

Wingtips

Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp



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Fellows appreciates "the conservation message"

By Tim Eisele, Friends of the Duck Stamp

People who know about the Federal Duck Stamp program love it and intently follow the contest and winning entries each year.

Those who are closely involved know that the program is run by just two employees.

Suzanne Fellows, chief of the Federal Duck Stamp Office in Falls Church, Virginia, runs the office with just one other employee.

Fellows, originally from Hawaii, has been chief of the office since May, 2019. She attended the University of North Dakota, and then received a Master's Degree in wildlife biology at Utah State University.

"I'm a field biologist at heart," she says, adding that she loves seeing the flights of waterfowl on the open prairies.

"My mother was an artist, my grandmother was a historian, and my parents had zoology backgrounds. And an old professor in Hawaii let me come into the museum to develop an interest in the sciences," she said. "I've had some terrific mentors and professors at the university."

Coming from a hunting and fishing family, and a background in biology, she worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Colorado and then became involved with the Junior Duck Stamp program in Kansas in 1995, resulting in her joining the Junior Duck Stamp program in 2013.

Fellows learned from spending four years at the Great Plains Nature Center in Wichita, Kansas the importance of communicating with people. She realizes that communications can come in so many forms, and beside verbal, a lot is through writing and drawing.

What really appeals to her about Duck Stamps is the conservation message. “Hunters and outdoors people contribute through Federal Excise Taxes and Duck Stamps. That’s always been a fascinating thing for me.”

In a way the Duck Stamp allows people to “pay for what they use,” both hunters who hunt waterfowl and birders who enjoy watching the magical migrations of waterfowl.

She enjoys working with people and especially seeing the creative minds of youngsters participating in the Junior Duck Stamp program, as well as people who just have a passion for natural resources.

Fellows admires the art submitted in each year’s contest, saying that she doesn’t know how the judges can come up with winners because they are seeing the “best of the best.”

Fellows follows a long line of past Duck Stamp Office chiefs, including Bob Hines, Pete Anastasi, Norma Upgrand, Bob Lesino, Vaughn Collins, Chris Tollefson, Pat Fisher, and Laurie Shaffer.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is the source for more information on the [Federal Duck Stamp](#).

A must-see exhibit in Connecticut

By Tim Eisele, Friends of the Duck Stamp

A unique opportunity to see some of the world’s best waterfowl art is on display at the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, Connecticut.

A special exhibit, “Conservation through the Arts: Celebrating the Federal Duck Stamp,” is available through February 9, 2025, and is the first such exhibit to feature a collection of original art works that have won Federal Duck Stamp contests.

The exhibit features 64 original works selected for the Federal Duck Stamp, most of them donated by Richie Prager, of Greenwich, an avid outdoorsman, conservationist and former Federal Duck Stamp Art Contest judge, who encourages people to buy Duck Stamps.

Dr. Daniel Ksepka, Curator at the Bruce Museum, said that the majority of Duck Stamp art is included in this exhibit, marking the first time these pieces have ever been publicly displayed together.

“The Duck Stamp show is a perfect example of the intersection between art and science. We have paintings, etchings, displayed in an exhibition about conservation biology.”

The exhibition also features historic documents associated with the program, waterfowl taxidermy and carved decoys from the Bruce Museum history and natural history collections, and examples of Duck Stamps including presentation panes, plate blocks, and stamps signed and remarked by artists.

Families will enjoy interactives such as “hatchable” eggs that reveal images of ducklings, as well as buttons that play audio of duck calls, while youngsters can collect stamps on their own Duck Stamp Passports.

The museum hosted the annual Duck Stamp Contest on September 19 and 20, 2024,

when five judges inspected 239 original art works and selected an acrylic painting of Spectacled Eiders by Adam Grimm of South Dakota for the 2025-2026 Federal Duck Stamp.



Dr. Daniel Ksepka

“We were honored to be selected to host the contest. It was the thrill of a lifetime,” Ksepka said.

Ksepka hopes that after the show ends the display of Duck Stamp art will be able to travel to other museums across the country so more people can see it.

Besides the original paintings, the displays also feature the biographical sketches of the artists. Ksepka said that “it is so interesting to read the stories behind each of the artists; they are all so fascinating. Everyone of them has something really cool about their history and how they got into the Duck Stamp program. What a great piece of American history.”

Ksepka, an avian paleontologist who researches bird fossils adds that, “I am thrilled with the response from the public. It has been the most visited exhibition for the month of

September.

“What strikes me is that so many times people come in and many don’t even know what the Duck Stamp is, but they leave with a big smile on their face, after they learn about this program and its impact on conservation,” he said.

Since it was first established in 1934, the [Federal Duck Stamp](#) has been sold to hunters, birdwatchers, outdoor enthusiasts and collectors, raising more than \$1.3 billion to conserve over 6 million acres of habitat for birds and other wildlife and provide countless opportunities for wildlife-oriented recreation on our public lands.

The museum is open Tuesday through Sunday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is \$20, except on Tuesdays when it is free to enter. Admission is free for children under 5 years, and is discounted for seniors and students.

Visit the museum's web site for [more information on the exhibition](#).

Grimm wins "Million Dollar Duck"

By Paul A. Smith, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

One of the nation's leading wildlife artists is a 3-time winner of the contest

In late winter, award-winning wildlife artist Adam Grimm had a tentative plan for the 2024 Federal Duck Stamp Art Contest.

The annual event is hosted in September by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and offers artists the chance to create the next year's Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, commonly known as the Duck Stamp.

The first-place entry in the prestigious competition has earned the nickname the 'Million Dollar Duck' for the economic impact typically enjoyed by the winning artist.

The rules allow artists to choose one of five species. This year brant, greater scaup, hooded merganser, northern shoveler and spectacled eider were eligible.

Grimm thought he'd paint the merganser. “Handsome birds, for sure, and ones I can see pretty often around here,” said Grimm, 46, and a resident of Wallace, South Dakota.

But a trip to Wisconsin changed his mind.

Grimm, similar to many other world-class wildlife artists, spends many hours in the outdoors photographing and observing species they intend to paint.

For Grimm that's most often in the fields and wetlands near his South Dakota home. But occasionally he also visits aviaries, or facilities that house birds.

In February Grimm made such a trip to Windy Hills Waterfowl, an aviary in southeastern Wisconsin. The facility is co-owned by Hannah Stolz, a friend of Grimm's daughter Madison.

Grimm knew he'd be able to see hooded mergansers at Windy Hills, including opportunities to photograph them in various lighting conditions and at close range.

And that he did. During the Feb. 10 visit Grimm spent most of his time focused on the small, charismatic ducks with the pompadour-like feathers on their heads.

But as the light softened in late afternoon, he decided almost as an afterthought to check on another eligible species in Stolz's collection: spectacled eiders.

Grimm spent about an hour photographing the eiders, including a handsome, adult male.

Grimm returned from Wisconsin with 4,000 digital images of ducks to sort through. And a weighty decision to make.

Grimm is among the nation's leading wildlife artists. His résumé includes two wins in the Federal Duck Stamp Design Contest, including in 1999 when he took first with a painting of a mottled duck. He was 21 years old and the youngest artist to win the competition.

The achievement helped him establish his full-time career in wildlife art. He owns and runs Adam Grimm Wildlife Art.

He notched a second win in the contest in 2013 with a painting of a pair of canvasbacks.

In 2023 he placed second.

Success is obviously elusive even for the most accomplished artists. Grimm said this year he was still feeling the sting of coming so close in 2023.

So, when he was going through the photographs of the ducks at the aviary, he was consciously thinking about settings and poses. And of course, species.

He did mock-ups - computer montages of photos in potential scenes to be painted - of both the hooded mergansers and the spectacled eiders.

"When I showed (the mockups) to my family and friends, it was almost unanimous," Grimm said. "The eiders had it."

There was one exception. His neighbor Harvey came over and upon seeing the photos of the eider said "boy that is an ugly duck," Grimm said

"I said, I know, they are kind of ugly," Grimm said. "But I also thought they look neat, and people don't see them as commonly. I thought I'm going to do the best version of this duck I can."

Grimm said he began working on the painting in June. He spent about two weeks on details in the reference photos and doing the mock-ups and about four weeks to make the actual acrylic painting.

He worked for 8 to 10 hours each day on the project.

Among his goals: place the ducks in their Arctic environment with mountains in the background. Grimm has been to Alaska twice; he drew on those experiences and photos from those trips for the painting.

He made the mountains slightly out of focus so the ducks stand out in the foreground.

The result is stunning.



This year's Federal Duck Stamp Art Contest was held at the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, Connecticut; the result was announced Sept. 20.

Of 239 entries judged in this year's competition, 15 entries made it to the final round of judging. Grimm's eider painting received 24 out of 25 possible points in the final round to take the top prize.

And take note: hooded merganser paintings took second (by Rebekah Knight of Deepwater, Missouri) and third (Abraham Hunter of Dandridge, Tennessee).

[An online gallery is available with all the entries.](#)

The judges for this year's Federal Duck Stamp Contest were Jennifer Scully, artist and conservation partner, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission; Tom Melius, retired Service Migratory Bird Program assistant director; John Gregory Mensik, retired biologist, land manager, and co-author of *Waterfowl of the World*; Norma Opgand, former Service Duck Stamp Office chief; Anne von Stuelpnagel, director of exhibitions, Bruce Museum; and Margie Crisp, artist and author of *Duck Walk: A Birder's Improbable Path to Hunting as Conservation*, who served as the alternate judge.

Grimm's artwork will be made into the 2025-2026 Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, or Duck Stamp, which will go on sale in late June 2025.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service produces the Federal Duck Stamp, which raises approximately \$40 million in sales each year. These funds support critical conservation to conserve wetland habitats in the National Wildlife Refuge System for 'the benefit of wildlife and the enjoyment of people,' according to the Service.

"The Duck Stamp Contest is about enjoying and selecting the art and recognizing the talents of the artists while celebrating this unique conservation program and its legacy of protecting millions of acres of habitat," said USFWS director Martha Williams. "I hope everyone goes out and buys a Duck Stamp like I do to be a part of this legacy that is more than 90 years in the making."

Since it was first established in 1934, the Federal Duck Stamp has been sold to hunters, birdwatchers, outdoor enthusiasts and collectors, raising more than \$1.3 billion to conserve over 6 million acres of habitat for birds and other wildlife and provide countless opportunities for wildlife-oriented recreation on our public lands.

Waterfowl hunters age 16 and older are required to purchase and carry the current Federal Duck Stamp. Many non-hunters, including birdwatchers, conservationists, stamp collectors and others also purchase the stamp in support of habitat conservation. Additionally, a current Federal Duck Stamp can be used for free admission to any national wildlife refuge that charges an entry fee.

Federal duck stamps cost \$25.

Grimm said he is grateful to have made the trip to Wisconsin this year.

"I really don't know what would have happened if I hadn't seen that handsome drake eider in that light," Grimm said. "But I'm so happy I did and was able to express that image in my art."

To purchase a Federal Duck Stamp, visit a U.S. Postal Service location or online at www.fws.gov.

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Quick takes

- If you know of friends, hunting partners, art enthusiasts, or others who would like to receive this newsletter, please send them to the [Wingtips archive page](#) for a sign-up link.
- **Celebrate the holidays: Buy a Stamp!** Looking for a last-minute “stocking stuffer” for the holidays, or a gift to easily mail with a card for a special person next year? The Federal Duck Stamp can be just the ticket! Go to your local post office to buy the new stamp, or check the [US Postal Service online postal store](#), or call AMPLEX at 1-800-852-4897. That \$25 gift will be appreciated and will keep on giving for wildlife habitat.

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