

# THE WILDFOWLER

FEBRUARY 2017

A PUBLICATION OF THE ATLANTIC WILDFOWL HERITAGE MUSEUM AND THE BACK BAY WILDFOWL GUILD

## *Back Bay Wildfowl Guild Memories*

### *Curtis Waterfield 1926-2017*

Reprinted with editorial license from 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Mid-Atlantic Wildfowl Festival Show Book.

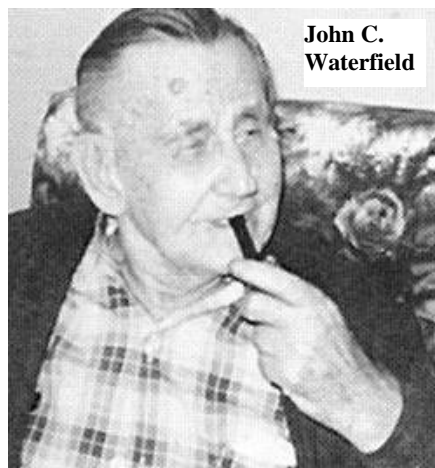
From the archives of the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum, The Virginian –Pilot, History of the Back Bay Wildfowl Guild and Mid-Atlantic Wildfowl Festival by Emma Meehan, and Past editions of The Wildfowler,

Back Bay has always been an ideal spot for waterfowl using the Atlantic Flyway to congregate. At the Virginia end of North Carolina's Currituck Sound, Back Bay is the first major feeding ground where waterfowl following the coast join the migration up the Chesapeake Bay. Residents of this area were farmers; but, fishing, trapping, and hunting waterfowl were also important to their livelihood. It was natural that most watermen made decoys for their own use. They also often made decoys for friends and neighbors passing these skills on to their sons and grandsons.

Such was the case for one of Back Bay's oldest families; the Waterfields. Well known for their outstanding abilities as watermen and decoy makers, carving has been a family tradition for nearly two hundred years. Waterfield family roots began in this country in the 1700's when William Waterfield was granted a land patent of 200 acres in Northampton County on Virginia's Eastern Shore in 1705. Many branches of the Waterfield family stemmed from this first English emigrant. Michael Waterfield, one of William's grandsons, settled on Knotts Island, North Carolina and records show him living there in 1755. A grandson of Michael, John Jehue (Gee-hoo) Waterfield, was born on Knotts Island in 1801. In 1847 Jehue moved his family to nearby False Cape on the outer banks in Princess Anne County, Virginia. The reason for moving and his manner of moving his family probably provide some insight to this man's temperament.

Construction had begun on a causeway to link Knotts Island to the mainland. Each resident was expected to contribute part of their time to the project each month. Jehue saw no need for the project and the demands that it would make on his time, so he decided to move. He took his house down and packed it and other belongings on a raft. He then floated his house hold and his family to his new location at False Cape, VA. The fame of Virginia's Back Bay as a water fowlers paradise was spreading. He hunted ducks, geese, and swans for the market before the heyday of market gunning and the wealthy sporting clubs which soon followed.

One can only assume that these Waterfields, like most watermen in the Atlantic Flyway, made decoys for their own use; even though none are known to exist today. However, that is not true with Jehue's son, John Cannon Waterfield who was born in False Cape in 1847. He was a market hunter and guide for wealthy sportsmen. By the age of ten his father, Jehue, had died and John was hunting, fishing, and trapping to help support the family. The decoys he made were chopped out with a hatchet, a skill he learned from his father. A few of John Cannon's decoys have survived. A pair of his swan decoys were donated to the old Back Bay Wildlife Refuge Museum by his son Charles Whitehouse Waterfield and remained with that collection when the museum was torn down.



John C.  
Waterfield

Charles was a skilled decoy maker, built gunning skiffs, worked as a hunting guide and hunt club caretaker. Born in 1881, he lived most of his life in the tiny village on the “beach side” between Back Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. He worked as a guide for the False Cape Club and later for Linwood Dudley for twenty seven years at the Dudley Island Club; located on the “beach side” just east of the northern end of Knotts Island. Charles thought Linwood’s decoys (the pride of many of today’s collectors) were too small to hunt over and made his own hunting rig to use at the club. His style of carving was similar to John Williams of Cedar Island in Back Bay. He simply chopped the birds from a single block of wood and smoothed them down. Most of his decoys were Canvasbacks, Bluebills, and Ruddies. Some of these working decoys still exist today in family and private collections. Charles eventually left the Dudley Island Club and built the Goat Hill Clubhouse on the beach about one half mile north of the Dudley Island Club and worked there as a caretaker. During the 1950’s he purchased the club property and a few years later sold it to J. C. Biggens, the City Manager of Newport News, Virginia and Dr. Coles Taylor also of Newport News, Virginia. Charles took a job as caretaker for the Newport News Hunt Club located south of the False Cape Club. Charles died in 1973 but his legacy was handed down to his sons, John J., Romie, Fred, Curtis, and Ardell; all born in False Cape.

Ardell was born in 1931 and is the youngest of Charles Waterfield’s sons. He worked as a waterman and at hunt clubs in the False Cape area most of his life. He moved to Knotts Island, North Carolina in 1970 where he continued to make a living as a waterman until his death in 2011.



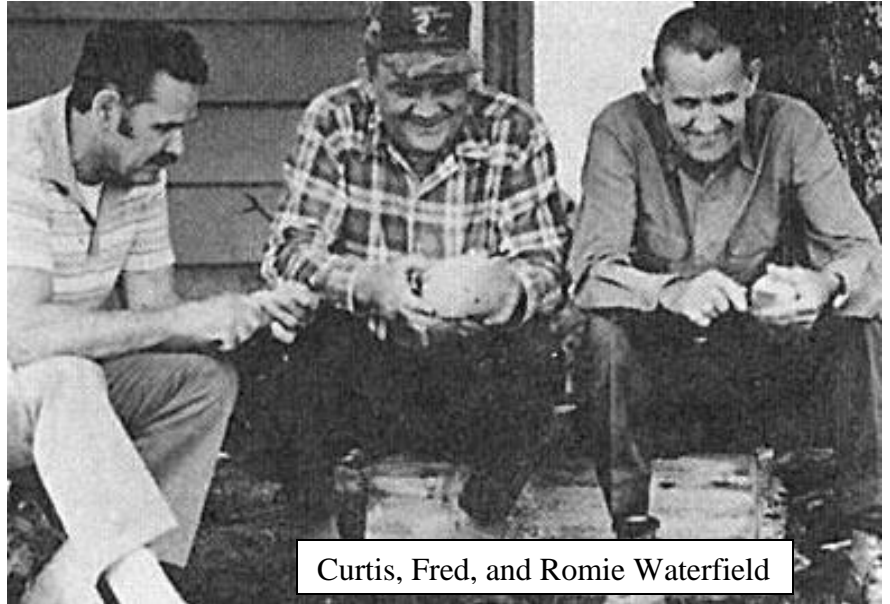
Romie

John J. Waterfield was the oldest son born in 1905. A quiet man, he worked as a waterman and for various hunt clubs, including the Newport News Club, and later as caretaker for the False Cape Hunt Club for 32 years. The birds John carved were all working decoys and none are known to exist today. He and his wife, Grace Newbern, had three children. His only son John, Jr., was an avid collector but did not carve. John moved to Virginia Beach shortly before his death in 1978 at the age of 73.

Romie Waterfield was born in 1918. In his youth he worked as a waterman and at various hunt clubs until he joined the Army in 1942. When he returned from his service in 1946, he worked as a carpenter and hunting guide before accepting a job in 1950 as a Biology Technician for the Fish and Wildlife Service. He worked for them for 28 years living on the Back Bay Wildlife Refuge. Romie retired in 1978 and moved with his wife, Ernestine Marcette, to Knotts Island where he continued to carve shooting style decoys until his death in 2010.

Fred Waterfield was born 1924 and like his brothers he spent his youth fishing, hunting, and trapping. Using these talents to acquire spending money, he and his younger brother Curtis hunted for frogs, which were shipped to live to Philadelphia and Baltimore,; bring five dollars a dozen. During the early 1940’s he worked as a hunting guide with his father Charles. It was during this time he began carving hunting decoys. Fred had an interesting sideline in his life. From 1973 through 1981 Fred played guitar in a band and entertained in clubs around the Tidewater area. In 1945 He married Mary White and moved to Knotts Island, NC. In 1946 he went to work at the Ford Motor Company assembly plant in Norfolk, VA as a Trim Painter. He continued to make canvas geese and swan decoys in his spare time. Fred retired in 1972. He continued to carve until his death in 1984. Both his canvas and wood decoys are sought after by collectors today.

Curtis Waterfield was born July 3, 1926. He also worked as a waterman and hunting guide in his youth. When he returned from the Army in 1947, he worked for the Newport News Fire Department and Langley Air Force Base Fire Department until an injury forced him to retire in 1966. Curtis moved to Knotts Island in 1969 and began carving decorative waterfowl full time. He became the first Waterfield to carve in this new contemporary style. Curtis' sons, Wayne and Doug have inherited the Waterfield talent for carving. In 1981 Curtis' wife, Emma McMilan, joined the men and began carving miniature and life-size decorative birds. Curtis and his son Wayne formed a team that led them to earn numerous awards in carving competitions around the country. In 1976, Curtis and Wayne were chosen from 10,000 craftsmen interviewed by the Smithsonian Institute, to demonstrate carving and painting for the Bicentennial of the United States.



Curtis, Fred, and Romie Waterfield

From the early roughed out hunting decoys, that were necessary for survival, to the beautifully detailed decorative bird carvings displayed today like fine sculpture; the accomplishments of this talented and resourceful family will live on forever and it seems fitting that it all started in this country in the early 1700's.

# DECOYS WANTED

**WE BUY WOODEN OR CANVAS DUCKS, GEESE, SWANS & SHOREBIRDS...**

**WHAT IS YOUR DECOY WORTH? IT COULD BE WORTH THOUSANDS!**

---

**WE WILL PAY YOU CASH FOR ANY OLD DECOYS AND HUNTING ITEMS**



FREE

DECOY IDENTIFICATION  
AND EVALUATIONS

of Single Decoys or Entire Collections

BY MARK CROMWELL

(757) 721-2746

Member North Carolina Decoy Collectors Assoc.





### *Upcoming Guild Events:*

02/07/2017: Back Bay Wildfowl Guild  
Membership Meeting 7:00pm, Social 6:30pm  
Speaker: James Freeman  
Decoy Carver

02/14/2017 Docent Training [at the Museum]  
6:00pm-8pm

02/20/2017: Board Retreat [Knotts Island, NC]  
10 am

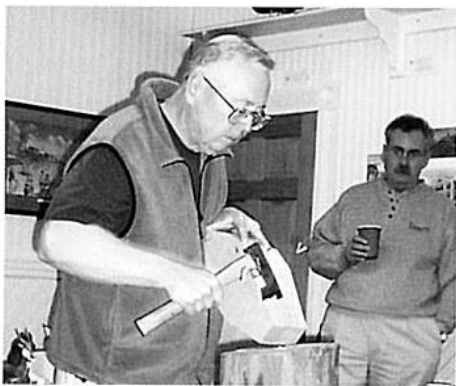
02/22/2017 de Witt Open House  
Virginia Beach Sheriff's Office Retirees  
6:00pm-8pm

02/28/2017 5pm-9pm "Dine Out for The deWitt"  
AMMO's Restaurant – Authentic Greek Cuisine  
324 N. Great Neck Road Virginia Beach, VA 23454

03/07/2017 Back Bay Wildfowl Guild  
Membership Meeting 7:00pm, Social 6:30pm  
Speaker: Drew Hawkins – Decoy Magazine  
Decoy Carver, Collector & Graphic Designer

### AS IT APPEARED IN DECOY MAGAZINE

## (IN) MEMORIAM



Charles Seidel.

### Charles Seidel *Delaware River carver & collector*

Charles Seidel, a long time decoy carver and collector, passed away on November 30, 2016 in his Virginia Beach home due to a sudden, aggressive form of lymphoma. He was 77 years old.

Born in 1939, Charlie grew up in Camden, New Jersey and began making decoys at the age of 15 to hunt ducks in the nearby marshes on the Delaware Bay. His Delaware River style carvings and boat

building abilities were influenced by his mentor, "Bid" Furness, who was the greatest influence on this avid young waterfowler's later carving career.

He joined the U.S. Navy in 1961 and served for 20 years, moving his family to Virginia Beach after his retirement. For 30 years he served as the Carver in Residence at the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center where he demonstrated his craft and taught thousands of students during his tenure. He was also a founding member of the Back Bay Wildfowl Guild.

## COLLECTOR'S SHELF

My canvasback was made by Ned Burgess (1868-1958). He was born in Duck and moved to Churches Island in the 1940s. Ned was North Carolina's most prolific carver and one of the state's best. It is estimated that he made 5,000-10,000 decoys during his 70 years of carving. Consequently, he made decoys for many of the clubs on Back Bay and Currituck Sound. Unlike those of many other decoy makers, the shape, paint patterns and finish of his decoys did not change over his many years of carving. This is remarkable, given that he was also blind in his right eye and almost lost all of his sight by the time that he died. His birds were made out of juniper and had a rasp finish to reduce the paint's glare (shine). He delivered his last order of decoys at the age of 89!



For a free evaluation or identification of your decoys, contact Jeff Tinkham at 757-724-7131 or [jeff@tinkhamlaw.com](mailto:jeff@tinkhamlaw.com).

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I am writing this message just as our area recovers from the heavy snow in January. That said, by the time that you receive this newsletter, spring will be just around the corner. We have a great deal planned for this year. We hope to finalize the details of a tour of one of our local Back Bay hunt clubs. Stay tuned for more details. Also, the antique decoy, contemporary decoy and flat art exhibits will be changing in the spring. If you haven't visited the museum in a while, please make a point to pay us a visit. Parking is ample at the de Witt cottage at this time of year. Guild members are also carving at the museum most of the time. They would welcome the opportunity to show you their carvings and to answer your questions. In particular, I have noticed that children enjoy watching the carving process. For the grandparents out there, please consider visiting the cottage with your grandchildren for a great weekend field trip! For complete details about our schedule and the new on-line gift shop, please visit our website.

## DOCENT CLASSES TO START FEBRUARY 14, 2017

Docent Classes will start February 14, 2017 in the de Witt Cottage at 6:00pm. If you have some time during the summer to help visitors at the de Witt Cottage to enjoy and learn more about the cottage, Back Bay, the de Witt family, local hunt clubs, decoys, carving and Virginia Beach history then you will want to attend these fun and educational classes. Come out and enjoy friends, soup, sandwich, and drink. All while learning more about your Back Bay Wildfowl Guild Heritage. Let's see how many docents we can train this winter. Email [director@atwildfowl.org](mailto:director@atwildfowl.org) or call (757) 437-8432 if you are interested.

## FROM THE MUSEUM DIRECTOR

I want to thank everyone who attended "Dine out for The de Witt" Monday night January 30<sup>th</sup> at Il'Giradino's Restorante. We brought approximately 45 people in for dinner that would not have normally been there on a Monday night. Their total attendance for the evening was 75. We should easily receive a donation of between \$200 and \$300 dollars for a most enjoyable evening with great friends. We also made many new friends aware of our existence. Great job! If you missed it you will have another chance on Tuesday February 28, 2017 at **AMMO's Restaurant**, 324 N. Great Neck Road, Virginia Beach, Virginia 23454. We also have some other outings in the works for March and April; Stay Tuned! March 8, 2017 at 6:00pm starts a new chapter in the history of the de Witt Cottage as that will be the first meeting of the **de Witt Cottage Garden Club**. If you enjoy gardening then you will not want to miss this opportunity to garden by the sea! Please contact the Director at Email [director@atwildfowl.org](mailto:director@atwildfowl.org) or call (757) 437-8432 if you are interested.

# Dabbling Ducks

Dabbling ducks, or puddle ducks, frequent shallow waters such as flooded fields and marshes. They feed by tipping up rather than diving. When taking flight, they spring into the air instead of pattering across the water. Most swim with their tail held clear of the water and have colorful, iridescent speculum (a rectangular patch at the hind edge of the wing).



## *About the American Wigeon*

### *Breeding*

American Wigeon nest farther north than any other dabbling duck with the exception of the northern pintail. They breed throughout northern Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba, Alaska, and the Northwest Territories. American wigeon prefer shallow lakes and marshy sloughs that are surrounded by dry sedge-lined meadows and contain submergent vegetation. Female American wigeons lay an average of 9 eggs.

Latin: *Anas Americana*

Average length: M 20", F 19"

Average weight: M 1.8 lbs., F 1.6 lbs

### *Description*

Both males and females have a bluish black-tipped bill. Male American wigeons have a white patch from the forehead to the middle of the crown and an iridescent green band from the eye to the back of the head. They have a pinkish-brown breast and sides that are separated from the black undertail coverts by white flank feathers. In flight, the white shoulder patch is diagnostic. The legs and feet are blue-gray to dark gray. Female American wigeons have a gray head with a brownish-black crown and brownish chest and sides. The legs and feet are blue-gray to dark gray.



## American Wigeon



### *Food habits*

American wigeon are aquatic grazers and forage on grasses and sedges in wet meadows and pastures.

### *Population*

The American Wigeon can be found all over North America. Their breeding grounds stretch from Alaska across the tundras of Canada all the way to the Atlantic Ocean. The American Wigeon can be found in their wintering habitats from the American Northwest to central Mexico, from the southern prairie pothole region through the Gulf Coast and from New York to the Bahamas close to the Atlantic shoreline.

### *Migrating and Wintering*

American Wigeon are among the earliest waterfowl to reach their wintering grounds. Wigeon in Alaska and western Canada migrate along the Pacific Flyway and winter around Puget Sound and into California. Birds that use the Central Flyway winter in the Texas panhandle and along the Texas and Louisiana coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Along the Mississippi Flyway, wetlands and lakes in eastern Arkansas and western Tennessee also provide important wintering habitat for wigeon. They use a variety of habitats in winter, including ponds, lakes and saline and brackish marshes with abundant aquatic vegetation. Wigeon also readily forage on grasses and sedges in wet meadows and pastures. American Wigeon are common winter visitors to Central America, the Caribbean, northern Colombia, Trinidad and occasionally Venezuela (Scott and Carbonell, 1986).

Reprinted from Ducks Unlimited Website



## Coastal Journal | Canvasback ducks are out at Back Bay

By Mary Reid Barrow

These three handsome male canvasback ducks swimming in the bay off Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge were photographed after the new year by lucky Charlie Bruggemann.

We don't get to see these big beauties often, but when we do, we sit up and take notice; and this was a first for Bruggemann.

It's easy to see why canvasbacks are the iconic duck of the Back Bay area. They are bigger than most ducks, elegantly colored and are especially good looking with their sloping forehead.

In the later 1800s and early 1900s, Back Bay was known up and down the East Coast as the prime duck and goose hunting spot on the Atlantic Flyway. Both sportsmen and market hunters flocked to the area in pursuit of the critters that flew south to spend the winter here. The sky was often black with ducks and geese flying overhead, the lore goes. Decoy carver Lee Dudley, who lived on Knotts Island, made the canvasback famous as he turned out rafts of the ducks for hunters to use in the water to lure in their prey.

"He was the most famous carver in the area," said Lynn Hightower. Hightower is the director of the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum in the de Witt Cottage at the Oceanfront. The canvasback is the wildfowl museum's symbol. Visit the museum and you can learn all about the canvasback and its lore as well as more fact and fancy about those glory days on Back Bay. To this day, hunters still prize canvasback ducks, not only for the nostalgia they evoke, but also for their looks and flight skills. "It's a beautiful bird to see both sitting in the water and in flight," Hightower said. "They are bigger than most ducks and fly like a rocket."

Today hobby decoy carvers pride themselves on fashioning canvasback decoys out of a block of wood, Lee Dudley fashion, as well as carving more realistic works of art of canvasbacks and many other species of wintering ducks and geese. You often can see these carvers in action at the wildfowl



museum. And the canvasback always holds its own among all the beautiful waterfowl, like tundra swans and snow geese. The males sparkling white bodies contrast with their black chests and tails and their wonderful rusty red heads. The female, as it goes in the bird world, is more brownish, plainer and duller.

The smaller redhead, a similar duck, has a more typical duck profile and is gray, not white. A diving duck, the canvasback goes down to the bottom looking for aquatic grasses, seeds and roots along with snails and other crustaceans. They nest in the far reaches of Western Canada and the United States. And we are lucky that some cross the country to spend the winter on the coast with us.

Once when I gave a talk at the wildfowl museum, I was given a small pair of canvasbacks by local carver Al Brandtner. And even before that, I received a conservation award from the Back Bay Restoration Foundation, a wonderful life-size carved canvasback decoy by Jac and Patricia Johnson. I have yet another canvasback also given to me by a favorite carver.

It's certainly a testament to the canvasback's enduring legacy that someone like me could be so lucky as to have her own flock!

Reprinted from Pilot Online





**Free Decoy  
Identification and Evaluation**  
By Jeff Tinkham  
President of The Atlantic  
Wildfowl Heritage Museum  
Call (757) 721-7131 or  
[jeff@tinkhamlaw.com](mailto:jeff@tinkhamlaw.com)



#### DE WITT GARDEN CLUB FORMING

The charter meeting of the **de Witt Cottage Garden Club** will be Wednesday March 8, 2017 at 6:00pm. This will also be an opportunity to learn how to garden in an hostile sea salt environment from two Master Gardeners. If you enjoy gardening then you will not want to miss this opportunity to garden by the sea! Please contact the Director at Email [director@atwildfowl.org](mailto:director@atwildfowl.org) or call (757) 437-8432 if you are interested.

## I Am Hampton Roads: Pete DiPietro

By [Kerri Furey](#) Published: January 19, 2017, 1:05 pm

### The Hampton Roads Show

PORTSMOUTH, Va. (WAVY) – After a career in the Navy, and then as a civilian ship-fitter, Pete DiPietro decided he needed a new challenge, so he taught himself how to carve. Now, DiPietro is a regular carver at the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum in Virginia Beach. Follow the link below to see the video.

<https://www.google.com/amp/wavy.com/2017/01/19/iahr-pete-dipietro/amp/?client=safari>

Enjoying Dinner at IL' Giradino's



## BACK BAY WILDFOWL GUILD

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jeff Tinkham, President      Wayne Jarman, Vice President  
Jim Mehne, Secretary      Roger Shope, Treasurer  
Fletcher Bryant      Werner Seibel  
Jamie Champe      Herb Videll  
Gentry Childress      Al Henley  
William Walsh, Jr., Curator

### MUSEUM CARVERS

Tuesday:      Pete DiPietro  
Wednesday:      Roy Carlson  
                         Ed Morrison, Herb Videll  
Thursday:      Hank Grigolite  
"The Boathouse Boys" Carving Club:      Al, Jamie, John & Pete  
Friday:      Gary Holt  
Saturday:      Gentry Childress & Ben Purvis  
Sunday:      Herb Verhaagen

## MUSEUM VOLUNTEERS

Tuesday:      Bob Bishop      1p-5p  
Wednesday:      Archie Johnson      10a-2p  
Thursday:      Joe Leo      10a-2p  
Friday:      OPEN  
Saturday:      OPEN  
Sunday:      OPEN  
Museum Grounds      Nancy Lekberg

### MUSEUM STAFF

Lynn Hightower, Director      Ann Smith, Gift Shop Manager

### MUSEUM CONTACT INFORMATION

ATLANTIC WILDFOWL HERITAGE MUSEUM  
1113 Atlantic Avenue  
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Telephone: 757.437.8432  
Facsimile: 757.437.9950  
Website: [www.awhm.org](http://www.awhm.org)  
Email: [director@atwildfowl.org](mailto:director@atwildfowl.org)

**You can now pay your dues online at [awhm.org](http://awhm.org) !**

*Please understand that we depend on every dollar to operate the museum. If you have not paid your 2017 dues, please give serious consideration to sending them into the museum right away. Beginning March 1, 2017, any listed member who has not paid their dues will receive an invoice from the museum director requesting payment of their annual dues*

## 2017 DUES

\$25/YR INDIVIDUAL

\$35/FAMILY

\$200/YR CORPORATE

\$500/YR SPONSOR



## BACK BAY WILDFOWL GUILD 2017 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ AMOUNT PAID \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_ [CELL] \_\_\_\_\_

*January 1, 2017 kicked off our Annual Membership Campaign. Each member is encouraged to find one new member to join the Back Bay Wildfowl Guild. Our very existence depends on growing the membership of the Guild. Please encourage everyone you know to become a member!*

***Please pass this newsletter on to any potential new member!***