

Welcome, Waterfowl

Winged Visitors Arrive During Fall Migration

Story by Susan Wilkinson

James Kinnett

A beautiful fall scene is portrayed in local artist James Kinnett's "McIntosh Mallards."



ROBERT BEALLE

Waldorf native Robert Bealle won the federal Duck Stamp contest with "American Wigeon." To see more of his work, visit www.robertbealle.com.

Shorter days, a nip in the air, falling leaves and chevrons of beating wings herald the arrival of autumn. Of the 40 species of ducks, geese and swans that are common in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, most are seasonal visitors. Following a program evolved over millions of years, the winged migration along the Atlantic Flyway leads waterfowl to food and open water in the Chesapeake.

After a visit to the region in 1679, Jasper Danckaerts described "water black with ducks" taking wing with "a rushing and vibration of the air like a great storm ... like the rumbling of distand (sic) thunder, while the sky over the whole creek was filled with them like a cloud."



MARGARET ANN FRUITT

Dr. John Roache's "Annie" retrieves a duck.



MARGARET ANN FRUITT

On a chilly morning, Dr. Roach is happy to have had a successful hunt.



MARGARET ANN FRUITT

Waterfowl hunting can be a family affair. Pictured here are George Allen Hayden, sons Christopher Hayden and Allen Hayden, and grandson MJ Lux.

"Waterfowl were a seasonal part of the colonial diet from the early years of settlement. We find archaeological remains of mallard, ducks, teals and Canada goose," reports Henry Miller, director of research for Historic St. Mary's City. "In the really early sites in Maryland and Virginia, archaeological remains of eagle, cormorant, coot, loon and even a hawk show up once or twice and then never again." Miller suggests this is evidence of experimentation as the colonists decided what was edible and what was not.

"As the taste for waterfowl exploded," Miller continues, "the Chesapeake became the largest commercial hunting ground in the world." After the Civil War,

millions of ducks and geese were shot each year, transported to the big cities on the East Coast and further abroad. "Waterfowl populations were seriously overharvested. Only in 1912 were restrictions finally put in place," he noted.

"The quiet at dawn, the smells, the adrenaline when the birds are coming in ..."

— Chris Mehl

Throughout the 20th century, poor water quality, loss of habitat and disease took a toll. While thundering flocks of diving ducks in the upper Chesapeake may be a thing of the past, Larry Hindman, waterfowl project leader for Maryland Department of Natural Resources, reports that careful management by state, provincial and federal wildlife agencies in the U.S. and Canada "have returned duck and goose

(Continued on page 22.)



DEVON SINCLAIRE

HAND-CARVED GOOSE AND DUCK CALLS

Dave Riggleman has been carving wood since his grandfather taught him to whittle when he was seven years old. A gifted carpenter who once built custom homes and exquisite wood moldings, he now uses his talents to make exceptional goose and duck calls. Riggleman spent years developing "The Riggleman" call that perfectly imitates waterfowl sounds, bringing the ducks and geese closer.

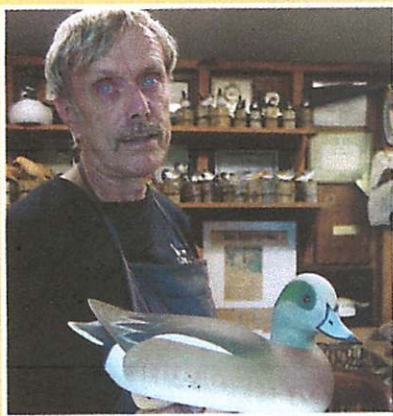
His calls are made from exotic woods from around the world. Many are then carved with personalized waterfowl scenes. His grandfather would be proud of his work! To find out more about Dave Riggleman's goose and duck calls, call 443-871-3501.



DEVON SINCLAIRE



Tommy Deagle's decoys are stored and waiting for cool weather.



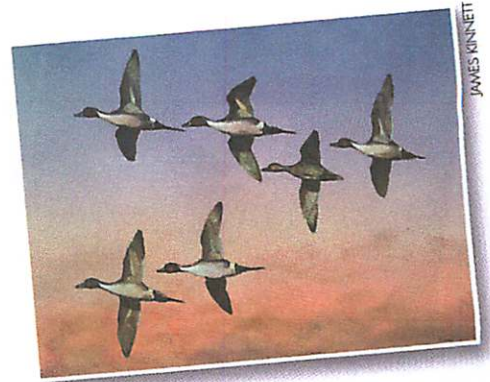
Deagle has been honing his art for 50 years, carefully adding texture and color to his realistic decoys.



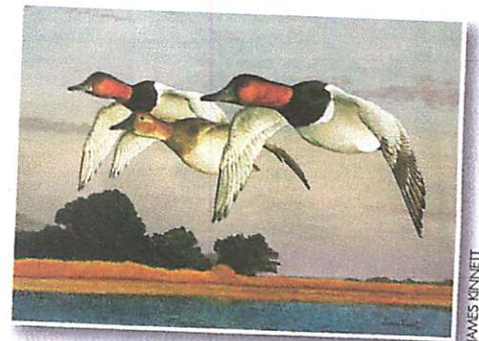
Here, Deagle teaches a youngster about decoy carving at a DU Greenwings event.

Decoys have long been used to lure geese and certain species of duck closer to hunters. The oldest known decoys, circa 400 B.C.-A.D. 100, can be seen at the National Museum of the American Indian. "Decoy carving is one of North America's few indigenous art forms," states Chad Tragakis, president of the Potomac Decoy Collectors Association (www.potomacdecoy.org). "The cottage industry that has grown up around them represents a wonderful slice of history that is in danger of disappearing." Tragakis is aware of just a half-dozen active carvers in the Southern Maryland region. He is a collector of vintage working decoys, often more generalized models designed to float and bob like a real bird. Others collect decorative decoys, intricately detailed and intended for display. Local artisans are well-represented in both worlds.

John Roache hunts with Tommy Deagle's working decoys. "The way they behave in the water, the way they float and move around," is key, he says. A visit to Deagle's Tall Timbers workshop evidences the skill wrought through 50 years of practice. Skip Edwards of Lusby and Berkey Boggs of La Plata are both celebrated decorative carvers. Edwards points out fine-combed "100-lines-per-inch" textures, iridescent coloring, and the way light realistically reflects off the feather quills, then states he has retired from decoy carving: "I get bored before I get done!" Boggs began carving as an adult. Like most carvers, he learned by doing and closely observing nature. He is active with the Southern Maryland Woodcarvers, Inc., like-minded craftsmen insuring the art of carving is not lost. New carvers are welcomed with shared tools and instruction. Contact president Melvin Williams at 301-934-8063 for information.



"Mating Flight" by James Kinnett. See www.jameskinnettart.com for more examples of his work.



"Blackwater Canvasbacks" by James Kinnett.

(Continued from page 21.)

populations to their highest levels since tracking began." Ongoing surveys of waterfowl breeding areas, and the application of technology to monitor waterfowl movements and habitat use, allow wildlife agencies to tailor hunting regulations to sustain populations. This, in turn, provides tremendous recreational opportunities for both hunters and conservationists, whose interests are closely aligned.

In fact, hunting is an integral part of conservation efforts. A successful hunter is a knowledgeable hunter, able to differentiate between the dozens of birds in the region, highly aware of each species' habits, and anxious to maintain the pristine waterways that attract waterfowl. Proceeds from state and federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps (essentially licenses to hunt), excise taxes on hunting equipment, and funds raised by private organizations such as Ducks Unlimited and Delta Waterfowl are dedicated to conservation, preservation and restoration of habitat, and wildlife

"It's about traditions. And friends. And watching the river wake up, the stories told, the partnership with the dogs, the birds flying overhead."

- John Roache, M.D.



A hunter sets decoys during a peaceful dawn.

MARGARET ANN FRUIT

research.

The Duck Stamps are also collectors' items. Competitions determine the waterfowl portraits featured each year. Farmer/artist and Waldorf native Robert Bealle has enjoyed success on both state and federal levels. His rendition of an American wigeon won the federal contest for the 2010-2011 Stamp, making him the first Maryland artist to win in 44 years, and establishing him as one of the nation's top wildlife artists. Jim Kinnett, of California, was Maryland's 2002-2003 Duck Stamp winner. Kinnett's art is drawn from life, models loaned by a taxidermist friend, and thousands of pictures shot from his forays into wetlands via kayak. The great detail evident in Bealle's and Kinnett's work allows the average person to revel in the beauty of the birds close-up.

The quest for food is seldom the driving force behind hunting these days, although most hunters enjoy the meat they harvest. Hunting offers other rewards. Ask a hunter why he or she

hunts and the answers often sound like poetry. "The quiet at dawn, the smells, the adrenaline when the birds are coming in ... [and] the synergy between man and dog" inspire Chris Mehl of Lusby back to water's edge each fall, along with the hope of bagging a duck to cook for his family on Christmas Eve.

"It's about traditions," John Roache, a doctor from Mechanicsville, reflects. "And friends. And watching the river wake up, the stories told, the partnership with the dogs, the birds flying overhead." Beyond the romance, "it's just plain dangerous to go by yourself. It's cold and you're on or near the water," Skip Edwards of Lusby observes. "So, during the season, for 30 or 40 years, you and your buddies sit in a duck blind. You learn everything you need to know about them."

Waterfowl on the wing, on the wall and on the menu – the seasonal presence of these great birds has left an indelible imprint on Southern Maryland culture and its economy. ■

EVENTS

FALL 2015

Charles County Ducks Unlimited (DU) Sportsmen's Bash: www.ducks.org/events

OCT. 17, 2015

St. Mary's County DU Banquet: www.stmarysdu.com

NOV. 7, 2015

Calvert County DU Annual Dinner: www.ducks.org/maryland/events/

FEB. 27, 2016

Charles County DU Annual Dinner: www.charlesdu.com

SPRING 2016

St. Mary's County DU Greenwings Youth Event: www.stmarysdu.com

Delta Waterfowl has a Southern Maryland Chapter. Check their Facebook page or the main Delta Waterfowl page for information on events: www.facebook.com/southernmarylanddelta; www.deltawaterfowl.org.

MAY 2016

Chesapeake Bay Waterfowl Arts Show: www.cfsomd.org

Calvert Marine Museum Maritime Festival (retriever demonstrations): www.calvertmarinemuseum.com

Ducks Unlimited (DU) chapters in Southern Maryland host annual friend- and fund-raisers to benefit DU wetland and waterfowl conservation programs.