



# LIVINGSTON RIPLEY WATERFOWL SANCTUARY

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

Fall 2004

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### LRWS HIRES NEW RESEARCH DIRECTOR



Kurt Hundgen

The fall of 2004 has been an exciting time as the Livingston Ripley Waterfowl Sanctuary hired Kurt Hundgen as its first Director of Research, Education, and Conservation. Kurt came from the Wildlife Conservation Society (which operates the Bronx Zoo) where he

has worked for the past 21 years. In the early 1980's he began working as Bird Keeper at the Zoo and earned successive promotions to Principal Senior Aviculturist. He has worked with a diversity of birds and specialized in waterfowl, as well as in Fruit Doves, Storks, Birds of Paradise and African Bee-eaters. He was appointed North American Studbook Holder for the Mauritius Pink Pigeon and International Studbook Holder for the Red Bird of Paradise.

In 1996, he became AZA's\* Species Survival Plan Coordinator for the Mauritius Pink Pigeon. In addition, Kurt gained expertise in collection planning, conservation programs and exhibit design. This experience will prove invaluable to the Sanctuary as it continues its transformation from a private collection to becoming a world-class facility for the propagation of rare and endangered species of waterfowl.

Kurt expresses enthusiasm over what he sees as the tremendous potential of the Sanctuary. "In most zoos," Kurt says "waterfowl are present only as a complement to large mammals - often called charismatic vertebrates by zoos. Here at the Sanctuary waterfowl are the major focus. The new facilities at the Sanctuary will allow staff to conduct various kinds of collection management that will enhance waterfowl captive husbandry. For example, one of the new ponds that was recently dredged will house a swan exhibit that will test whether flocks of Coscoroba and Black Swans can inhabit the same large enclosure and breed successfully."

Kurt hopes to attract more graduate students to conduct research on waterfowl genetics and behavior and to study various environmental issues associated with waterfowl, such as the effect waterfowl usage has on water quality.

Kurt agrees that wetland conservation is waterfowl conservation. From breeding to feeding to wintering and shelter, wetlands play a major role in the survival of nearly all species of waterfowl. The success of a captive breeding program for an endangered species destined for reintroduction depends on the availability of suitable habitat for release. While efforts are underway in this country to protect wetlands, the same cannot be said of many countries around the world. In India, for example, wetlands are being degraded at an alarming rate due to pesticides and draining for agricultural use. The Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) is working on this problem and believes that focusing on human needs for clean water will help conserve wetlands. Kurt hopes to coordinate research conducted in the US with SACON's work on waterfowl and wetlands in India.

One of the ways to help people understand the importance of habitat and biodiversity is through education. Since the lessons of environmental stewardship begin at home, Kurt anticipates involving the local Litchfield community more directly in this effort, particularly kids of all ages. As the Sanctuary develops more educational exhibits, ranging from the Wood Duck conservation efforts during the 1940's to the global distribution of waterfowl, Kurt anticipates that LRWS can play a pivotal role in educating visitors on the challenges waterfowl and their habitats are encountering.

Kurt received a BS in Wildlife Biology from Colorado State University and an MS in Animal Biology from Fordham University. In the early 1980's, he with the Colorado Division of Wildlife where he investigated the winter distribution patterns and juvenile recruitment rates of the Sage Grouse. Kurt also developed educational materials to promote state wildlife policies to public interest groups. Prior to his work in Colorado, Kurt was an urban park ranger in New York City and served as a Wildlife Technician for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Additionally, as a student, he conducted wildlife population censuses in Kenya, Malawi, and South Africa.

Kurt currently lives with his wife and 2 children in Mahopac, NY. In his spare time, Kurt enjoys outdoor landscaping, recreational sports, and traveling.

\*The American Zoo and Aquarium Association is dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, education, science, and recreation.

## 2004 CORE SPECIES BREEDING RESULTS

The spring of 2004 brought breeding results from all three LRWS core species - the Meller's Duck, the Bewick's Swan, and the White-headed Duck - all of which had been imported from Europe in 2001 and 2002.

The Meller's Ducks (*Anas melleri*) were imported from the Netherlands in December of 2002. From two breeding pairs at LRWS, thirteen ducklings were fledged. These ducks will be integrated into the LRWS breeding program.



*Young Meller's Duck*

Our adult pair of Bewick's Swan (*Cygnus c. bewickii*) benefited from additional lighting provided to simulate a longer daily photoperiod needed by many arctic nesting species to stimulate breeding. After weeks of nest building and vigorously defending a small territory, the female laid a clutch of four eggs. The eggs were checked for viability, but unfortunately only one proved fertile. Nevertheless, the fertile egg was successfully hatched and fledged. Because of the effectiveness of the artificial lighting for the swans, next season we will use the light system to encourage breeding for our second pair of Bewick's Swan, as well as our Siberian Red-breasted Geese (*Branta ruficollis*), which will be of breeding age next spring. All of these species nest in or near the Arctic Circle.



*Bewick's Swan cygnet*

The White-headed Duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*) is known to be a rather reluctant breeder in captivity. Our breeding flock produced three eggs in July, all of which proved infertile. Nonetheless, this year's eggs, though infertile, are a very positive start, as we now know we have at least one laying female. With new breeding pens slated for use in the 2005 breeding season, we will be able to separate our flock into separate pairs to establish strong pair bonds. This year, LRWS' two males seemed preoccupied with defending their space and territory from each other, an activity which may have affected their fertility. With this issue addressed, we have high hopes for the White-headed Ducks in 2005!

## CONSTRUCTION OF NEW BREEDING PENS

In keeping with the Sanctuary's Master Plan developed in 2002, this year the Sanctuary has begun construction of a new breeding facility. Gone is the greenhouse which for years served as the wintering shelter for the less hardy birds, and in its place are 15 individual breeding pens. These new pens will facilitate selective breeding of our core species.



*New breeding pens under construction*

Active management of breeding has been difficult given the lack of small dedicated pens to allow separation of breeding pairs. For example, this year the three female White-headed Ducks on site failed to produce any fertile eggs despite the presence of two males. The males were actively engaged in protecting their territory and spent too much of their time fighting! When the new pens are completed, hopefully by year end, each pen will have its own water supply and thick vegetation for privacy. Parents will be allowed to rear their young independently, and we hope for successful breeding next spring!

We are very thankful for the generous donations from the Seherr-Thoss Charitable Trust and the Marilyn M. Simpson Charitable Trust which made this project possible.

## CHANGING FACES AT LRWS



Mike Bean

Mike Bean who has been with the Sanctuary since 1989 has recently announced that he is returning to his family roots in upstate New York. Mike was hired by Dr. Ripley and has been an integral part of what was then known as Paddling Ponds, later known as LRWS. Both Dr. and Mrs. Ripley appreciated Mike's enthusiasm for the birds and his interests in raising ducklings and adding new species to the collection. Dr. Ripley and Mike used to disappear for long hours among the ponds where they shared a sense of wonder and excitement about the diversity of species. Mike also shared his love of plants with both the Ripleys. He became such an ardent enthusiast for the Night Blooming Cerious, for example, that the Ripleys would hold Night Blooming Cerious parties in the summer so their guests could enjoy the sight and fragrance of these spectacular flowers.

In recent years Mike has helped oversee the dramatic renovation of the ponds and pens. He has balanced the daily needs of the birds with the requirements of being a project manager, working with contractors, digging wells, building barns, dredging ponds and laying fencing. At the same time, Mike has gone back to school to continue his studies in biology.

Over the last 15 years, Mike has been at the epicenter of LRWS. He has managed numerous demands and has kept the waterfowl collection swimming along at the same time. While we recognize that it is time for Mike to move on to new endeavors, we have greatly appreciated his numerous contributions and will miss him!



Ian Gereg

We are very pleased to extend a warm welcome to Ian Gereg who recently joined the full-time staff at the Sanctuary as Assistant Aviculturalist. Ian has been working part-time at the Sanctuary since 1998 with duties spanning daily care and management of the waterfowl collection, maintenance of the facility, and guided tours through the collection.

Ian was raised around waterfowl and took an active interest in them from the time he was a small boy. He even ordered his first ducklings by mail order! Ian currently maintains his own collection of Pintails, Cape Barren Geese, Wigeons, Andean Geese, and Australian Wood Ducks and has been actively involved in the captive breeding of many of them.

Ian is a member of both the APWS and the IWWA. In

June 2004 Ian graduated from Unity College in Maine where he majored in Environmental Science and has recently returned from the Alaska SeaLife Center in Alaska where he worked as an intern over the summer conducting field research on Puffins and Spectacled and Stellar's Eiders.

## 2004 ANNUAL FUNDRAISER



Bird of Paradise

On June 5 Dr. Bruce Beehler engaged an attentive audience of supporters recounting his experiences carrying out ornithological research and nature conservation on the great tropical island of New Guinea. He began by paying tribute to Dr. S. Dillon Ripley for his groundbreaking work there. Dr. Beehler described the process in which research builds on earlier foundations. Dr. Ripley studied Birds of Paradise in New Guinea in the 1930's and 1960's. Dr. Beehler conducted additional work on this group of birds in the 1970's and 1980's. He discussed environmental conservation and the critical role of local forest-dwelling communities to the cause of nature conservation in New Guinea and elsewhere in the tropics. He argued that successful nature conservation requires respect for and understanding of the needs of local forest-dwellers in order to benefit from their knowledge of the environment. Ultimately, Beehler believes that conservation can only be accomplished by engaging local people in the process of managing natural resources. Without the support and active participation of local stakeholders, conservation programs will languish, whether they are in faraway New Guinea or in Litchfield County.

## DR. VIJAYAN VISITS LRWS

Dr. Vijayan is the Executive Director of the Salim Ali Ornithological Center (SACON) located in Vhadras, India. Dr. Salim Ali was India's leading ornithologist and naturalist and a long-time colleague, co-author and friend of Dr. Ripley. LRWS and SACON are investigating areas of mutual cooperation.



Dr. Vijayan

## LRWS HOSTS CJR PARTY

On July 9, the Sanctuary hosted the annual house tour preview party on behalf of the Connecticut Junior Republic (CJR), a state-run school for troubled juvenile boys. The house tour, which CJR sponsors every year, is a popular event and a major fund-raiser, attracting residents from Litchfield and beyond who enjoy viewing Litchfield's beautiful houses, many of which date from the eighteenth century.



This year's preview party set new records - in part because it was being held at the Livingston Ripley Waterfowl Sanctuary. The event attracted over 400 people, roughly double the more typical number. Fortunately, the evening was warm with the late afternoon sun casting a golden glow through the fields of the Sanctuary where S. Dillon Ripley and his wife, Mary, had their summer home. Guests strolled the grounds and enjoyed the view from the terrace overlooking the ponds and waterfowl of the Sanctuary. Some participated in small group tours that were offered by Sanctuary staff during the course of the evening. For many, it was their first time visiting the Sanctuary and provided an introduction to waterfowl conservation. We look forward to their continued interest.

## MURAVIOVKA PARK: SAVING THE SWAN GOOSE

In June, Mike Bean and George Archibald, LRWS Chairman, spent nearly two weeks in the Amur region of Siberia visiting Muraviovka Park to learn about efforts underway there to restore the endangered Swan Goose. Muraviovka Park is a vast 13,000-acre wetland located in the village of Muraviovka near the Russian Chinese border in Siberia. It was created when the Amur river changed course, producing a core habitat for numerous species of wetland birds, including waterfowl. Dr. Sergei Smirenski, a noted Russian ornithologist, is responsible for the creation of this park after being inspired by the wealth of birds nesting there.

The Swan Goose, once abundant in the region, has become almost extinct, primarily because of over hunting along its flyway from Russia through China. The sighting of Swan Geese in the park has been reduced to one lone individual over the last several years. In captivity, however, the Swan Goose breeds well. In fact, thousands of years ago they were domesticated by the Chinese. This domestic goose, known as the Chinese Goose, is far removed from its ancestors — it is large, heavy and incapable of flight; whereas the wild goose is small, light and capable of flying great distances.

Dr. Smirenski would like to develop a pilot project, which would be the first of its kind in the Park, to breed the Swan Goose. He is actively seeking international assistance in this effort, and LRWS is attempting to outline the role it might play - from developing a captive breeding program, to helping train personnel in Siberia to raise the goslings, even to assisting with the construction of proper breeding facilities in the Park. Although only preliminary steps have been taken to protect waterfowl in Russia, people in this remote region are realizing through continued education, particularly of children, the importance of protecting their wildlife. A partnership between the Livingston Ripley Waterfowl Sanctuary, Muravioka Park and the Moscow Zoo would allow eggs to be flown from the Sanctuary for over twenty hours to Russia where they would be hatched, raised and released back into a region where Swan Geese once prospered in the wild.

If you would like to contribute to this effort directly, you can purchase a T-shirt or sweatshirt from [www.savingcranes.org](http://www.savingcranes.org) and visiting the International Products section of their shop.



*Muraviovka Park, Siberia*

## OPPORTUNITIES TO VOLUNTEER

If you are interested in volunteering, the Livingston Ripley Waterfowl Sanctuary needs you! Special projects, both large and small, abound. If you have a few hours to spare each week, we need tour guides to help give tours to the public, data entry people to help with waterfowl record-keeping, organizers to help create a permanent archive of our photographs. Please call 860-567-2062 to volunteer.

## PADDLING PONDS DAY - NOT JUST FOR KIDS!

In late May the Livingston Ripley Waterfowl will have a gaggle of fun and games, but, it's not only for kids! We are planning to expose children to nature, but especially to our favorite subject - ducks, geese, and swans. We will have some of the birds on hand, and games to teach you to recognize the differences between them, and how and where they live. Did you know there are three types of ducks and eight different types of swans, each with distinctly different voices (except, of course, the poor mute swan, with no voice at all). And the geese, wait until you meet our female Coreopsis.

Dillon Ripley believed that learning was fun, if you make it so, so this is a day which is dedicated to him. Of course, there will be a rain date, but we all know what weather ducks prefer...! Exact date to be announced in the local papers in the Spring of 2005.

## JOIN LRWS TO WITNESS THE SANDHILL CRANE MIGRATION

George Archibald, chairman of the Sanctuary and founder of the International Crane Foundation in Barabou, WI, has generously agreed to lead a private tour for LRWS members to see the annual migration of the Sandhill Cranes on the Platte River in Nebraska. The date of the tour is the weekend of March 19 -21.



Sandhill Cranes congregate by the hundreds of thousands along the Platte River en route from Texas to Canada and

beyond. They feed and rest along this shallow, but wide stretch of the river for several weeks in March before continuing their journey northward.



If you are interested in joining this group, the first of its kind offered by LRWS, please pre-register by calling 860-567-2062. The cost of the trip, not including airfare, is estimated at \$500 for two nights and includes a \$300 donation to the Sanctuary. A block of rooms has been reserved at the Wingate in Kearney, NE and rooms are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Please register early as the trip will be limited to 25 people.



### We would like to thank the following people for without their contributions the work of the Sanctuary would not be possible:

Mr. & Mrs. Tobin Armstrong  
Ms. Juliet Tammenoms Bakker  
Ms. Linda Banche  
Mrs. William L. Bird, Jr.  
Mr. Andrew Blum  
Mr. William Boyd, Jr.  
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Mrs. Laura Thorn  
Mr. & Mrs. Peter Van Roijen  
Ms. Lulu C. Wang / The Shoreland Foundation  
Ms. Mary White  
Mr. Paul Windels  
Mrs. James E. Wood, III  
Ms. Joan Young  
Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Zacharias

## TOUR INFORMATION

Tours are available on Saturdays in June and July at 2:00 p.m. The cost is \$10.00 per person; children under 12 are free. Please call (860) 567-1691 for further information or send us an email at [duckpondroad@snet.net](mailto:duckpondroad@snet.net).

## DIRECTIONS TO LRWS

Directions to LRWS from Litchfield Center: Take Rte. 202 West toward Bantam. From the center of town, travel 0.8 miles to traffic light (just past Stop & Shop shopping center on left) and turn right at the light onto Milton Road. Travel 1.2 miles on Milton Road, taking the third left turn onto Duck Pond Road, a small dirt road. Proceed 0.5 miles to the third driveway on the right, marked with wooden sign for Livingston Ripley Waterfowl Sanctuary. You will be met there.



*View of the Sanctuary*

LRWS  
PO Box 210  
Litchfield, CT 06759  
Address Service Requested



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

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

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

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ \$50 - Wood Duck

\_\_\_\_\_ \$500 - Ross' Snow Goose

\_\_\_\_\_ \$100 - Nene

\_\_\_\_\_ \$1000 - Trumpeter Swan

\_\_\_\_\_ \$200 - Siberian Red-breast

\_\_\_\_\_ Set of 10 "Morning Splash"  
notecards (black & white) - \$15

## PLANNED GIVING

Did you ever consider planned giving to the Sanctuary? Planned gifts include gifts through your will, charitable gift annuities, gifts of life insurance, pooled income funds and charitable trusts.

If you would like to consider supporting the Sanctuary in one of these ways, please give us a call at 860-567-1691. Your financial support of the Sanctuary will help us realize our mission to conserve endangered waterfowl through propagation, education and research.

*Please write us with your comments or suggestions.  
LRWS is a 501(c)3 organization; your contribution is tax-deductible.*