

## Birders and the Duck Stamp

**H**ave you heard the news? You can now buy a Federal Duck Stamp through the ABA. You can do it via this easy-to-remember, easy-to-share web address: [aba.org/stamp](http://aba.org/stamp). Or you can call the ABA office at 1-800-850-2473. I encourage you to do so right away.

For years, debate has swirled around the issue of whether birders and similar low-impact wildlife watchers should buy the Duck Stamp. There are excellent arguments on both sides, as well as many shockingly bad, even self-contradictory ones. I'm going to try to say in just a couple hundred words how I see things now and going forward.

There are several great reasons for U.S. birders to buy the Federal Duck Stamp.

1. The Duck Stamp is a proven effective and efficient mechanism for protecting bird habitat.
2. The stamp is only \$15, which is cheap by almost any standard for anyone who devotes significant amounts of time and resources to birding.
3. The stamp gets you into U.S. national wildlife refuges that charge entrance fees, including some of our most beloved refuges in the ABA Area.
4. We as a community naturally want to support and grow the acreage of high-quality bird habitat and birding opportunities. Even non-U.S. birders realize direct value from the migratory bird populations the U.S. refuge system protects.

For several excellent reasons, birders have been reluctant to fully embrace the stamp program. These can be boiled down to variations on a single theme: The stamp is for duck hunters, and



Photo by © Greg Neise.

most of us—though by no means all of us—don't hunt ducks. More important in my view is that most of us don't identify as duck hunters; the Duck Stamp, for good or for ill, is strongly identified with hunters, their community, and their interests.

The standard counter to this argument is that birders and hunters want the same

thing: healthy bird populations and expanding, well-managed refuges. The Duck Stamp is a proven mechanism for helping reach those goals, the argument goes, and the onus is therefore on birders to step up and support it. After all, it shouldn't matter who gets the

credit, as long as bird populations are conserved. That's true, up to a point. It's also horrendously bad marketing.

**N**o question about it, hunters, birders, anglers, wildlife photographers, hikers, and so on do share many, many overlapping interests and should be natural allies in the fight for conservation and open space. But they aren't exactly the same, and no amount of marketing, even skillful marketing, is going to make them feel that they are.

Consider an ocean beach. Birders, surfers, and anglers, just for starters, might all have a compelling interest in seeing that the water and the beach are clean, ecologically intact, and protected from careless development. But don't expect the anglers to don wet suits or the birders to buy fishing licenses. Each of those groups must make its own contribution, in its own way. This isn't because birders disdain surfers. It's simply human nature.

It's not about the \$15. It's about identity.



Purchase your 2014–2015 Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp from the ABA. Call 1-800-850-2473, or go online: [aba.org/stamp](http://aba.org/stamp).

The obvious path, if the bottom line is getting more people to buy the stamp and therefore protect more habitat, is to offer birders, photographers, and other wildlife watchers a stamp of their own. And don't stop there: Offer each of these groups a customized stamp, if that results in higher sales.

That's what any commercial business would do. Imagine if the optics companies, whose goal is to sell the most optics, refused to do different ad campaigns for hunters and for birders. Would that make any sense? Apparently, the creation of a federal wildlife-watching stamp—to complement the traditional Duck Stamp—is currently seen as a legislative bridge too far. I can't speak to the truth or falsity of that claim, though I believe that more diversity of stamps would lead to greater overall sales.

In the meantime, we at the ABA stand firmly on the side of habitat conservation. We believe that by offering birders a mechanism to purchase the stamp as *birders*, we will not only help increase bird habitat in the short run, but also help build a persuasive case for a more birder-friendly stamp down the road.

So please, memorize this web address: [aba.org/stamp](http://aba.org/stamp). Double up with birding friends, and give them as gifts. The cost is \$15 per stamp. A one-time shipping and handling fee of \$4.95, covering up to five stamps, delivers the stamp or stamps straight to your front door. All that plus the satisfaction of knowing that you, along with your fellow birders, have made a positive difference.

Good birding,



Jeffrey A. Gordon, President  
American Birding Association




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