



HAVE FUN *Painting* DUCKS

For duck stamp contest winners, painting ducks is serious business and fun.

by Joe Hautman

My dad didn't usually collect things, so why did he have all of these old stamps with ducks on them? When I was a kid I must have asked questions like this when I discovered my dad's collection of federal duck stamps in a corner of the basement. I learned that anyone who hunted waterfowl in the United States had to buy a federal duck stamp, but it was the beautiful pictures of ducks that led Dad to save his duck stamps every year.

The pictures attracted my interest too. But I never dreamed that I would eventually see my own artwork on not one, but three federal duck stamps. And that two of my brothers would design another five duck stamps!

Painting wildlife has given me the chance to do what I love to do and, at the same time, help to raise money for wildlife habitat. In the following pages, you can "look over my shoulder" as I show how I do a painting of mallards for a duck stamp.

1. Do Duck Research



The South Carolina Waterfowl Association's mallard release program gave artist Joe Hautman a chance to see a live duck up close (top). Taking photographs (above) of wildlife can help an artist accurately draw and paint animals in action in their natural habitat.

To win a duck stamp contest, you need to create a realistic portrait of a particular duck species in its natural habitat. So I spend a lot of time outdoors observing ducks and other wildlife. I take a lot of photographs and also hunt ducks. These are all great ways to learn to identify the different species of ducks and to understand their behavior.

Before I sit down at the easel and pick up a paintbrush, I make sure to learn as much as I can about the duck that I am painting. For example, the spectacled eider was one of the duck species eligible for the contest in 1991. I chose to paint this species because it is such a striking looking duck, but I had never seen one before. It is a very rare species that lives in the far north of Alaska and Russia. So I started the design by using a sketch I had made of a mounted goldeneye duck. Then I studied stuffed specimens of spectacled eiders at a museum in Ottawa and visited a zoo in Philadelphia to see live spectacled eiders. A trip to Alaska helped with the background scenery, even though I was not able to see the elusive spectacled eider in the wild.

Federal Duck Stamps—Don't stick it on an envelope!

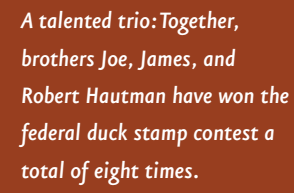
Joe Hautman



James Hautman



Robert Hautman

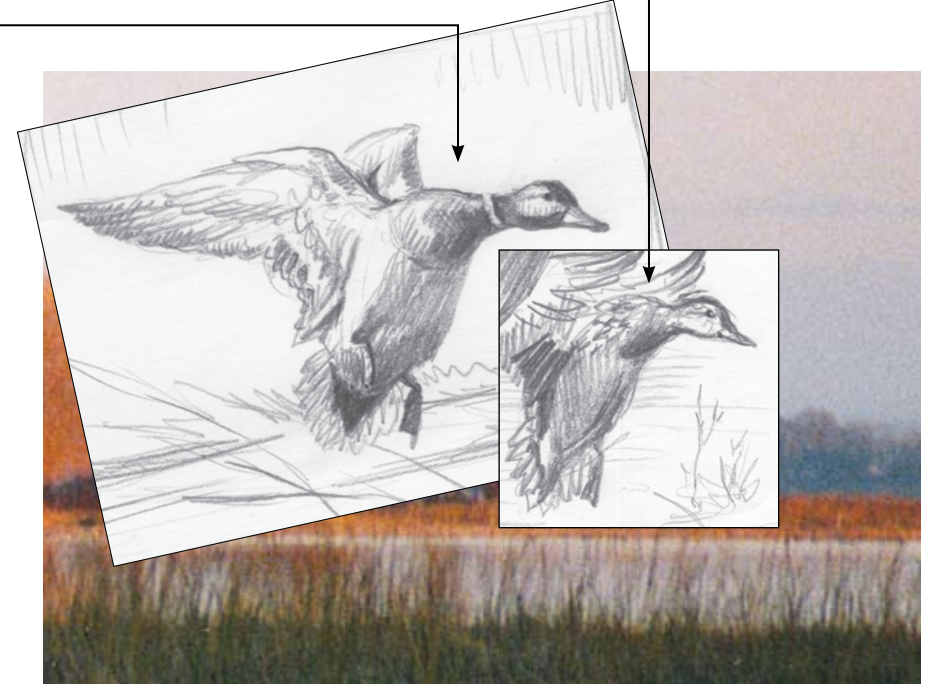
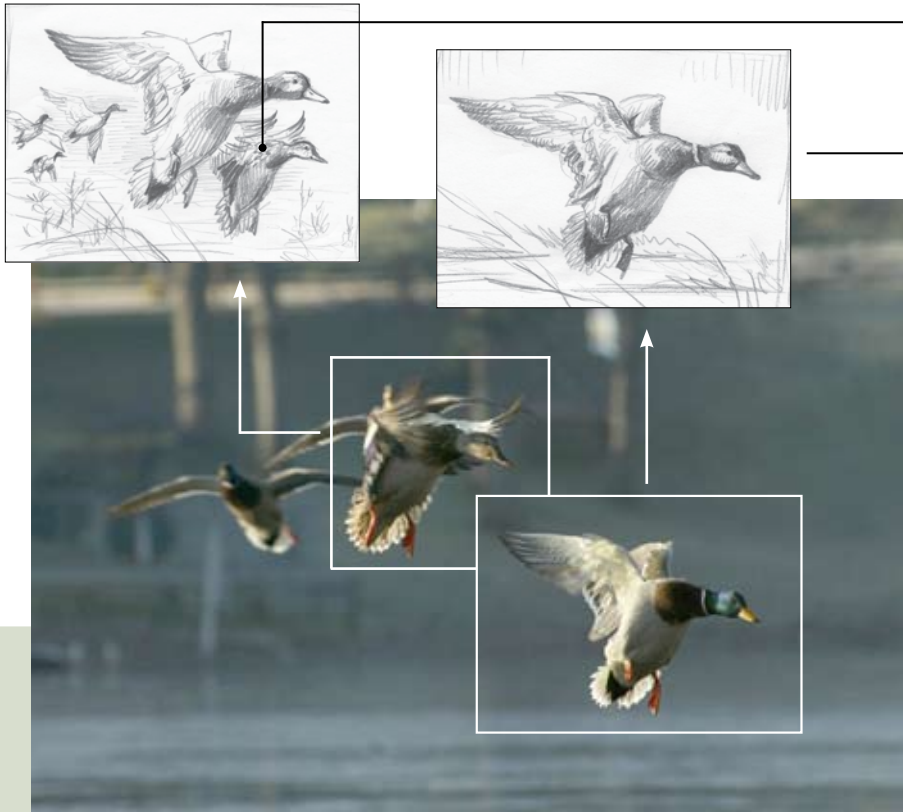


A talented trio: Together, brothers Joe, James, and Robert Hautman have won the federal duck stamp contest a total of eight times.

The official name for the federal duck stamp is the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp. It is produced for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and you can't use them for postage. Created in 1934 as a federal license for hunting migratory waterfowl, duck stamps have a larger purpose: to protect places for wild ducks. The stamps cost \$15 each, and 98 cents out of every dollar goes directly to purchase or lease wetland habitat for ducks and other wildlife. So far, stamp sales have protected 500,000 acres of habitat in Minnesota, including waterfowl

production areas and national wildlife refuges.

A new duck stamp design is selected every year in a competition. A panel of five judges scores hundreds of designs submitted by wildlife artists. Winning the contest can instantly launch a career in wildlife art. Joe Hautman, the author of this story, had never sold a painting before he won his first duck stamp contest. After touring the country to help promote duck stamps, including a visit with President George H.W. Bush in the Oval office, he became a full-time wildlife artist.



2. Compose *the Picture*

I took this photograph of mallards landing on a lake by my studio. I liked the dynamic position of the drake and the dramatic lighting, and thought it might be the start of a good duck stamp design.

The next step was the composition, arranging the ducks and the background in a design that is natural and pleasing to the eye. Here you can see some of

the pencil sketches I made when I was trying to come up with a composition. After doing sketches and looking at different design possibilities, I often start to lose track of the idea that I had in the first place, so it's important for me to show my sketches to other people. Even someone who is not an artist can give you good feedback.



If you need to make any corrections in your design, it is easiest to do it before you start painting. For this painting, I finally settled on the design with two ducks because it showed both the drake and the

hen and wasn't too complicated. Then, I tried out several ideas for the background. I liked the light, overall color, and the natural setting in this photo that I took while I was duck hunting in North Dakota.



3. Draw, then *Paint*

The first thing I do on the actual painting is to make a detailed pencil sketch on a piece of hardboard that is painted gray. After I finish drawing, I paint in the lightest and darkest areas with white

and black paint. The neutral gray background and the light and dark areas help to set up the overall *tonal values* of the painting. For this painting I am using acrylic paints, but I have also used

oil paints, color pencils, and pastels.

Next I paint in big areas with solid colors. I like to get the overall look of the painting established quickly before I put in too many details. When I need a fresh

view, I ask my wife, brother, electrician, mail carrier, or anyone I can find for a quick critique. I ask them what they like or don't like about the painting, or what doesn't look realistic to them.



A close-up photograph of a black scoter's bill shows its pronounced ridges, called lamellae, which it uses to filter food from the water.

Winning Details

If you just want something to hang on your wall, you can paint a polka-dotted duck with three eyes. But for a duck stamp contest, you need to paint a realistic duck. The details can be important.

A few days before I entered my painting of a black scoter in the 2001 federal duck stamp contest, I dug an old black scoter out of my freezer. I had shot the duck in Alaska many years before and kept it for reference. When I examined it, I noticed that it had very pronounced ridges along

the edges of the bill, so I decided to add that detail to the painting.

The contest came down to a tie-breaking vote between my painting and another painting of a black scoter. I won. After the contest, I learned that one of the judges had voted for my painting because my duck had ridges on its bill and the duck in the other painting did not!



When is *a painting finished?*


Once I've filled in the ducks and the background with large areas of color, I smooth and blend the colors and add details. I keep adding detail until the painting looks realistic to me. Some areas of the painting might look right with just a little detail, and other parts might need minute details, like a shine in the eye or on the edge of a single feather. This work is not really hard, but it can take a lot of patience.

An artist could probably spend years perfecting a painting. Sometimes it is hard to decide when the artwork is done. Once the painting looks right to me, I like to show the painting to other people again to see how *they* see it.

When I thought this painting might be finished, I showed it to my mom, who is 86 years old and still loves painting. She liked the ducks but wanted to see what the painting looked like without the straight line of weeds in the background. As soon

as she made that comment, I could see that the background weeds were drawing attention away from the ducks, so I repainted that area.

Not everyone is as outspoken as my mom. Sometimes you have to work hard to find out what people really think, and you need to be ready to interpret what they say. For example, some comments mean you have more work to do: "Is it done?" "Do ducks really do that?" "Is that water?" "Painting is really hard!" Here are some comments you hope to hear: "I feel like I could reach out and touch it." "I wish I was there." "They look like they are going to fly right off the canvas."

One measure of success I've found helpful is this: A good painting looks as though the artist had fun doing it. Of course, just enjoying painting doesn't guarantee a great work of art. But if you try, you can sure have fun painting ducks! 



When an artist feels a painting is finished, he or she may want to show it to other people to find out what they think. They might point out an important detail that was overlooked. For a stamp contests, the final touch on a painting should never be a signature. Contest judges are not allowed to know whose painting they are looking at, and artists may be disqualified for signing their paintings.

Junior Duck Stamp Contest

If you're a student in kindergarten through high school, you can try your hand at making a duck stamp by entering the Federal Junior Duck Stamp Contest. For information, call the federal duck stamp office at 703-358-2000 or go to www.fws.gov/juniorduck.



Minnesota's Stamp Contests

Minnesota has its own state duck stamp contest, as well as stamp contests for pheasant, wild turkey, trout and salmon, and walleye. Visit www.mndnr.gov/contests/stamps.html to learn more.



2006 MINNESOTA WATERFOWL STAMP BY JOE HAUTMAN



2007 MINNESOTA PHEASANT STAMP BY JOE HAUTMAN