

Livingston Ripley Waterfowl Conservancy

Research • Education • Conservation Action

SPRING 2011

NEWSLETTER

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MEET OUR NEW ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATOR

LRWC is proud to welcome Lauren Coyle as our new Environmental Educator. Lauren will work with Ian Gereg to provide environmental education programs held at LRWC and in the Litchfield area schools. She will also help us develop new programs, expand our outreach and assist with the creation of our new on-site classroom facility.

Lauren received her B.A. in biology from Rutgers University before moving to Connecticut where she received her M.S. degree in biology from Southern Connecticut State University. She has teaching experience from both the Bergen County and Bronx Zoos. Prior to joining LRWC, Lauren gained field experience working on research projects for endangered species, including the piping plover and least tern on the Connecticut coastline, and the golden-cheeked warbler in Texas.

Lauren enjoys educating students about wildlife and the importance of conservation. Along with all of the LRWC staff, Lauren is looking forward to seeing spring at the Conservancy, as well as introducing the public to our classroom facility. We welcome Lauren to LRWC!



Lauren Coyle and a white-faced whistling duck

LRWC PROVIDES UNIQUE AVIAN EXPERIENCES

Bruce Beehler, member of the LRWC Board of Directors and the author of the book *Birds of New Guinea*, guided a LRWC trip to Papua New Guinea in August 2010. Bruce orchestrated a spectacular experience for a small group of LRWC supporters that consisted of bird watching and eye-popping ethnographic displays. With Bruce's careful leadership, participants saw a host of beautiful



12-wired bird of paradise

birds, some at close range, including ten different species of birds of paradise.

Remarkably, birds of paradise follow strict courting routines, performing elaborate displays at specific hours and in specific locations; they were very accommodating to the group's schedule!

The trip started at Varirata National Park, which is close to Port Moresby, and where the group saw the Raggiana bird of paradise, the national symbol of Papua New Guinea. Over ten days, the travelers explored the lowlands on the north coast and the highlands, which is the



LRWC member Barbera Brooks learns about local traditions from the Huli wigman in Papua New Guinea

(Continued on page 2)

LRWC PROVIDES UNIQUE AVIAN EXPERIENCES

(Continued from page 1)

more populated region of the country. Everyone had a marvelous time riding a jet boat on the Karawari River, ultimately visiting a village that had not seen a single westerner for over a year, let alone a boatload. The group visited remote villages, toured native homes, and learned how the native people produced their food. They were also very fortunate to witness some of the oldest ceremonial traditions and learn how these remarkable people have lived in harmony with nature for over a millennia without the "benefits" of western civilization.

How adventurous are you?

The trip to Papua New Guinea was one of the unique experiences offered in the silent auction at the 2010 Annual Fundraiser. Past offerings have included trips to exotic regions of the Amazon, Chile and Patagonia, along with avian adventures in the US. The theme of this year's silent auction is "Everything Avian" and it promises to provide not only a fabulous selection of experiences, but also a diverse array of artwork, photographs and interesting items that are, well, everything avian!

Annual Fundraiser — June 4th

BLACK DUCK RESEARCH CONTINUES THANKS TO SIMPSON GRANTS

In 2010, LRWC partnered with the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (CTDEP) by providing three satellite transmitters to enhance black duck research. Funding for the transmitters was provided to LRWC by a \$15,000 grant from the Marilyn M. Simpson Charitable Trust. The Simpson Trust recently awarded LRWC another \$15,000 to continue this effort, which exemplifies the cooperative nature of this important work.

Field research for black ducks has been ongoing in Connecticut since 2007. CTDEP researchers have been working to identify priority habitats and quantify available food resources that are critical to the winter condition of black ducks. During 2007-2009, CTDEP



Black duck with a LRWC satellite transmitter

biologists monitored the local movements of 60 adult hens that were marked with VHF radio transmitters. The addition of GPS satellite technology not only provided precise locations of black ducks

throughout the day, but also allowed us to follow the birds on migration and learn about their movements throughout the year.

Preliminary results from the CTDEP study have demonstrated that there is plenty of habitat to support the number of black ducks that currently winter in Connecticut. In addition, hunting mortality did not play a significant role in overall survival during winter. The biggest factors limiting the number of black ducks in Connecticut were



Annual movements of black ducks with satellite transmitters

extended periods of severe weather and disturbance. Mortality of black ducks increased when long periods of ice prevented them from feeding. Information from the satellite transmitters demonstrated that black ducks did not move south during inclement weather, instead they remained in Connecticut and endured the harsh winter storms. The extreme site fidelity of these birds highlights the importance of maintaining quality salt marsh habitat to sustain these birds throughout the Connecticut winter.

Disturbance to wintering black ducks was related to human activities and development around coastal salt marshes. Disturbance factors correlated with an increase in the time black ducks spent flying, and a concurrent decrease in feeding and loafing. The increased energetic costs related to disturbance means that conservation efforts should focus not only on maintaining habitat with adequate food resources, but also protecting large expanses of salt marsh that will limit disturbance to wintering birds.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dr. Susan Sheaffer, Executive Director

The mission of LRWC is to protect waterfowl and their habitats through research, education and conservation action. When I first came to LRWC, I found it difficult to remember the correct order of the mission statement. Was it education, research and conservation action? Perhaps it was alphabetical (conservation action, education and research)? The key to our mission statement lies in the nature of our work. Research is the first step towards improving our understanding of the biology and ecology of the species we need to protect. All the research in the world is not useful, however, without a concurrent effort to educate biologists, wildlife managers and the public about new and important findings. Improved conservation planning is the ultimate goal, which relies on the combination of research and education to implement successful conservation action.

Here at LRWC we strive for a balanced program that not only provides new insights into conservation needs, but also gets the word out to ultimately make a difference for waterfowl and their habitats. Our recent work with satellite telemetry provides a good example of a successful program. Following birds around via satellite technology is exciting work, and it provides interesting material for educational programs. Beyond the excitement, however, is valuable information about bird movements and the habitats they use; information that is used by our associate wildlife agencies to guide habitat assessment and future management strategies. Our work with black ducks began in Connecticut, but it has already generated interest from other wildlife agencies to expand this effort throughout the northeast. Internationally, the Greenland white-fronted geese we monitored last year generated interesting hypotheses about the quality of habitats they selected along the way, and how this relates to declining numbers in some areas of their range. If you would like to learn more about telemetry research, visit our website..... and get the word out!



Sue and Jax recommend a laugh every day!



Duck Day
Fun for the entire flock!

SAVE THE DATES

Duck Day

Sunday, June 5th

Annual Fundraiser

Saturday, June 4th



Conor Gereg and our Avian Ambassadors prepare for Duck Day

LRWC SEA DUCKS INSPIRE WINNING JUNIOR ARTIST

The 2011 Federal Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Contest for Connecticut was held on March 16 at Cabela's in East Hartford, Connecticut. Susan Minkowski of Stratford, Connecticut won first place in the 7th-9th grade group for her pencil drawing of a pair of spectacled eiders. Susan's entry was inspired by a recent visit to LRWC, where she observed the spectacled eiders in our sea duck enclosure. Susan is already looking forward to her entry in next year's contest, and plans to draw a surf scoter. Congratulations, Susan!



Spectacled eiders by Susan Minkowski

AVICULTURE ACROSS THE POND

LRWC's Director of Aviculture and Education, Ian Gereg, was recently invited to attend the International Wild Waterfowl Association (IWWA) conference hosted by Aviornis International in Brussels, Belgium. The September 2010 conference provided an opportunity for aviculturists from throughout the world to share techniques for improving the care of captive waterfowl and collaborate on upcoming breeding programs. As part of the conference program, Ian gave a presentation on the Conservancy's programs in the fields of waterfowl captive breeding, research and education.

Prior to arriving in Brussels for the conference, Ian visited two of England's Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) centers in West Sussex and Gloucestershire. WWT was founded by Dillon Ripley's friend and fellow conservationist Sir Peter Scott as a place for "bringing people and wildlife together for the benefit of both". Among the accomplishments of WWT is the recovery of the Hawaiian goose and, more recently, work to save the Madagascar pochard, a species considered extinct prior



Kelp geese

to 2006. Ian's visit to WWT included meeting with aviculture staff at both centers to learn about their husbandry techniques and bird facilities. In addition, the visits provided countless ideas for wetland and waterfowl

education programs here at the Conservancy.

After leaving England Ian joined Conservancy volunteer (and impromptu German interpreter) Olaf Soltau in Hamburg, Germany to visit two world-renowned bird facilities. Their first visit was to the Wild Bird Park in Walsrode, a popular visitor destination that integrates fantastic horticultural work with impressive aviaries and birds. In addition to operating a spectacular bird park, Walsrode participates in conservation programs to restore wild bird populations. Afterwards they visited the private waterfowl collection of Ludger Bremher. Mr. Bremher owns Lundi, a well-known bird diet company, and his nutritional expertise was evident by his incredible collection of birds. Recently Mr. Bremher was recognized as the first person to successfully propagate torrent ducks in captivity. Other rarities in his collection include kelp geese, Steller's eider and moose!

The IWWA conference was equally exciting with several facility visits, including a very successful cracid and crane conservation center, and Pairi Daiza which has had recent success breeding shoe-billed storks. Another highlight was a visit to Cleres, a French national park that was created on the estate of the late Jean Delacour. Dr.



Shoe-billed stork

Delacour is known for his important contributions to our knowledge of waterfowl taxonomy and natural history, including the seminal four volume book *The Waterfowl of the World*. A long-time friend of Dillon Ripley who shared his interest in environmental education, Dr. Delacour eventually became the Curator of the Los Angeles Museum of Natural History.

The conference was a wonderful opportunity to meet many of Europe's most respected aviculturists and introduce them to the Conservancy. The experience was also an education in waterfowl husbandry and facility development. Ian returned home with many new ideas related to educating the public about wetland and waterfowl conservation, which he plans to integrate into the Conservancy's aviculture and environmental education programs.



Netted aviary in Pairi Daiza