

# New Jersey Decoy Collectors Show

By Pat Johnson



Shorebird decoys.  
Photo credit: Ocean County.

The New Jersey Decoy Collectors Association has the largest membership and most well-attended meetings on the East Coast of any club dedicated to decoys, said President Jaim Lloyd at a recent meeting of the NJDCA at the Manahawkin Elks Lodge. The meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday of every month (except December) at 7 pm, doors open at 6 pm.

The forty or so members in attendance that night had brought their best decoys for a friendly

competition in which the winners get points towards the title of “Best Decoy Collector of 2024” that will be bestowed during the 30th Decoy, Art & Hunting Collectibles Show and Sale.

The Decoy Show will be held April 6th at a brand new location, Stockton University – Campus Center 9 AM to 4 PM. Club President Jaim Lloyd looks forward to the new venue as a great opportunity to reach out to the larger community and to share with them an appreciation for decoys, carvers, and bayman culture. Lloyd hopes the new association with the University will lead to educational demonstrations on the interconnection of art, history, and environment represented through decoys.

The featured carver of the 2024 show will be Will Hammarstrom, who was recently honored with the 2022 Hurley Conklin Award at the Old Time Barnegat Bay Decoy & Gunning Show in Tuckerton. Renowned collector and decoy historian Bob Seabrook will create an artifact display for the show. Seabrook’s expertise and engaging display design has earned high praise,

with visitors to the show stating Seabrook puts together the best decoy exhibit in the state.

A guest speaker to be announced at a later date will give a presentation during the show. The Ocean County Parks Department table will feature crafts for kids. Food and drink are available at the food court and Coffee House in the Campus Center.

The NJ Decoy Collectors Association, Inc. was created back in 1982 as a forum for the discussion of contemporary and vintage decoys, reads its mission statement, “Focusing, but not limited to, New Jersey decoys and carvers as well as collectibles. A primary goal of the group is to promote an interest in the carving of decoys and the hobby of decoy collecting. By sharing the stories of the history of waterfowl carving for sport and as a specialized cultural craft, we encourage learning about today’s contemporary carvers and those from a long history of this craft that has created this unique art form. Introducing decoys to new collectors and providing a forum that is conducive to learning decoy history is our goal.”

Bob Seabrook from Absecon is one of the founding members of NJDCA and said the club started after Russell Holst, a premier collector, died in January 1981.

## Decoy Collectors continued...

“His widow owned the collection and started selling it that summer. Late fall or early winter some of us started meeting at each other’s houses. Someone would bring beer and something to eat and we’d talk decoys. There was some horse-trading, some buying and selling. One of the things was we all went together to Maryland [to the Havre de Grace Decoy and Wildlife Art Festival] and New York for shows and thought, why not start a club? So, six months later, we did.”

During the recent meeting, a video produced by James P. Hand and James Tales was shown, a long-form interview used for their feature documentary film “From the Marsh.” In it, eminent Delaware River decoy carver Bob White talked about his carving process. He said once he starts carving a bird, he becomes engrossed and keeps going, hour after hour, until its finished.

“Every bird I make is going to be treasured by somebody,” he said.

Later, during the same meeting, White joined Tuckerton decoy collector Jim Allen to talk about the early days of decoy collecting. White was a “picker” for collectors Lloyd Johnson and Johnny Hillman during the 1950s and 60s, he said. He told a story about finding a bunch of shore bird decoys in an old carriage house along the Delaware River. The owner initially called them ‘lawn birds’ and White thought he was going to get them for a good price but then the owners cousin told him they were decoys and worth a lot of money. “So I told him, I think you’re right –ask your cousin how much he’s going to pay for them. Then I pulled out a few hundreds. You can take the money now or take them to your cousin. He said ‘I’ll take the money’.”

Jim Allen said he was just a youngster when he and his dad met Jim’s future mentor, collector John Hillman. They had stopped at Claude Stevens Sunoco gas station that used to be along Main Street in Tuckerton to fill up their duck boat before heading out on the meadows to hunt. Hillman asked them if they had any old decoys—that Hillman was looking to buy them. They said no but Jim remembered the conversation.

Allen was 16 when he was asked to help clean out a

## NEW JERSEY DECOY COLLECTORS ASSOCIATION 30th Annual Decoy, Art & Hunting Collectibles Show and Sale

*“BEST OLD DECOY SHOW IN NEW JERSEY”*



**SATURDAY, APRIL 6, 2024**  
9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.— Rain or Shine

**LOCATION:** Stockton University - Campus Center  
101 Vera King Farris Drive  
Galloway, NJ 08205

**ADMISSION:** Adult - \$6.00 (with this flyer or our  
advertisement \$5.00)  
Children 12 & under FREE

- ▶ **FEATURED CARVER:** William “Will” Hammarstrom
- ▶ **ARTIFACT DISPLAY BY:** Bob Seabrook
- ▶ **FOOD & DRINK** available at the “Food Court”  
and “Coffee House” in the Campus Center
- ▶ **FREE DECOY APPRAISALS**
- ▶ **GUEST SPEAKERS:** To be announced

### SHOW CONTACTS

**Jaim Lloyd - Club President**  
609-703-6143  
**Clarence Fennimore - Co-Chairman**  
609-405-4376  
**John Shores - Co-Chairman**  
732-691-3278  
**Al Barker - Art Chairman**  
609-298-7459

out a gunning shanty on Middle Island before the season started. “I tied up at the dock and went up into the loft. All the decoys were racked but in back of them I found a potato sack full of decoys. I said I’d like to have them and I was told to bring back some cork or paper mache birds to replace them.”

He looked all over for John Hillman’s number and

## Decoy Collectors continued...

called him. “He said, ‘These are really good decoys. I’ll give you \$25 a piece for them but I think you should keep one. All I could think of was, I could get that brand new Brownie shot gun for duck hunting [with the money].”

“The decoys were by Captain Jesse Birdsall” said Allen to groans by his audience, who cannot believe Allen was lucky enough to stumble upon a treasure trove of decoys from one of the most prestigious New Jersey carvers of all time. “All original paint,” more groans as Allen details this rare feature of a 19th century “working” decoy (a decoy used for the purpose of hunting rather than as only a work of art for display) that significantly increases its value.

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going to be treasured  
by somebody."*

“Two years later he [Hillman] was exhibiting in Russell Hutz’s decoy show in Atlantic City and I was with him. At one-point John reached down under the table and pulls out one of those black ducks. Hultz pulls out a roll of hundred dollars bills and peels off three of them. ‘Well, did you learn anything son?’” Hillman asked me.

“I did keep one,” said Allen.

Allen also said back in the day when the marshes or meadows (as Tuckerton-ians called them) would flood, there would be decoys washed up all along Brigantine Road.

White added that he missed the days when finding decoys in old barns and cellars was like a treasure hunt. “I don’t pick anymore, I buy from weekly auctions. Contemporary birds are coming up in price. Unless you know what you’re doing with olds –you’re going to get stung.”

Allen added that collectors back in the day would have cookouts where collectors would swap stories and decoys.

“It’s like this club, you meet good people and you have something in common.”