



# LIVINGSTON RIPLEY WATERFOWL SANCTUARY

## N ♦ E ♦ W ♦ S ♦ L ♦ E ♦ T ♦ T ♦ E ♦ R

Spring 1998

### HISTORY OF THE SANCTUARY

Waterfowl have been an early and enduring interest for S. Dillon Ripley who spent weekends and summers in Litchfield, Connecticut, during childhood. He started his first duck pond at the age of 17 with the gift of a pair of blue-winged teal and a pair of redheads from his mother. Later Alain White, the naturalist who gave the 4,000-acre White Memorial Foundation to Litchfield, added two pairs of mallards. Dillon Ripley's interest in birds grew over the years and his collection of rare waterfowl grew with it. He named the network of ponds, pens and barns where he raised numerous rare species Paddling Ponds, and he expanded his interest with scientific studies at Yale and later Harvard. Mary, his wife, became his partner in this interest, and together they built a collection which today numbers over 80 species of ducks, geese and swans.

In addition to trading with zoos and other collectors, occasionally endangered species have been raised in Litchfield for re-introduction to the wild. One important example was during the late 1950's and early 1960's when the Ripleys were the only people on the North American continent raising Nenes or Hawaiian geese, which at the time were threatened with extinction in the wilds of Hawaii. They sent a small flock of birds to Hawaii where, along with birds raised by Peter Scott's Wildfowl Trust in England and birds raised in captivity in Hawaii, they were released on the island of Maui. This program was successful, and by the late 1960's, the total population of Nenes had increased to 500, up from only 50 birds 15 years earlier.



Dillon Ripley wrote about his duck ponds in Paddling of Ducks which was published in 1957. He continued to research and write in Litchfield about birds and his expeditions to track them even during the years when he ran the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, from 1964 to 1985. Throughout his life, Dillon Ripley wrote many books about birds, including scientific, scholarly treatises and others more oriented towards his travels.

In 1985, Dillon and Mary Ripley became concerned about preserving this part of his life's work for future generations. They decided to create a foundation and over time began gifting parcels of land. Early supporters of the foundation included Russell Aitkin, George Archibald, Mary Burke, John Henry Dick, Gaylord Donnelley, Caryl Haskins, Frank Larkin, Michael Lubbock, Peggy Reventlow, Michael Robinson, and Stuart Rackwell. The foundation was granted tax-exempt 501 (C) 3 status in 1985 by the IRS. After the death of Mary Ripley in 1996 and Dillon Ripley's continued illness, the Ripleys' three daughters, Julie, Rosemary and Sylvia, are planning to continue the Foundation's work.

In 1997, the Ripleys' daughters formulated the Board of Directors and are delighted that the following people agreed to become board members: Dr. George Archibald, Founder and President, International Crane Foundation; Mrs. Jackson Burke, philanthropist and trustee emerita of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Dr. Thomas E. Lovejoy, Counselor to the Secretary for Biodiversity and Environmental Affairs, Smithsonian Institution and Dr. Michael Robinson, Director of the National Zoo in Washington, DC. Among the first steps taken by the Board was the reaffirmation of the Sanctuary's mission.

### MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Sanctuary is to conserve rare and endangered species of waterfowl through propagation and through research and education and to promote the conservation of waterfowl and their habitats.

### RECENT EVENTS

The Board also approved a three-year plan which includes a number of important investments to upgrade the infrastructure. During 1997, the Sanctuary invested in a new well to ensure a constant, reliable source of clean water for the birds in the pens and barns. Also, since the Sanctuary had lost a number of birds in each of the last two winters as wet snows brought netting crashing down on top of the birds, a new pen with a unique design was created and built in the fall. Plans are underway to rebuild one of the old barns into a modern space complete with incubators, full heating and insulation, and the best in efficient design for raising young waterfowl. Additionally, as one of the only collections of rare waterfowl on the eastern seaboard, the Sanctuary is collaborating with Yale University and hopes to welcome at least one intern to the Sanctuary in the future.

### FUTURE PLANS

While the Sanctuary has welcomed small groups informally in the past including numerous schools and annual visits from the White Memorial Foundation and Audubon Society, this year will mark the first tours ever formally open to the public. Current plans are to invite people for small guided tours on Saturdays at 2:00 pm during the months of July and August. Admission will be \$6.00 per person with children under 12 years old free. These tours will be a bit experimental since we are uncertain how many people will be interested and we have a limited number of people available to guide the tours. Accordingly, we ask your patience and welcome your comments as we develop our expertise in handling groups of people. If you are interested, you should be at the large gray barn (second driveway on the right if you turn onto Duck Pond Rd. from Brush Hill Rd.) at 10 Duck Pond Road at 1:45 pm on any Saturday in July and August to participate in a tour. We look forward to seeing you!

### FLOWN THE COOP?

In September of 1997 one of the Ripley's flamingos became famous! It flew over the fencing as the Sanctuary's executive director Mike Bean tried to catch it to trim growing flight feathers. After a four week stay on the Connecticut River, it became an international celebrity when it flew north to Canada stopping on the Ottawa River near Ottawa City. After several more weeks of eluding everyone who tried to catch it, the flamingo was finally caught by The Wild Bird Care Center ten weeks after its escape and just as the river was freezing over. Thankfully, the *Ottawa Citizen* became so interested in the story which was covered by US and Canadian newspapers and on the internet that it financed the flamingo's return to Paddling Ponds. This story may be told in the form of an upcoming children's book.



*(Photo courtesy of The Hartford Courant)*

*"In the suspense of an autumn day, the lazy drone of bees hovering over spoiled grapes is shot through with the taut call of the jay. The last of the scarlet swamp maples still abounds and reflected in the ponds, the golds, browns and sumac reds seem to shimmer as the ducks wheel and turn. I can find surcease sitting on a wooden bench beside the ponds, watching the busy world of ducks and geese, the changing seasons, the mood and patterns of dress and customs of the waterfowl tribe which serve as splendid reminders of our comparative place in the scheme of things".*

View from the Castle, Smithsonian, November 1974 by S. Dillon Ripley

*"The year 1950 marked the beginning of my interest in conservation. I began to realize at the rate at which human population was increasing and exploiting the land, natural habitats would be so severely depleted by the turn of the century that thousands of species of birds, and millions of species of other animals, each adapted to it's own eco-system would cease to exist. Conservation has thus meant to me the preservation of a mosaic of habitats in which could be preserved at least a broad cross section of species which would serve as a reservoir for accumulating a further storehouse of information, and on which to base survival."*

View from the Castle, Smithsonian, July 1971 by S. Dillon Ripley

### **L.R.W.S.**

Duck Pond Road  
PO Box 210  
Litchfield, CT 06759-0210

Address Correction Requested

#### **Directions to L.R.W.S. from the center of Litchfield:**

Take Route 202 West toward Bantam. After leaving the center of town, proceed through the second traffic light at the intersection with Milton Road (just past Stop & Shop shopping center on left). Travel .6 miles past traffic light and take second right at Brush Hill Road. Turn right at first dirt road on right next to stone wall Duck Pond Road, proceed to second driveway with red and gray barns on the right #10.

**Yes! I would like to support the L.R.W.S. by becoming a member.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ \$50. – Wood Duck      \_\_\_\_\_ \$500. – Ross' Snow Goose

\_\_\_\_\_ \$100. – Nene      \_\_\_\_\_ \$1000. – Trumpeter Swan

\_\_\_\_\_ \$200. – Siberian Red-breast      \_\_\_\_\_ Other

*Please write us with your comments or suggestions.*