



# LIVINGSTON RIPLEY WATERFOWL SANCTUARY

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Summer, 1999

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

### RECENT EVENTS AND FUTURE PLANS

1998 was a busy year for us as we continued to invest in upgrading the Sanctuary infrastructure! We tore down an old barn which had been on the place for decades and built a new and enlarged facility on its foundation. The design was based on our need for raising waterfowl and incorporates some of the most modern features that we have seen in the US and England. In addition we upgraded another pen, utilizing the same design developed last year, in order to successfully withstand the harsh snow and ice of a southern New England winter.

During 1999, we are working on plans to develop a second barn into an administrative facility which could be used to host visitors. Formerly, a large dairy barn, this space has been used for incubating eggs, rearing young birds, and sheltering larger birds such as African Crown Cranes in winter. If our plan for renovation is successful, we hope to build an orientation center to provide visitors with information on the Sanctuary. Additionally, we hope to have exhibits and materials to educate visitors on the rare waterfowl species being raised at the Sanctuary. Over time we may be able to offer housing to interns or volunteers completing research at the Sanctuary.



*New barn for raising young birds*

### EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS

For many years members of the Audubon Society, numerous school groups and others interested in birds have visited our Sanctuary. Our goal has been to introduce visitors to the many interesting and beautiful species of waterfowl and to our efforts to conserve some of the rare and endangered species. During 1998, over 200 people visited the Sanctuary.



*Black Swans from Australia*

### SWANS

Over the last several years, the Sanctuary has begun to raise an increasing number of species of swans. To our knowledge today, there is no place in the world where people can see all of the species. Currently, we have seven species of swans and have been working to breed them. During 1998, we raised three young Whooper Swans and increased our representation of Trumpeter Swans to four pairs. This year we have raised seven young Whooper Swans, four young Black Swans and four Mute Swans. In addition two pairs of our Trumpeter Swans have laid seven eggs and all seven pairs of our Coscoroba Swans have made nests. The only swan species which has never produced eggs for us is the Whistler Swan. Next year we will attempt to re-create the Whistler's native breeding conditions by using outdoor flood lights.

Swans are beautiful birds which can be easily recognized by the features that make them so well adapted to their aquatic lifestyle. Virtually all of the species have long graceful necks which exceed the length of their torso and allow them to reach their primary food, aquatic vegetation. Swans can feed at a depth unattainable to all other waterfowl except for the diving ducks.

Taxonomists have long recognized the uniqueness of this genus *Cygnus* or *Cygenini* and classified them separately from their closest relatives--the family of geese and the family of ducks. Swans share behavioral characteristics with geese,

such as their closely knit family life, and there is one species, the Coscoroba, formally classified in its own genus, that provides a link between swans and ducks.

There has been much debate on the exact number of species of swans. Some species are clearly recognized and differentiated, while others may be sub-species inhabiting separate geographies.

The most well known species is the Mute Swan or *Cygnus olor* of Europe which has well-established feral populations in the U.S. This is the traditional garden swan which is all white and has a graceful, S-shaped neck. The Mute Swan is large and has a black frontal knob and orange bill and is known for its protective, somewhat aggressive behavior.

The Black Swan *Cygnus atratus* of Australia is completely black with white flight feathers and a cherry-red bill that has a stark white band across it. This is the only species that nests in colonies and shares the duty of incubation with its mate. In fact Black Swans appear to make devoted pairs and exhibit a wonderful musical call.

The Black-necked Swan or *C. melanocoryphus* is indigenous to southern South America and is one of our favorites. It is fairly unusual to see in captivity in North America but can be readily distinguished by its white body, black neck and blue bill which has a red knob on top. These swans possess an unusual slant of white feathers starting from the knob on the bill and passing around the eye and disappearing to a point just above the ear. Their calls resemble the notes of a flute.



*Black-necked Swans from South America*

The last species of swans indigenous to South America is the Coscoroba or *Coscoroba coscoroba*. This is the smallest of the swan species and is completely white except for black tips on the flight feathers. These swans have rose pink bills and matching legs which are unusually long for a swan. In all swans the males and females are identically marked except for the Coscoroba. The adult male or cob has a white iris; whereas, the adult female or pen's iris is brown.

The remaining swans are from the northern part of the globe. The Trumpeter Swan or *Olor buccinator* is native to North America and is one of the largest flying birds in the world. It is distinguished by an exceedingly loud call and hence its name. These swans are white with black bills and black feet. Trumpeters once covered much of North America, but due to over-hunting they have been reduced to only a small fraction of their former territory. They have rebounded in certain areas of the U.S., after having been given protection by the U.S. government as an endangered species.



*A pair of Whooper Swans with young*

The Whooper Swan or *C. cygnus* is the Palaearctic cousin of the Trumpeter Swan. It is smaller than its cousin with a predominately yellow bill. The front tip of the bill displays a varying amount of black with individuals being distinguishable from each other by the pattern on the bill.

The remaining three types of swans have been the subject of a longstanding debate. In the past each type was classified as a distinct species: the Whistling Swan *Cygnus columbianus*, the Bewick's Swan *C. bewicki* and the Jankowski's Swan *C. jankowskii*, although today it is increasingly common for people to group these three species together. The Whistling Swan is similar to the Trumpeter Swan in color, but it is smaller with a yellow tear drop near the eye next to the bill. These swans have a soft melodious call. Whistlers breed in northern Alaska and cross the continent to winter along the Chesapeake Bay. The Bewick's Swan is a diminutive counterpart of the Whooper Swan that winters in Europe. The Jankowski Swan is very similar to the Bewick's Swan except it is larger and it winters on the east coast of Asia. Both the Bewick's Swan and the Jankowski breed in Arctic Siberia.

So are there seven, eight or nine species of swans? While no one has an answer today, we are raising the seven most differentiated swan species here at the LRWS and hope you'll come see them!



*A pair of Whistling Swans*

## **TOURS**

This year we will once again be open for public visits with small tours conducted on Saturdays during the month of July. If you are interested, please join us at the large gray barn (second driveway on the right if you turn onto Duck Pond Road from Brush Hill Road) at 10 Duck Pond Road at 1:45 pm. Admission is \$6.00 per person with children under 12 years old free. Next year, tours will be given on Saturdays at 2:00 pm during the months of June and July. We look forward to seeing you!

## **HISTORICAL NOTES**

Since the 1940's Dr. and Mrs. S. Dillon Ripley have been responsible for bringing many species of waterfowl into the United States and successfully breeding numerous rare or endangered species. Frequently, if they had located more than a single pair, the birds were shared and sent to zoos and other avicultural institutions. Species such as the Siberian Red-breasted Goose which today can be enjoyed and appreciated by people in the US are due to the efforts of this well-matched couple.

One highly unusual species, the Double-wattled Cassowary from northern Australia and New Guinea, was introduced to North America by the Ripleys. This species is a throwback to the time of the dinosaurs and is noted for its size, musculature and primitive foul temper. The Cassowary stands approximately 4-5 feet tall, and resembles a small ostrich, but for the bony carapace on its head. Cassowaries have five long, sharp black feather quills which can act as lethal spears in what remains of the former flight feathers. The inner of the three toenails grows to several inches and serves to thrash its owner's way through its native rain-forest jungle but can also be used as defense weaponry usually by the female when cornered and provoked. Females are considerably larger and more aggressive than their male counterparts and tolerate them only during the breeding season. After mating with the dominant male in whose territory

she is passing through, the female will lay a small clutch of eggs which is incubated by the male. Males also rear the young while avoiding the wandering, adult females.

The Ripleys' adventures with Cassowaries started with a single egg given to them in 1963 on one of several trips to New Guinea. The fragile dark-green, two pound egg survived the long trip from the southern hemisphere to the northern hemisphere, a much longer trip then and still a long trip today. After forty-three days in incubation, the egg hatched at the Sanctuary on Duck Pond Road in Litchfield. The vividly striped chick grew into a large, glossy, black bird adorned with an off-yellow crown, two vivid red wattles and a cobalt blue and green face.

Once matured, this female Cassowary unknowingly was given the masculine name of "Kong" because of her size, strength and aggressive behavior. However, when she was fully grown, she became so aggressive that the Ripleys donated her to a zoo. Eventually, the zoo located a young male from Europe, and the pair went on to breed and produce several young over the course of many years.

Today, Cassowaries are rare and endangered in northern Australia where efforts are being made to breed them in captivity. Recently, the Sanctuary has had the great luck to find and procure a young female descended from Kong and an additional young male of European lineage. We are looking forward to breeding this pair and hopefully raising a young one!



*Double-wattled Cassowary*



Wood Duck

The logo of a North American Wood Duck on our letterhead was taken from S. Dillon Ripley's book [A Paddling of Ducks](#). This species has a little known history which includes Litchfield, Connecticut. Around the turn of the century, the Wood Duck suffered a severe decline due to extensive hunting. Threatened with extinction, a naturalist, Alain White, who founded the White Memorial Foundation in Litchfield worked extensively to re-establish the Wood Duck in the wild. He learned how to keep, breed and raise Wood Ducks in captivity and then released them into the wild. Today, a healthy wild population exists in Connecticut, and there is no longer a need to breed them in captivity. The Sanctuary chose the Wood Duck for our letterhead as a symbol of the resilience of nature and as a symbol for the successful re-establishment of endangered species right here in Litchfield.

**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 a red barn on the right. We will meet at the gray barn behind it, #10 Duck Pond Road.

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.*