

THE WILDFOWLER

JUNE 2026

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

Mark McNair Exhibit

Now through April 2027

Mark McNair, a celebrated decoy carver living on Virginia's Eastern Shore, is portrayed as both a master craftsman and a humble artist deeply devoted to making things by hand. Working from his home overlooking the Chesapeake Bay, McNair carves lifelike duck decoys from white cedar with remarkable ease, though he insists it is simply the result of decades of practice. Widely regarded as the leading living figure in contemporary decoy carving, his work is collected by major museums and prized by collectors, yet he remains grounded, motivated less by fame or money than by the joy of craft itself.

The passage also traces the history of duck decoys, from ancient hunting tools to collectible folk art, and explains how McNair came to the tradition indirectly through his love of wood, drawing, and design. Though he did not grow up as a hunter or decoy carver, his artistic training and fascination with form led him to create his first bird in the 1970s during a revival of interest in American folk art. Since then, he has developed a distinctive style known for its sculptural elegance and unique paint finishes. Above all, McNair's work reflects close observation of nature, traditional craftsmanship, and a belief that humans are driven to make useful things beautiful. For more information follow this link: <https://gardenandgun.com/a-legendary-carvers-chesapeake-chops>. Mark and his family will be at The Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum on September 19, 2026 for an Auction and Reception celebrating Mark's creations and those of his two sons, Colin and Ian.



Carving Decoys

By Hand



Mark McNair's

Humble

Workshop

Craddockville,

Virginia

Photographs by

Gately

Williams





Upcoming Guild Events:

de Witt Cottage Garden Club

9:00 am, at the museum

Meets every Monday

We are a hands on Garden Club

So bring your gloves and tools.

06/23/2026: Board Meeting

In person at deWitt Cottage

6:30 pm

06/21/2026 Father's Day

07/04/2026: Independence Day

Friday July 3rd through Monday July 6th

Save these Dates:

Saturday, 09/19/2026 AWHM Celebration of
McNair Exhibition And Decoy Auction

Happy Father's Day !



Free Decoy Identification and Evaluation

By Jeff Tinkham
Past President of The Atlantic
Wildfowl Heritage Museum
Call (757) 724-7131 or
jeff@tinkhamlaw.com



Luxurious Princess Anne Hotel
circa 1900



WILDFOWL HERITAGE

It was a bygone era when men would dress in fine linen suits and women would don beautiful dresses to take a summer's eve stroll along Virginia Beach's wood-planked boardwalk. Music would float in the air from the nearby dance hall and sounds of jubilant glee would crescendo from the nearby hotel's casino. It was a summer paradise where the outside worries of the gentry disappeared on the sands of the beach and new hopes glistened like the beautiful sparkles of the sun's reflection on the waves. The Princess

Anne Hotel marked the birth of this paradise, ushering a new era of resort life to Virginia Beach. Built in 1880 under the name Virginia Beach Hotel, it started as a modest hotel with only 50 rooms. What set this hotel apart was that it had a depot for the Norfolk & Southern Railroad that ran almost literally into its lobby. This opened up the oceanfront to residents in Norfolk and all other connecting cities. Soon, people started coming in from all around to bask in the sunshine and relax by the Atlantic Ocean. It served as a way point for wealthy New Englanders "Snow Birds", traveling to Florida.

In 1887, the Virginia Beach Hotel was sold and remodeled. It would then be baptized The Princess Anne Hotel, quickly becoming an elite retreat for the famous and wealthy that flocked to the Virginia Beach oceanfront in droves. Soon, new hotels began popping up but none could compare to the majestic grandeur that the Princess Anne Hotel held. Aside from its proximity to the oceanfront (having its own private walkway to the boardwalk), the Princess Anne was a wonder to behold. It was so large that the hotel covered two blocks, between 14th and 16th Streets. Amenities included a post office, bowling alley, dance halls, casinos as well as fresh and saltwater soaking baths.

This all-inclusive refuge was known for its fine cuisine as well as the more fanciful dancing that was done in the dance halls. The Princess Anne Hotel had room for up to 400 guests and would often draw the rich and the famous. Amongst those that graced the hotel's hallways included: Presidents Benjamin Harrison and Grover Cleveland, politician William Jennings Bryant, labor leader Samuel Gompers, Cornelius Vanderbilt and was a favorite vacation spot of Alexander Graham Bell and his family. The Princess Anne Hotel is where Bernard Holland was first employed as a Clerk for the railroad. Guests would wake up at dawn and spend the early morning hours on the beach, avoiding the harsh exposure of the afternoon sunshine. Afterwards, they would often take the train into Norfolk to see and be seen by the rest of the local and visiting elite. After catching a late afternoon train back to the Princess Anne Hotel, they would dine on fine meals and dance to their hearts content to popular waltzes of the day. Then, they would retire to their luxury accommodations, preparing for the next morning. In 1906, the Virginia General Assembly voted to allow the resort area of Virginia Beach to become a separate entity from then Princess Anne County. The first council of the newly-incorporated city met for the first time at the Princess Anne Hotel on March 15, 1906. It was there that many important community functions were established, including a police and fire department.

Early in the morning on June 10, 1907, a fire began in the kitchen of the Princess Anne Hotel and quickly spread throughout. Sergeant Carl Boescher (of the Richmond Light Artillery Blues) hurried to help get the 110 guests and employees out of the hotel. Within a few hours, the hotel that was the anchor of the Virginia Beach



oceanfront had fallen completely to the ground, taking almost five blocks of other buildings with it. All guests and employees escaped except Emma Clark (the hotel's chambermaid) and the hotel's steward, John Eaton, both perishing in the fire. The manager was so emotionally overcome that he attempted to throw himself in the ocean to take his own life. However, friends and guests restrained him. The estimated loss of the hotel's structure came to \$185,000 (approximately \$4,205,284 today). In addition, the hotel's safe had been left open and thousands of dollars worth of valuables belonging to the guests along with the hotel's hard receipts were completely lost. With only \$83,000 (approximately \$1,886,695 today), the owners decided not to rebuild the Princess Anne Hotel and the once famous and sought after landmark was lost to the ages. Today, no trace of the beautiful hotel remains. The blocks in which it sat are now home to a fishing pier, high rise hotels and restaurants. The elegant life that defined and punctuated the world that the Princess Anne Hotel saw now merely haunt the streets. But standing on the cement boardwalk late one evening, you may catch yourself hearing waltzes floating in the breeze, harkening back to a forgotten time that disappeared in the ashes of the iconic resort.

DECOYS WANTED

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

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hello Board Members , Members and Volunteers

I hope everyone had a wonderful Memorial Day weekend. As we welcome the summer season, I am excited to share that the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum is now open seven days a week from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. On behalf of our Board of Directors, staff, and volunteers, thank you for the incredible support you have shown our museum. Your memberships, donations, volunteer efforts, and continued encouragement help us preserve and share the rich heritage of waterfowling, decoy carving, conservation, and the coastal traditions that have



shaped our region for generations.

The stories and craftsmanship represented within our museum are more than artifacts of the past; they are a living legacy. Through education, exhibits, and community engagement, we work to ensure that the traditions of decoy carving, collecting, and waterfowl conservation continue to inspire future generations. Preserving this heritage is essential to honoring those who came before us and protecting the natural resources that make these traditions possible.

We have several exciting events, exhibits, and programs planned throughout the summer, and we hope you will join us. Whether you visit the museum, attend an event, become a member, make a donation, or volunteer your time, you play an important role in helping us carry this legacy forward.

Thank you for being part of the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum family. We look forward to seeing you at the museum this summer.

Respectfully,
Aimee Rhodes
President
Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum



The Perils of Being a Duck

Top Duck-Craving Predators - Reprinted from Delta Waterfowl Website

When it comes to food-chain hierarchy, ducks are the rabbits of the avian world — essentially every critter with forward-facing eyes wants a bite of them. The threats are even broader for ducklings, which are consumed by practically anything large enough to complete the task, from bullfrogs to herons. And you can imagine the vulnerability of duck eggs to plundering, given their immobility and tasty, nutrient-rich yolks. Here's a look at the key predators that impact waterfowl production.

Red Foxes

Red foxes are a primary predator limiting duck production in the prairie pothole region, particularly for upland-nesting species such as mallards and pintails. Why? For one thing, research suggests they specifically seek out duck nests, rather than finding them opportunistically like most other mammals. They also want more than just



eggs — they creep in stealthily in hopes of pouncing on the hen, which of course leaves no chance for renesting. Foxes frequently cache newfound eggs — that is, squirrel them away for later — and move on to the next nest.

Raccoons

Raccoons generally don't actively target duck nests, but they're happy to eat most or all of a clutch when they happen upon one. And happen upon them they do, in their travels along prairie wetland edges, farmland ditches and other places breeding ducks nest. They'll eat ducklings, too, although their consumption of eggs is far more detrimental to the fall flight. Notably, raccoons are not native to all of the prairie pothole region, and ducks didn't have to contend with them in prairie Canada until about the 1950s.

Skunks

Like raccoons, skunks are foraging animals that delight in chance encounters with duck nests and occasionally eat ducklings, too. Research funded in part by Delta Waterfowl suggests that the average skunk depredates at least two or three duck nests each spring — which adds up quickly in regions with high skunk densities — and that skunks feed most heavily on duck eggs in early spring when food alternatives are scarce.

Coyotes

Many assume that coyotes are public enemy No. 1 for nesting ducks, given their size and abundance. While they will eat ducklings, scavenge eggs and kill any hens they manage to catch, they also drive away foxes and other preeminent breeding duck predators. Thus, while coyotes have a net negative impact on breeding ducks, the losses are somewhat offset by the coyotes' displacement of more aggressive nest raiders.



Badgers

Badgers are a major duck-egg predator across much of the prairie pothole region. In a 1999 study published by Notre Dame and conducted in west-central Minnesota and southeastern North Dakota, waterfowl flesh was found in the stomach contents of 32 percent of the badgers sampled, while 27 percent contained ducklings, and a whopping 60 percent had recently consumed duck eggs.



Mink

These fanciful, semi-aquatic mammals are occasional egg-eaters and kill a lot of ducklings in the prairie pothole region. In dry years, when wetlands retract from the surrounding vegetation and ducklings are left exposed, mink can exact an especially grave toll on how many survive to migration. Otters, a relative of mink, similarly affect duck production in areas such as Nova Scotia, where their numbers are increasing.



Corvids

The corvid family, which includes crows, ravens and magpies, poses a formidable aerial danger to waterfowl eggs and ducklings. These birds are more plentiful in the parkland habitats of central Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba — which have ample trees and therefore support high corvid populations — than in the prairies of the Dakotas and southern Canada. And because the Canadian parklands are a critical region for over-water nesters such as canvasbacks, redheads and ring-necked ducks, corvids strongly affect these key diver species. Crows used to be considered the top avian predator for waterfowl, but recent data suggests that ravens are

far more destructive and their numbers have dramatically increased in parkland habitats that support canvasbacks.



Gulls

One might think the secluded breeding habitats of eiders and other island-nesting sea ducks would be relatively protected from egg-eaters. However, a recent influx of gulls and other predators is significantly limiting nest success and duckling survival in coastal Maine and Canada's maritime provinces. Predation by black-backed gulls, in particular, is believed to be a leading cause behind declines of common eider populations in the Atlantic Flyway. The gulls perch in wait, and strike when hens leave their nests unattended.



Other Nest Predators

The list goes on. Despite steep population declines, Franklin's ground squirrels remain a significant nest invader in key portions of the prairies. Birds of prey, including hawks and owls, eat eggs and ducklings, and the recovery of bald eagles in the East is thought to be putting a serious dent in eider duckling survival. Snakes are well documented wood-duck nest raiders, while snapping turtles, largemouth bass, northern pike and even bullfrogs pull plenty of ducklings below the surface. Feral cats, about 95 million of them at last count, weasels, Opossums, Armadillos, Bobcats, and Herons are also on the hunt for newborn ducks. To be certain, a juvenile duck that finds itself winging south with winter's chill at its back has overcome all manner of odds. — *Kyle Wintersteen* USFWS National Digital Library.

Please Donate! With your support, we can continue to work to protect our natural resources, preserve the legacy of wildfowling, promote environmental education, history and the arts through a variety of events and community partnerships.

Renew your membership online at www.awhm.org or, text WILDFOWL to 44-321

Memberships run for 12 consecutive months from the date annual dues are paid.

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\$35/YR INDIVIDUAL

\$50/YR FAMILY

\$100/YR BRONZE

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\$500/YR GOLD

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BACK BAY WILDFOWL GUILD 2026 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

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Thank you for your support!***

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Have a Great Summer!

