words of others - I think this is a major factor in keeping this

place contemporary. Sylvan Heights, along with its positive aura, has a very contagious sense of humour, which adds a great madness to everyone's methods here and make each day at work even more enjoyable. The staff at Sylvan Heights had a major role in making my journey here fun-filled and smooth, I felt like the final completing piece of a jigsaw puzzle and got along perfect. So did all other interns and employees that joined here after my arrival; just as if there is always a perfect place for you in the Sylvan Heights family's jigsaw puzzle.

The diversity of staff at Sylvan Heights had been a great education for me in terms of understanding the culture and history of the USA. As someone here told me, Sylvan Heights is the place where you travel even without travelling; people from different parts of the country and world are here making it a great place to work at. It was through here that I got exposed to the southern culture and lifestyle. It was an altogether different cultural experience for me coming from a society where hunting is majorly prohibited and fishing is done professionally. Though the love of southerners towards their farm, livestock, tractors, pick-up trucks and their buds reminds me of Indian states of Punjab and Haryana. A certain character that south has to itself and its accent and its sweet tea will always have its place in my heart for a long time.

'Greater avenues, better vistas' as it is said; and it definitely is true for me as I am sure that all the experience and learning that I have soaked in during my time here will lead me to a world full of similar opportunities. Personally, I feel I have grown many folds as an aviculturist and as a person. Sylvan Heights has taught me the real meaning of consideration, team work, patience and endurance, and in past few months have taught me as much as I would learn in any university's course work. As an aviculturist or ornithologist I am still in my egg, unhatched, but Sylvan Heights through all their teachings and guidance have already provided me with wings. Though my time here is soon approaching its end and thinking about it disheartens me more than I had imagined it would, I would like to thank everyone from the Sylvan Heights family for all that they have done for me. When I recall the time that I have spent here, I can say just like William Wordsworth; "*and then my heart with pleasure fills, and dances with the daffodils*".

PS: It wasn't until my teenage years that I realised Bombay duck was actually a fish and not a duck, but the alterations to my self-esteem had already been done.



gift shop update

by TASHA DAVIS
Retail Manager, Sylvan Heights Bird Park

Hello, my name is Tasha Davis and I have been given the opportunity to take on the position as Gift Shop Retail Manager here at Sylvan Heights. Next time you visit the park, I'm hoping you will stop by the gift shop to say hello and check out our new arrivals. Some of those new additions are a great selection of indoor/outdoor pillows, wind chimes, an expansion to our book section, and much, much more. I can't wait to see you on your next visit.



volunteer thanks

Sylvan Heights relies on the support of its members and volunteers. It is because of you that we are able to carry out our mission to advance the conservation of waterfowl and wetlands habitats. While we would like to thank each of you for your contributions, in this issue we would like to recognize Claude Boyde, Stephen (Junior) Bryant, and John Reiner. Claude and Junior continue to provide Sylvan Heights with fish donations to help feed our birds, and John repeatedly puts his carpentry skills to work at both the Park and the Breeding Center. From the staff at Sylvan Heights, thank you all for your support!

park events

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



Birds & Brews

June 24, 2017 | 5:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Sample local craft beers, plus live entertainment, food, and birds! Save by purchasing advance tickets online at shwpark.com/brews.



Summer Camps

July 25-28, 2017 | 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Join us this summer for educational fun! Campers will have a chance to focus on specific areas of interest while making new friends. Summer camps are for ages 4-10.



Moonlight Takes Flight

October 14th, 2017 | 6 p.m.

Entertainment, live auction and a variety of foods to dine upon at Sylvan Heights' annual fundraiser event.



Trick or Tweet

October 31, 2017 | 5 p.m. - 6 p.m.

Our family-friendly Halloween event. Visit costumed characters handing out candy throughout the park.



Fly For Five 5K

November - Date TBA

A unique 5K race through the bird park and surrounding areas, plus a family fun run/walk!



Breakfast With Santa

December 2, 2017 | 9 a.m. or 10 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.

donations make the difference!

Here's what keeps Sylvan Heights Bird Park open:



We rely on donations, sponsorships, and grants to cover 37% of our yearly operating expenses.

shwpark.com/donate

(252) 826-3186 | brent@shwpark.com

Sylvan Heights is a 501c3 non-profit that relies heavily on many types of contributions to help feed the birds, offer educational programs, and be a wonderful place to visit. As a member, you are already contributing to this unique bird park, but if you would like to help out more, here are some other opportunities to do so:

Feed a Duck!

With a \$100 donation, you can become a proud sponsor of one of the wonderful waterfowl at Sylvan Heights Bird Park.

For each duck sponsored, you will receive a certificate to display in your home or business.

Matching Gifts

Many employers sponsor matching gift programs and will match any charitable contributions or volunteer hours made by their employees. Ask your company if it has a matching gift policy.

Donate

Help us fill in the blanks! Admissions, memberships, and sales only cover a fraction of what's needed to keep Sylvan Heights operating. Please consider supporting our conservation and education programs today.

thank you to our donors

Sylvan Heights Bird Park gratefully acknowledges our donors of \$500 or more since October 1, 2016 through March 31, 2017.

Russellene J. Angel
Atlantic Coast Pipeline
Beth and Steve Bailey
Robert A. Baille
James Ballance
Phyllis Barbour
Sandra E. Barnes
Betsy and Walter Bennett
Joan April Blazich
Mayo Boddie
John and Hope Bryant
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Westmoreland Partners
Bonnie and Billy Whitehurst
Kay & Mike Winn
David Zebroski

Your donations help keep Sylvan Heights Bird Park open.

I want to: Donate Feed A Duck (\$100 per certificate)

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!**



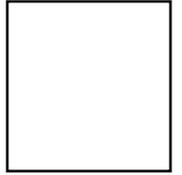
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INTERNATIONAL
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Spectacled Eider
(*Somateria fischeri*)