

THE WILDFOWLER

AUGUST 2026

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

ATLANTIC WILDFOWL
HERITAGE MUSEUM
de Witt Cottage

HIGHLIGHTING THE MCNAIR
DECOY LEGACY
FALL CELEBRATION 2026

MCNAIR & SONS DECOYS
A SPECIAL EXHIBITION
INCLUDING THE MARK AND
MARGIE CROMWELL COLLECTION

MEET THE CARVERS
MARK, IAN, AND COLIN AND
EXPERIENCE A LIVE CARVING
DEMONSTRATION. 200 OF THEIR
CARVINGS WILL BE ON DISPLAY
IN THE MUSEUM.

There will be an auction with live and online bidding for a pintail by Mark, a black duck by Ian and a carving by Colin created especially for this fundraiser event.
Opening Reception Saturday September 19th, 2026, 3pm VIP, 4pm general admission at the Dewitt Cottage, Virginia Beach
CONTACT DIRECTOR@AWHM.ORG FOR MORE INFORMATION
AND TO REGISTER TO BID ON MCNAIR DECOYS. AWHM.ORG | 1113 ATLANTIC AVENUE, VIRGINIA BEACH, VA 23451

Sponsored by Copley Fine Art Auctions

COPLEY FINE ART AUCTIONS

◆ BECOME AN EVENT SPONSOR ◆

Help Us Celebrate & Preserve Our Coastal Heritage

Join us on **September 19, 2026**, for the **McNair Decoy Legacy Fall Celebration**, an exciting afternoon celebrating exceptional decoy artistry, family tradition, and the rich coastal heritage of Virginia Beach.

WHY SPONSOR THIS SPECIAL EVENT?

★ Showcase Your Business

Gain valuable recognition among museum supporters, collectors, artists, community leaders, and guests.

★ Support Our Mission

Your sponsorship helps the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum preserve the history, art, and traditions of wildfowling and coastal Virginia.

★ Be Part of the Celebration

Enjoy an unforgettable afternoon featuring **Mark, Ian, and Colin McNair**, live carving, an extraordinary collection of decoys, and a special auction.



SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES ARE AVAILABLE

Want to become an Event Sponsor?

[Event Sponsorship](#)

Or Contact Aimee Rhodes, Museum Director, at director@awhm.org

YOUR SUPPORT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Preserve the Past • Celebrate the Present • Inspire the Future

SEPTEMBER 19, 2026

VIP Reception: 3 PM • General Admission: 4 PM

Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum • de Witt Cottage

Virginia Beach, Virginia

WE LOOK FORWARD TO CELEBRATING WITH YOU!

Join us for one of the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum's most anticipated events of the year! On Saturday, September 19, 2026, friends, members, collectors, and supporters are invited to the historic de Witt Cottage for an unforgettable afternoon celebrating the artistry, tradition, and heritage of the legendary McNair family of decoy carvers.

It was such an honor to have the McNair family support our Fall Fundraiser and Auction last year, and we are thrilled to welcome them back for this year's celebration. Their generosity, talent, and commitment to preserving the tradition of decoy carving helped make last year's event a tremendous success, and we are grateful to once again partner with this extraordinary family.

This year's Annual Fall Fundraiser will feature the McNair & Sons Decoys exhibition, showcasing extraordinary carvings by Mark, Ian, and Colin McNair, including pieces from the renowned Mark and Margie Cromwell Collection. Guests will also enjoy an exclusive live carving demonstration and can meet the artists whose work is admired by collectors around the world.

The excitement continues with an in-person live and online auction featuring original carvings created especially for this event by the McNair family. Whether you're an avid collector or simply appreciate exceptional craftsmanship, this is a rare opportunity to own a unique work of art while supporting the museum's mission. Every dollar raised helps preserve Virginia Beach's rich coastal heritage, expand educational programming, and care for the historic de Witt Cottage for generations to come.

The festivities begin with a VIP Reception at 3:00 p.m., followed by General Ticket Admission at 4:00 p.m. Tickets will be available for [Purchase Your Ticket\(s\)](#). Be sure to watch your email, our website, and our social media pages for online registration for the auction and event updates.

	Free Decoy Identification and Evaluation By Jeff Tinkham Past President of The Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum Call (757) 724-7131 or jeff@tinkhamlaw.com	
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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Preserving Our Past. Inspiring Our Future.

Dear Friends of the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum,

It is an honor to serve as the Director of the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum and to help carry forward the remarkable history and traditions preserved within the historic deWitt Cottage.

As I look ahead, I am reminded that our museum is much more than a collection of decoys, artwork, photographs, and artifacts. We are preserving stories. We are honoring the generations of carvers, hunters, artists, conservationists, families, and community members who helped shape the rich cultural heritage of Coastal Virginia Beach.

One of our priorities moving forward is to capture and preserve more of our own history, the history of the Back Bay Wildfowl Guild, the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum, the deWitt family and Cottage, and the broader history of Virginia Beach and Coastal Virginia.

We Need Your Help Preserving Our History

We are looking for volunteers who have an interest in local history, research, genealogy, photography, storytelling, or simply helping preserve the past.

There are countless stories, photographs, documents, newspaper articles, artifacts, and memories that may be sitting in family albums, attics, file cabinets, or personal collections. Some of these stories have never been formally documented.

We want to find them and preserve them for future generations.

You do not have to be a historian to participate. Volunteers can help research and organize historical materials, interview longtime community members, identify photographs, document stories, research the deWitt family and Cottage, and help create a permanent historical record of the people and organizations that have contributed to our community.

If you have a story to tell, a photograph to share, a family connection, or an interest in helping us uncover our history, we want to hear from you.

Get Involved. Be Part of Our Story.

There are many ways you can help keep our heritage alive:

Become a Member

Your membership provides essential support for the Museum and helps us continue preserving our collections, offering educational programs, and sharing our coastal heritage with the community.

Become a Sponsor

Businesses and organizations can make an even greater impact by sponsoring an event, program, exhibit, or Museum initiative. Your sponsorship provides valuable community recognition while directly supporting our mission.



Volunteer

Whether you are interested in history and research, helping with visitors and programs, assisting at special events, or lending your talents behind the scenes, there is a place for you at AWHM.

Attend Our Upcoming Events

Join us for exhibits, educational programs, workshops, fundraisers, and special events. Bring your family, invite a friend, and experience the history and traditions that make our museum unique.

Together, We Preserve What Matters.

None of this would be possible without the incredible support of our members, volunteers, donors, sponsors, and community partners. Every membership, donation, sponsorship, volunteer hour, historical photograph, document, story, and visit makes a difference.

As we move forward, I invite you to become part of the next chapter of the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum. Help us protect the stories of those who came before us, celebrate the traditions that brought our community together, and inspire future generations to appreciate and protect our natural and cultural heritage.

Our history belongs to all of us. Let's work together to make sure it is never forgotten.

Thank you for believing in our mission and for helping us preserve the past, celebrate the present, and inspire the future.

With gratitude,

Aimee Rhodes

Museum Director

Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum

Historic deWitt Cottage | Virginia Beach, Virginia

MEMBERS • SPONSORS • VOLUNTEERS • HISTORIANS • STORYTELLERS • VISITORS

There is a place for everyone at the Museum. Join us and help preserve our story!

DECOYS WANTED
WE BUY WOODEN OR CANVAS DUCKS,
GEESE, SWANS & SHOREBIRDS
WHAT IS YOUR DECOY WORTH? ... IT COULD BE WORTH THOUSANDS!



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



**FREE DECOY IDENTIFICATION & EVALUATIONS
OF SINGLE DECOYS OR ENTIRE COLLECTIONS
BY MARK CROMWELL 757-721-2746
Member North Carolina Decoy Collectors Assoc.**



COLLECTORS SHELF

SHIP CABIN CLUB

(1925 to Present)

Bobby Byrd and I are college fraternity brothers from the 1960s, an auspicious beginning to our story. Over the years, we have traveled extensively with our wives to England and numerous destinations in the U.S., and we generally meet socially on a weekly basis. The four of us are close friends...more like family. With the indulgence of our wives, Bobby and I share a passion for quail hunting with fine, small-gauge double guns. In the process of doing so, we generally end each season with freezers full of birds. Bobby's next-door neighbor is one Ned Lawrence, a fine fellow himself and a friend of mine, as well. Not long ago, Ned became a member of The Ship Cabin Club, a longtime waterfowl hunt club on Back Bay in Virginia Beach. More recently, Ned thought it well; to invite Bobby and me to an evening social function at the club, at which I would bring birds and prepare a dinner for all using my nearly famous "Quail Marsala" recipe. **It all went uphill from there.** I don't want to brag about the quality of my chef skills, but the few of many servings that weren't consumed at dinner disappeared at breakfast the next morning.

All this is an aside, however, to the focus of this month's Wildfowl Heritage piece. All of the club members Bobby and I met were exceptionally gracious, and I even saw a friend I hadn't seen in several moons. The camaraderie of the club reminded Bobby and me of our fraternity house on West 45th Street in Norfolk...way back in the day. The club members were particularly entertained by Bobby's repertoire of duck hunting experiences beginning in the early 1960s. For our purposes here, however, conversations with the club members about their club and its origins were particularly intriguing. As the name implies, the clubhouse was obviously taken off a ship (brass-framed portholes being an obvious indicator), but the club members had no knowledge of what ship and knew little about the club's founders who accomplished that complex undertaking. I suggested to John Hurd, the club's president, that we attempt to solve what we could of those mysteries. The only information we had at hand was Archie Johnson & Bud Coppedge's seminal work Gun Clubs & Decoys (of Back Bay & Currituck Sound). They wrote that the club was founded in 1925 when Capt. Joe Clark from Norfolk purchased the club property from L. E. Davis and then Joe Clark, Joseph Wood, and John Clark salvaged a cabin from a "sailing" schooner and had it moved by barge to Back Bay to serve as the clubhouse. Beyond that, other details about the club's founding were lost to the dustbin of history.

John and I picked up the challenge of restoring what we could of that history. Let's start with the founders. On p.49, Johnson & Coppedge included a 1925 photo of Joe Clark, Joe Wood, an 'unknown' hunter, and John Clark. We are comfortable saying the 'unknown' hunter was Alvah H. Boushell (our first revelation). The four were residents of Norfolk and the houses, they lived in exist today in the city's Ghent section. Capt. Joseph M. Clark owned the Jos. M. Clark Towing Company, a fleet of tugboats working on the Norfolk waterfront. His business partner was Boushell, and his brother, John I. Clark was a member of the enterprise. In 1920, Jos Clark sold his towing company to Wood, with Boushell and John Clark remaining with the operation as Wood's Vice- President and Sec'y Treasurer, respectively. Joseph Downing Wood was a known and respected waterman on the busy Norfolk waterfront and his new Wood Towing Company was a well-known entity in the shipping industry. (Wood retired when he sold his company many years later to Curtis Bay Towing, the large national tugboat/towing company headquartered in Baltimore.) We'll talk more about Wood, whom we consider the most prominent member of the club.

For now, however, let's consider the club's founding. The four people we've identified were obviously close friends and business associates. Being in the tugboat/barge and ship towing business, they were aware of virtually everything happening on the Norfolk waterfront. At some point, they decided to form a hunt club. Noticing vessels



that were being decommissioned and salvaged locally, it occurred to them that a cabin from one of those ships would make a usable clubhouse. But that would require the seemingly overwhelming task of moving the ship cabin from Norfolk's waterfront to Back Bay in Princess Anne County. In fact, and perhaps obviously, such an idea might only occur to someone who owns a tugboat and barge towing operation. The concept became a reality. They obtained the cabin from a ship being salvaged, Jos Clark bought the club property from Davis, and Wood's company barged the cabin up the Elizabeth River, through the Chesapeake/Albemarle Canal past Great Bridge, down the North Landing River to Currituck Sound, around Knotts Island to Back Bay, and then up Back Bay to its present location on Red Head Bay. Voila! The Ship Cabin Club was born with an instant and quite unique clubhouse!

Let's now talk about Capt. Joseph Downing Wood, whom we consider to be the most noteworthy founder of the club. Wood was born in 1867 in Washington County, NC, about 100 miles south of Tidewater, VA. (Author's Note: Washington County is adjacent to Tyrell County where my father, Ernest Pettigrew Davenport, was born and raised. Wood's grandfather married a Sallie Ann Davenport from Tyrell County. If one goes back far enough, all of the Davenports in that part of NC are related, being descendants of one Richard Davenport of Kilby, England who migrated to Virginia in the mid-1600s and received a land grant on Albemarle Sound.) In 1886, Wood moved to Norfolk and began working on the waterfront. In 1889, he earned his master's license and became skipper of the Norfolk/Portsmouth ferries. In 1900, the U.S. Navy made him master of tugs and pilot for the Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth. In 1905, the Navy selected him to be sailing master for a major endeavor: towing the U.S.S. Dewey, our nation's first floating drydock, to the new Subic Bay Naval Station in the Philippine Islands, a six-month long trip that involved crossing the Atlantic into the Mediterranean, through the Suez Canal, across the Indian Ocean, through the Malacca Strait into the South China Sea, and then north to Subic Bay. The journey totaled 16,000 miles, becoming the longest tow ever recorded and giving Wood world-wide acclaim. (On his way back, the ship Wood was on ran aground on a reef 40 miles from Hawaii, with the crew and passengers luckily being rescued by a nearby vessel. He finally made it back to Vancouver, BC on a British/Australian mail packet.)

In 1917 during WWI, the Navy made Wood Director of Tugs for the entire Fifth Naval District (all of Hampton Roads) and commissioned him Lt. Commander. In short order, he was promoted to Commander. In 1920, he moved on to where we began our story...private enterprise—the acquisition of Joseph Clark's (and Alvah Boushell's) tugboat company and formed his own Wood Towing Company. But Wood's story goes on from there. In 1926, he was elected to Norfolk City Council, where he served for a total of 16 years. After a four-year break within those 16 years, he returned as Mayor of Norfolk during WWII. During Wood's years, Norfolk was Virginia's largest city and the Norfolk port operation was the state's primary economic asset. Wood was a leader in the city, with prominent involvement in its port operations.

Perhaps no less important was Wood's early foresight and efforts in the need for a bridge and tunnel between Norfolk and Portsmouth. Having earlier captained the Norfolk/Portsmouth ferries and spent virtually all his working life on the Norfolk waterfront, Wood saw firsthand the increasing need for a way to facilitate vehicular traffic between the two cities. He began actively advocating for the tunnel system in the 1920s when his political career began, long before the Elizabeth River Tunnel Commission was formed. It wasn't until 1952 that the tunnel existing today, the Downtown Tunnel was opened, but Wood's early advocacy was key to the final result. (In a personal interest vein, personal for my friend Bobby, that is Wood's daughter Margaret, married a Burton "Bootie" Melchor, a prominent Norfolk businessman. Bootie, who passed away in 1987, was a friend and associate of Bobby. It's a small world.)

So let's return our focus to The Ship Cabin Club. Other than the names of the four founders and what we've learned about Wood, we know little of the club's early years. Our museum (AWHM) has a hunter's diary from the club. The diary begins in 1950 and was kept by the son of Conrad Little, who eventually acquired the club property in 1959. It records the names of recognizable individuals who hunted at the club, to include a Jay Wood (?) who hunted in 1958. Also, interestingly, the diary notes that from 1956-59 there was a serious decline in grass

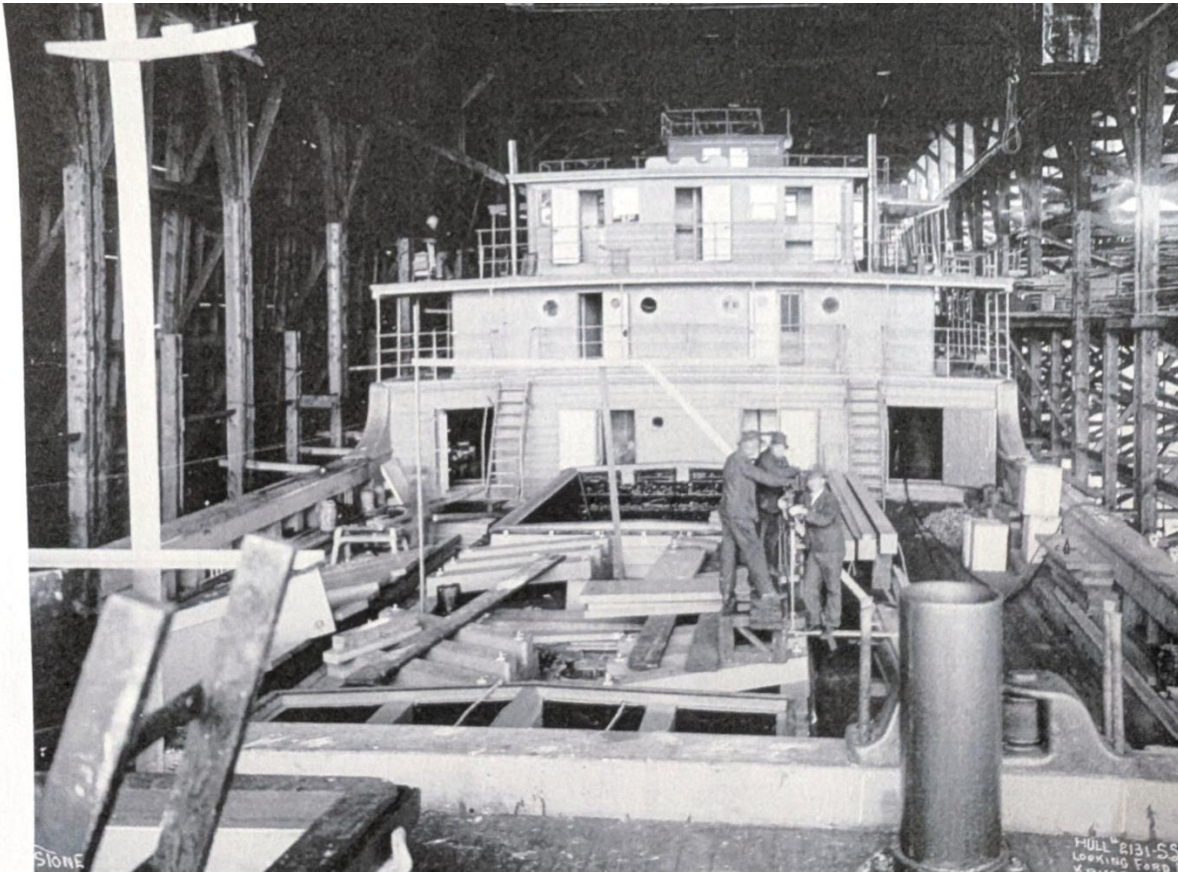


beds in Back Bay, with an accompanying decline in ‘ducking’ (SIC). While everything presented thus far may be of interest, there’s nothing in Johnson/Coppedge or the club’s record to suggest what ship the club’s cabin came from what I’ll call the ‘Holy Grail’ finding. Again, this appeared to be one of those pieces lost in time. Enter the newly formed public investigating team of Hurd & Davenport, where no unknown is left unknown for lack of earnest effort. As previously noted, Johnson/Coppedge said the cabin came from a ‘sailing’ schooner. Given the size of the club’s cabin (see photo below), the only sail vessel candidates would have been the four- or five-masted lumber schooners, large wooden sailing vessels which were in common use in the late 1800s to early 1900s.



But a discovery by John took us in a different direction. John stumbled upon the Ferris 1001 wooden-hulled steamships, commissioned by the federal government during WWI. Upon entering the war, our isolationist country had an immediate and dire need for international shipping capability. A standard design was quickly developed for a 260’ to 290’ ship with a wooden hull, wood being readily available. Various shipyards were quickly awarded contracts, to include the Dierks-Blodgett yard in Pascagoula, MS. Again, the design for these ships was standard from yard-to-yard, to include the deck housing superstructure. A quick study of the Ferris 1001 photo below yields a startling revelation—one sees a cabin structure identical to that of The Ship Cabin Club. Note the roof overhang and configuration/location of the four portholes and two passageway doors the club and Ferris 1001 photos are mirror images.





Voila! The club's cabin came from a Ferris 1001 steamship, not a sailing ship. But which one of the many Ferris 1001s provided the club's cabin? Well, we don't know which one...but we know with a high degree of certainty that it was one of two we have identified. Our story continues... While the Ferris 1001 ships were built in 1918-19, by 1925 when The Ship Cabin Club was founded those wooden-hulled behemoths were already obsolete. One, in fact, developed a dangerously leaky hull on its maiden voyage to France and had to put into the Royal Navy Dockyard in Bermuda to have its hull completely re-caulked. (That ship was one of our two suspects.) It's also written that none of these Ferris 1001 ships ever completed a voyage across the Atlantic. All this being the case, all of these ships were being broken up for salvage at the time in question. So how could we know which of the many provided the club's cabin? Here's how—in 1925, only two of the Ferris 1001s were being scrapped in Norfolk. They were the SS Belair and the SS Cawker (Cawker being the one to seek refuge in Bermuda), both built by the Pascagoula, MS yard. And here's how we're comfortable saying it happened. Again, our four club founders were friends and business associates in the Norfolk tugboat port scene. It's likely they had already hunted with other clubs/friends on Back Bay and/or knew or knew of L.E. Davis and his property in the marsh off the end of what is now Ship Cabin Rd. In any case, the four decided to acquire the property from Davis (purportedly, Joseph Clark, specifically, made that purchase) and obtain the cabin from either the Belair or the Cawker, both of which were being broken up in a Norfolk salvage yard which their tugboats sailed by daily. If that's not exactly how it happened, we're sure it's more than close enough for our purposes.

So where does all this leave us. First, we know considerably more about The Ship Cabin Club and its founders. Second, while we may not know with a bullet's accuracy the ship from which the club's cabin came, we're comfortable saying we know within a shotgun spread! And we've also shed light on another fascinating story of waterfowl hunting on Back Bay and Currituck Sound. There are more to follow...

Larry Davenport...

and John Hurd, President of The Ship Cabin Club



MEET OUR CARVERS

Monday: Open
Tuesday: Open
Wednesday: George, Mike, Allison, Gentry and Ed Morrison
Thursday: “*The Boathouse Boys*” Carving Club: Al, Jamie, John, Pete
Friday: Open
Saturday: Open
Sunday: Gentry, Ben, Allison and Mike

*Our carvers are in the boathouse from 11 am to 3 pm.
Come by and see them in action*

Upcoming Guild Events:

Meets every Monday
de Witt Garden Club
10:00 am, at the museum
Bring your work gloves and tools

Meets every 3rd Tuesday
08/18/2026: Board Meeting
6:00pm in-person and Virtual

PLEASE CHECK OUT WWW.AWHM.ORG FOR MORE EVENTS



Please pass this newsletter on to any potential new member.

Board of Directors:

Parke Atkinson, Secretary

Larry Davenport, Treasurer

Larry Lambert

Chris Ludford

Jim Mehne

Mark Cromwell

Patrick (Buzz) Hayes

Philip Davenport

Austin Rutter

Gordon Harrison

Will Dickinson

Lynn Hightower

[Email the Director at director@awhm.org](mailto:director@awhm.org)



Become a Member – Help Preserve Our Legacy and Heritage

The Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum exists because of the generosity and dedication of people like you. Every membership directly supports our mission to preserve, protect, and share the rich history, art, and traditions of Virginia's coastal and wildfowl heritage for future generations.

If you are not yet a member, we invite you to become part of our museum family by purchasing membership at the level that best suits your commitment. Your support helps us care for our historic collections, present educational programs, maintain our beautiful museum, and create meaningful experiences for visitors of all ages.

If you are already a member, thank you! We encourage you to take a moment to verify that your membership is current. Renewing your membership ensures that your support continues uninterrupted and allows us to plan confidently for the future.

Every membership, whether new, renewed, or upgraded, makes a meaningful difference. Together, we are preserving an important piece of our community's history while inspiring future generations to appreciate and celebrate our unique maritime heritage.

Thank you for believing in our mission and for helping the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum continue to thrive. We couldn't do it without you.

Click here for [Online Membership Purchase](#)

Thank you for your support!

BACK BAY WILDFOWL GUILD 2026 MEMBERSHIP GUIDE

☒ Membership Level (please check one):

☐ \$35 / Individual

☐ \$200 / Silver

☐ \$50 / Family

☐ \$500 / Gold

☐ \$100 / Bronze

☐ \$1,000 / Presidents Circle

Renew your membership online at www.awhm.org or, text WILDFOWL to 44321

MEMBER INFORMATION (PLEASE PRINT)

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City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

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Telephone Number: _____ ☐ Cell ☐ Home _____

How do you want to receive your monthly newsletter? (Please check One) ☐ Email or ☐ US Mail

Mail this form and payment to: Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum 1113 Atlantic Avenue,
Virginia Beach, VA 23451



