

# The Livingston Ripley Waterfowl Conservancy

## NEWSLETTER



SPRING 2009



### The Livingston Ripley Waterfowl Conservancy

10 Duck Pond Road  
P.O. Box 210  
Litchfield, CT 06759

(860) 567-2062  
Fax: (860) 567-4369  
info@lrwc.net

[www.lrwc.net](http://www.lrwc.net)

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## LRWC SEA DUCK CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Sea ducks are a diverse group of waterfowl that are uniquely adapted to life at sea and on land. Included in this group are the eiders, long-tailed ducks, scoters, mergansers, goldeneyes, buffleheads, and the eye-catching harlequin ducks. Sea ducks possess specialized bills for feeding in marine environments, from the stout heavy bills of the eiders who feed on mussels, to the long serrated bills of mergansers that allow them to catch fish. They are masterful divers, with some species known to dive to depths of 180 feet. Armed with thick, fluffy down that protects them from extreme cold, most sea ducks breed in the Arctic. Connecticut is the winter home to a variety of sea ducks, which can be observed along the coast from late fall until early spring.

Although sea ducks represent one third of all North America waterfowl species, basic life history information is lacking for many species and their biology is poorly understood. The remoteness of their marine habitats makes them difficult to study, and even harder to survey and monitor. The information we do have indicates that many populations of sea ducks have undergone long term declines. The causes of the declines in sea duck populations are not well documented; however, there are several factors thought to impact current population trends. Arctic breeding grounds are under

constant threat of oil and natural gas development, and many traditional wintering areas have become urbanized and industrialized. Annual reproduction of many sea duck species is negatively impacted by thriving predator populations, and the coasts of the United States, where many sea ducks winter, are impacted by the bioaccumulation of chemical



Barrow's goldeneye

contaminants, oil spillage and coastal development. The increasing risk of global climate change, and the subsequent impacts on marine environments, means that an integrated effort to understand the biology of sea ducks is essential to the conservation of sea duck populations. In turn, the status of sea duck populations is a prime indicator of the health of our marine and global environments.

This year the Livingston

Ripley Waterfowl Conservancy (LRWC) is launching a *Sea Duck Conservation* campaign, which is designed to promote conservation awareness for sea ducks and their marine environments. We are initiating the first phase of this campaign with fundraising efforts for the construction of a new aviary designed to meet the specific needs of sea ducks. Scheduled for construction this summer, the new aviary will allow us to increase the size and diversity of our sea duck collection, which in turn will greatly enhance our educational outreach program. The sea duck aviary will also provide an optimal site for critical research efforts. Because of the difficulty in monitoring and collecting essential data from wild sea ducks, a captive environment which promotes the natural behavior of these birds will provide opportunities for research on behavior, physiology, ecology, and other aspects of sea duck life history. The second phase of this campaign will target fundraising to enhance and develop collaborative research efforts for sea ducks, and an educational program designed to raise public awareness for sea ducks and marine environments. If you are interested in contributing to *Sea Duck Conservation*, or you would like more information about our program, please visit our website at [www.lrwc.net](http://www.lrwc.net) or contact Dr. Sue Sheaffer (ssheaffer@lrwc.net).

## AVIARY HAPPENINGS

The Conservancy's collection of captive waterfowl is one of the largest and most diverse collections of its kind in the United States. We've recently revised our captive waterfowl program to focus on specific themes that serve a particular purpose and can be integrated to accommodate the



Bronze-winged ducks

dynamic needs of the research, conservation and education programs. This integrated approach has noticeably enhanced the array of waterfowl found at LRWC. As a result, many of the avian sights and sounds heard this spring are new to the Conservancy.

Our representation of North America's diversity of ducks has been expanded to include several additional species, ranging from the diminutive cinnamon teal of the western states to the charismatic northern shoveler of the mid-west. The expansion of our North American collection provides excellent

opportunities for local students to observe firsthand the diversity of waterfowl in their own backyards and the need to conserve wetlands and the biodiversity they shelter. Native waterfowl at the Conservancy also provide students, birders, waterfowlers, and artists a chance to gain an intimate understanding and appreciation of waterfowl identification, behavior and plumages.

Another theme of the Conservancy's waterfowl collection pays tribute to Dillon Ripley's multiple awards for being the first person to propagate several species of rare waterfowl in captivity. We recently acquired the New Zealand scaup for the



Baer's pochard

Conservancy's collection. Dr. Ripley's skill as an aviculturist resulted in the breeding of these small scaup, sometimes called the 'black teal', for the first time in North America in 1962. Several threatened and endangered species were integrated into the collection this year for the international species conservation theme, including Orinoco geese, Baer's pochard and

bronze-winged ducks. The diversity of waterfowl theme received a very exciting addition with the loan of Australian freckled ducks from the Sylvan Heights Waterfowl and Ecological Center. Freckled ducks are among the most aberrant of waterfowl and arguably one the most intriguing species for taxonomic and behavioral research.

Spring is a wonderful time to enjoy waterfowl. Along with the longer days and warmer weather, the birds come



Northern shoveler

alive with activity and sound. The musical calls and fascinating displays of courting ducks, geese and swans fill the air and entertain the eye. We hope you can visit the Conservancy in the near future to see our new additions firsthand. Stay tuned for more exciting developments in the months to come!

**SAVE THE DATE**

**The 4th Annual**

Livingston Ripley  
Waterfowl Conservancy

**DUCK DAY**

Sunday, June 7, 2009

10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

ADMISSION IS FREE!

Duck Pond Road  
Litchfield, Connecticut

For more info visit

**www.lrwc.net**

or call (860) 567-2062

or email [info@lrwc.net](mailto:info@lrwc.net)

## LRWC OUT AND ABOUT

LRWC was represented by scientific advisor Rich Malecki at the recent winter meeting of the Atlantic Flyway Waterfowl Council and Technical Section held in Easton, Maryland (Feb 22-27). This group is composed of representatives from 17 states and 6 Canadian provinces that have responsibility for the management of migratory bird resources throughout eastern North America. Both Rich and Director Sue Sheaffer have a long time affiliation with this group and actively participate as ad hoc members of technical sub-committees involving swans, geese, brant, black ducks,

mallards, other waterfowl species, and environmental issues. Sue attended the winter meeting of the Mississippi Flyway Waterfowl Council and Technical Section held during the same week in Davenport, Iowa. The states and provinces of the Mississippi Flyway are involved in the mallard satellite telemetry study that is currently coordinated by the LRWC. Continued involvement in both eastern Flyways increases the visibility of the LRWC and promotes our mission to conserve waterfowl and their habitats through research, conservation action and education.