

May 2, 2013



# WINGTIPS

Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp

## Semipostal Stamp For the Wildlife Refuge System?

On April 25, there was a hearing in the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Oceans, Wildlife and Insular Affairs on a proposed Semipostal Stamp Act, H.R. 1384. Passage of such a bill would create a new postal stamp similar to the Fish and Wildlife Service's International Program's multinational species stamp.

You may have seen or used that creative fund-raising "[tiger stamp](#)," launched in 2011.

Testimony and witnesses at the hearing on April 25 were highly supportive of the new proposal. This included written testimony submitted by the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), a diverse coalition of 22 conservation, scientific, sporting, and recreational organizations representing over 15 million Americans.

A new proposed Semipostal Stamp would support the National Wildlife Refuge System and serve as an "over-priced" postage stamp for regular first-class mail. The price that goes beyond the regular cost of a standard postage stamp is directed to the worthy cause profiled.

A Semipostal Stamp is very different from the "Duck Stamp," of course, but aware conservationists should become familiar with the proposal, since there may be confusion by some wildlife, bird, environmental, and stamp supporters.

Funding from such a Semipostal stamp for the Refuge System is estimated by some observers to approach \$5 million annually. The proceeds would go specifically to the huge, \$3-billion, operations and maintenance backlog of the Refuge System. "O&M" funds cover everything from invasives removal and scientific evaluations to environmental education and

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## Did You Know?

1) Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge has had 94.9% of its land purchased through Stamp/MBCF dollars. The refuge, located along the Rio Grande in southernmost Texas, is a real avitourism attraction, well-known for its birds of Mexican character (e.g., Green Jay, Chachalaca, White-tipped Dove, Clay-colored Thrush, and Olive Sparrow).

2) The Stamp is usually released on or about the start of July of each year. One exception, however, was for the 1949-1950 stamp, when it was released on the first of September 1949,

visitor services. On the other hand, the funds for the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp go into the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, dedicated to habitat acquisition in the Refuge System.

What are the odds for passage of H.R. 1384? So far, reception for the bill has been very favorable. In the last Congress, a similar bill made it out of the House committee with bipartisan support. But the process is not easy. For starters, the bill has to be approved by both the House Committee on Natural Resources and the committee in charge of U.S. Post Office, the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

The semi-postal stamp bill, H.R. 1384, introduced by Del. Gregorio Sablan (D-Northern Mariana Islands), can be read [here](#).

Some folks will support this measure because it means no real cost to the American taxpayer. Some will want a new way to help the National Wildlife Refuge System. Some will want both. In any case, the effort for this Semipostal Stamp deserves discussion, support, and a Congressional vote.

due to delays caused by Congress deliberating on raising the stamp price from \$1 to \$2.

3) Relying on survey data provided by the Habitat and Population Evaluation Team (HAPET) offices in Bismarck, ND, and Fergus Falls, MN, the Service uses funds from the sale of the Stamps to acquire land and easements that permanently protect some of the most threatened, productive, valuable wetland and grassland bird habitat in the country in parts of the Dakotas, Minnesota, Iowa, and Montana

4) The highest number of stamps sold in one year was for the 1971-1972 stamp: 2,445,977 were sold.

5) After years of controversy, the Migratory Bird Conservation Act was passed on February 18, 1929. It created the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission.

## Book Review: *The Wild Duck Chase*

### *The Wild Duck Chase*

By Martin J. Smith (2012)

Walker & Company, 251 pages, \$25

Reviewed by Jim Williams

Martin J. Smith has written a book about bird art and bird conservation, focusing on the tiny, unique world of artists who compete each year for the right to have their artwork on what is commonly called the duck stamp. It's called *The Wild Duck Chase*.

An important conservation tool, the stamp is officially known as the Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp. Its short name is duck stamp. All migratory waterfowl hunters in the U.S. must buy and carry this stamp to hunt legally.

The duck stamp actually is a conservation stamp, supported and endorsed at its birth by men known for their broadly based conservation ethic. It meant far more than ducks to them, and it should mean far more than ducks to wildlife enthusiasts of all kinds now.

Smith makes this clear as he recounts one year in the competitive life of artists who seek fame and a bit of fortune with a waterfowl painting. They all want their artwork on the face of the upcoming stamp.

Smith follows the 2010 duck stamp contest at which the artwork for the 2011-2012 stamp was chosen. There were over 300 entries. They included entries by Minnesota's fabled Hautman brothers, "the New York Yankees" of the duck-stamp world, according to Smith.

The Hautmans Jim, Joe, and Bob have won the contest 10 times in 22 years. Jim and Bob

entered the 2010 competition. Brother Joe could not because winners must take a three-year hiatus before entering again. Joe won in 2008.

Smith follows in detail the five artists whose work makes it to the final round of judging. Creating a seven by 10 inch painting of one of five waterfowl species selected for that competition is no simple matter. Artists choose a species carefully. They consider the competition, the judges' possible predilections, and the vagaries of design: one bird or two, flying, grounded, or on the water, storm clouds above or clear sky?

There is a submission period. Should you send your entry early, late, or in the middle of the period? Entries are presented to the judges during the first elimination round in the order received. Some artists have a superstition-like belief that timing makes a difference.

There are three rounds of judging, the first a simple in or out. The second is point-based to select five finalists (and ties). Judges view the paintings, and then raise cards numbered one through five to assign points. A final round of point assignment determines the winner. There is suspense and tension as well as an Olympic figure-skating flavor to it.

Competitive waterfowl painting is, as Smith describes it, "perhaps the narrowest niche in the known art world," but that doesn't lessen the intensity of the artists.

When Europeans first arrived in North America wildlife was so bountiful that people believed and acted like there were no limits on what man could do. Waterfowl numbers exceeded the imagination. Uncontrolled market hunting and the inevitable loss of habitat brought imagination to ground. Bird populations were finite.

Smith calls the beginning of the duck stamp program in 1934 "a desperate reaction .... to the strip mining of the New World's wildlife."

Today, almost 80 years later, a problem of a different kind exists. The number of waterfowl hunters is in decline. Like everyone else, hunters get old and die. They're not being replaced at the same pace. Stamp sales are in decline.

Duck stamp revenue is used by the federal government (98 cents of every stamp-sale dollar) to buy or protect habitat that favors ducks, but land that also is home or refuge for hundreds of species of wetland and grassland birds. Anyone who enjoys the outdoors - fishing, birding, wildlife photography, hiking, canoeing, etc. - gets return on the \$850 million earned and invested since 1934 through stamp sales.

Many national wildlife refuges have been created in large part with duck stamp money. The excellent birdlife found on hundreds of refuges is a gift from waterfowl hunters. While chapter three of Smith's book goes into the origins of the stamp, he does not delve deeply elsewhere into the meaningful investment in the refuge system, a minor disappointment.

Still, Smith does touch on the effort underway today to convince non-hunters that they too should buy stamps and contribute to this major and historic conservation effort. It should be obvious that the \$15 price of the stamp is a modest and worthwhile investment in preservation of bird species.

The hunting link is what throws some folks off the track. Well-meaning, they protest duck hunters doing what duck hunters do: kill birds. They miss the broader picture. Hunters cannot hunt if bird populations are not high enough to support the harvest. The use of duck-stamp revenue to secure suitable habitat is an effort to maintain waterfowl numbers that allow hunting. At the same time, this land supports hundreds of species of wetland and grassland non-game birds.

The duck stamp story as told by Smith is a story of artistic passion, given life years ago by a passion for preservation of land and birds. It is a passion all outdoor and wildlife enthusiasts should share.

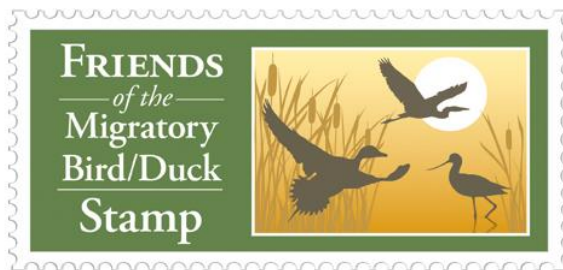
Not to spoil the suspense of the story Smith tells, but Jim Hautman won the contest for the 2011-2012 stamp, after much deliberation about which waterfowl species to paint. (He chose White-fronted Goose, the "speckle-belly" as it's known). It was his fourth win. Furthermore, the 2012-2013 stamp that went on sale last July carried a Wood Duck painted by brother Joe, his fourth winner as well. Brother Bob has won twice.

The New York Yankees of duck stamp art, indeed.

### Jr. Duck Stamp Winner Disqualified

In our *Wingtips* of 22 April, we [reported](#) that six-year-old Madison Grimm, of Burbank, South Dakota, had won the nationwide Jr. Duck Stamp Contest. A few days later, she was disqualified as the winner. Apparently, it had to do with charges of "copying" or "tracing" parts of her painted image. See more details [here](#), from the *Argus Leader* out of Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

### About the Friends



The Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to the promotion, preservation, sales, and better understanding of the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (commonly called the Duck Stamp). The organization fosters an appreciation of how the funds collected through the stamp build the National Wildlife Refuge System.

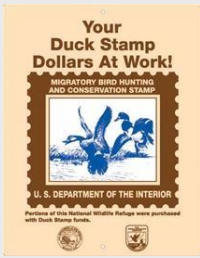
Part of our emphasis is that the purchase of a stamp is not something that will just benefit ducks. Among scores of other bird species, numerous kinds of shorebirds, long-legged waders, and wetland and grassland songbirds are dependent on habitat derived from stamp purchases.

And it's not only birds that benefit from the stamp! Reptiles, amphibians, fish, butterflies, all flourish through stamp investments. Water quality is also strengthened.

One 15-dollar purchase of a stamp goes a very long way!

There are many ways you can help support the growth and appreciation of the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp. For starters, become familiar with the stamp on the [Federal Duck Stamp Office website](#). Then review the content of our [Friends website](#). You can download our [flyers and posters for distribution](#). You can also forward *Wingtips* to friends (See the forwarding tool on the very bottom of this page.)

Of course, buy a stamp - or two - and use/display it proudly. And become a Friend. To find our how to do so, you can visit our [website](#).



[Become a Friend Today!](#)