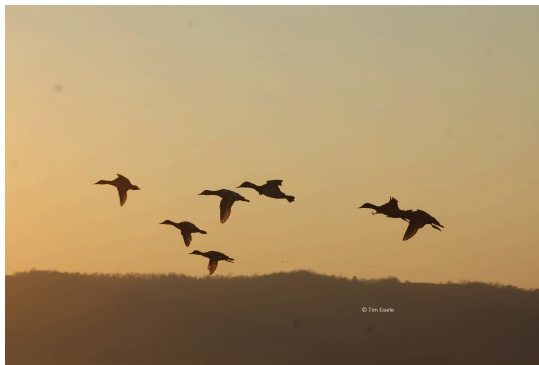


Wingtips

Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp



21 September 2026



Canvasbacks at sunset;
photo (c) Tim Eisele

Watch the 2026 Duck stamp contest from home

A new chapter for Jerome Ford

Quick takes

Watch the 2026 Duck Stamp contest from home

By Tim Eisele, Friends of the Duck Stamp

For an up-close view of some of the best waterfowl artwork in the country, you don't have to travel.

Just go to the link on the [Duck Stamp Office's website](#) to watch judging of more than 330 entries in the 2027-28 Federal Duck Stamp Contest.

The event takes place **September 24 and 25, 2026** at the Ducks Unlimited national headquarters in Memphis, Tennessee.

For those of you who can travel to the free event, enter the lobby at 9 a.m. and judging will begin at 10 a.m. People who would like to watch from the comfort of their home can tune in at 10 a.m. Central Time on both that Thursday and Friday.

According to Valerie Fellows, chief of the Federal Duck Stamp Office, judging on Thursday is anticipated to end by 4 p.m., but ending time will be flexible depending on the amount of time needed by the judges.

For people attending in Memphis, a Hog Wild Real Memphis BBQ and Moveable Feast Catering will be on site with food for purchase.

The winning artist for the 2026-27 Duck Stamp is Jim Hautman, who will be on site and available to personally sign the current Duck Stamp for collectors.



Tim Eisele interviews Jim Hautman following his win with a pair of Mallards in flight in the 1994 Federal Duck Stamp contest.

Eligible species in the 2026 contest include: Cackling Goose, [Blue-winged Teal](#), [Mottled Duck](#), [Long-tailed Duck](#), and [King Eider](#). The [Cackling Goose](#) has never been featured on a Federal Duck Stamp.

[Low resolution scans of the artwork](#) are published on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Flickr account.

Hautman's #7

Jim Hautman, from Chaska, Minnesota, took top honors for the current Duck Stamp with his acrylic painting of two drakes and a hen bufflehead in flight over water with a northern Minnesota background.

This was the seventh Federal Duck Stamp contest that Jim has won.

Last September he was not at the actual judging event at Patuxent Research Refuge in Laurel, Maryland, but he watched live on his computer.

"I was watching the contest live on the YouTube feed, and didn't have the feeling that I would win when it started," Hautman admitted.

But as the judging went along, he felt that his work was a little different, as other entries featured birds on the water.

When it got to the final round, he said he had a pretty good feeling, but wasn't sure it would hold up. In the end three other entries ended up just one point behind his painting.



This 2026-2027 Stamp features Buffleheads; image courtesy of Jim Hautman.

It takes time

Judging entries in the annual contest, often called the Olympics of wildlife art, is not easy, as I learned when I judged the 1994 Duck Stamp competition in Washington, D.C.

That year there were 585 entries in the contest and we took two-and-a-half days to make our selection.

The actual judging is difficult in that the entries are all so good and the judges need to take into consideration: accuracy of the painting, both of the bird and habitat where it is often found; appropriateness for the 10-by-7-inch painting to be reduced to the small stamp; and overall effect on the person seeing the artwork.

No writing is permitted on the submitted entry--most importantly, nothing to identify the artist.

Five judges, normally each with different backgrounds in hunting, ornithology, art work, stamp collecting, and general knowledge of nature, assess the work. The names of the judges are not announced until they appear on stage for the actual judging.

The year I judged I was joined by Geneva Berry, Eugene German, Mark LaBarbera, and Dave Butz, and I found the event to be extremely well run.

Each original painting was shown to each judge by a lawyer from the Solicitor's office and then we had to make up our own mind how we would rate it; we were separated from other judges so that none of us knew how the others voted. We also had no knowledge who painted the work, as they were identified only by number.

The initial round is judged as whether the painting should continue to be in the contest or if it should be set aside and out of consideration. Then the final competition begins with judges rating the paintings from 1 to 5, with the highest combined score winning.

When it comes down to the final hours of the competition, there normally is a murmuring of excitement among the audience.

The 1994 contest was the first time ever that one of the entries received a perfect score, a total of 25 points from five different judges. The winner that year? You might have guessed it: Jim Hautman!

In total, the Hautman brothers have won 15 different Duck Stamp contests. The winning artist has to sit out future Duck Stamp competition for three years.

Following the contest the winning art and artist are normally available at the Easton Waterfowl Festival in Easton, Maryland; National Junior Art Contest in April; First Day of Issue Ceremonies; ceremonies in the artist's hometown; the Duck Stamp contest the following year; and, in mid-October, the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge in Sanibel, Florida.

Buy the Stamp

The Federal Duck Stamp is one of the most successful conservation programs in our nation's history.

Duck Stamps are vital tools for wetland conservation, with ninety-eight cents out of every dollar spent on Duck Stamps going directly to wetland habitat conservation. Since its inception in 1934, sales of the Duck Stamp have generated over \$1.2 billion that has conserved more than six million acres of wetland habitat for birds and other wildlife.

The Stamp was first designed in 1934 by Jay N. "Ding" Darling, and it is a legacy worth buying into. The actual judging is something that everyone can also tune into.

Tim Eisele is a freelance outdoor writer/photographer in Madison, Wisconsin and a fan of Ding Darling and the Federal Duck Stamp. He is the author of the forthcoming book: [*My Wisconsin – People and events that make Wisconsin natural resources special.*](#)

A new chapter for Jerome Ford

Many thanks to [Jerome Ford](#), Assistant Director of the Migratory Bird Program since 2011, as he moves to a new role. Over the years he has been a steadfast and treasured supporter of the Federal Duck Stamp Office and its work running both the Federal Duck Stamp Program and [National Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program](#). Under his leadership in the Migratory Bird Program, Duck Stamp sales have contributed to critical wetland habitat being protected as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, benefiting waterfowl and many other species.

All who have worked with him over the years are happy that he will remain with USFWS. We wish him continued success as he now moves to lead the [National Conservation Training Center](#) in Shepherdstown, West Virginia.

Quick takes

- As noted in Tim Eisele's article above, **this year's contest features 331 entries** - the highest number in the last 20 years. The contest continues to grow through the efforts of the Duck Stamp Office and conservation partners to stay relevant and to reach out to new audiences.
- The 2026 Waterfowl Festival in Easton, Maryland runs November 13-15, 2026, where Duck Stamp art and many other waterfowling displays will be available. For over 50 years, this event has raised \$6 million for wildlife and habitat conservation, education, scholarships, and research. For details and schedule go to <https://waterfowlfestival.org/>.
- How important is the Duck Stamp? Let us count the ways. Whether you are an artist, enjoy being outdoors, or simply value the conservation of wetland habitats, your support of the Stamp and the Federal Duck Stamp Program helps sustain needed revenue for protection of wetlands. Stamps are available through sporting goods stores and other retailers, as well as other groups that sell them through consignment, such as refuge Friends groups. [Purchase a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp](#) and help send a strong message to our decision-makers that the Federal Duck Stamp and Junior Duck Stamp programs need to remain part of our national heritage and legacy.
- 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.

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