# 32nd Ocean County Decoy and Gunning Show

By: Victoria Ford

Duck calls will ring out. Dogs will get wet. Beautiful handmade and collectors' items will be bought and sold. Artisans will showcase their talents and treasures. Delicious food smells will fill the air. Live authentic Pinelands music will stir the soul. Contestants will match skills to win the judges' favor. It's the annual Decoy and Gunning Show, and it's a longtime tradition that celebrates all the best of the Barnegat Bay region.




*Program Cover, Ocean County Decoy & Gunning Show*
Photo credit: Tuckerton Seaport

The Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the Ocean County Department of Parks and Recreation present the 32nd annual event in Tuckerton on Saturday, Sept. 27, and Sunday, Sept. 28 this year. The event runs from 8:30 AM to 5:30 PM both days, with the earliest skeetshooting contests starting at 7:00 AM. Shuttle buses will run between the two sites and to and from the parking areas at Pinelands Regional High School, Freedom Fields County Park and at the Tuckerton Seaport.

As show coordinator German Georgieff explained, the hub of activity is at Tip Seaman County Park, on the lakefront and in the community center. Seminars and presentations are scheduled throughout the two days. Wildlife art, auctions, antique hunting and fishing equipment, gunning and carving supplies, are all part of the experience. Concurrently, demonstrations, exhibits and boat rides will happen at the Tuckerton Seaport across the street. See every attraction at the re-created maritime village in full swing and the artists of the Jersey Shore Folklife Center practice such skills as basketmaking, carving and quilting.



*Youth Carving Club.*
Photo credit: Tuckerton Seaport

Area nonprofit groups (no commercial food vendors) will offer a wide variety of hot foods and cool treats – so guests' purchases benefit churches, fire companies and community organizations.

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Georgieff has been involved with the show for 20 years, and after all this time, his favorite part of it is the people. Year after year visitors return, drawn back together by their common interests, to renew friendships and rejuvenate their appreciation for the Barnegat Bay and its inhabitants.

Since it began, "we've explored every aspect of waterfowling," Georgieff said.

The 2014 bird of the year is the wood duck, an exquisite North American waterfowl. The male has a crested head, red eyes, colorful iridescent plumage and a white flare on his neck. The less-colorful female also has a crested head, a white eye-ring and a whitish throat. Also called a Carolina duck, it's a perching duck that lives in wooded swamps and marshes.

Each year, the park's maintenance staff makes a huge painted plywood silhouette of the selected bird to set up on Lake Pohatcong at Tip Seaman Park, announcing the upcoming Decoy Show to all who pass through Tuckerton's downtown area on Route 9 – a visually striking way to remind passersby to mark their calendars.

In choosing the bird of the year, organizers cycle through the various species found in the area, whether they are favorites to hunt or to carve; they try not to choose ones that are too obscure or unpopular (the year of the snow goose was a lesson learned), which might discourage people from entering contests. The bird of the year is meant to entice bird enthusiasts to the show, be they bird watchers, photographers, hunters or carvers.

Georgieff himself is a duck hunter and decoy collector with a Labrador retriever at home, so his interest in sneakboxes and all things bay-related is firsthand. As a bonus, each year the Decoy Show falls on or very close to his birthday and wedding anniversary, "so my wife lets me buy a decoy every year."



*Youth carvers take class with Nate Kirby.* Photo credit: Tuckerton Seaport

Since it was first introduced in 2010, the dock diving dog contest has become extremely popular. Dogs simply run, jump and splash. "That's something everyone enjoys watching," Georgieff said. A club of hobbyists called Delmarva Dock Dogs facilitates the contest, which measures the distance of the jumps to declare the winner. Any breed can join. The only requirements are a love of water, a competitive instinct and the courage to take the biggest possible plunge to retrieve a toy or stick. The retriever contests, too, always draw big audiences. The retriever contests showcase the dogs' skills in a simulated hunting environment.

At this point in its 32-year history, the event has leveled off in terms of magnitude, participation and attendance, Georgieff said. The Decoy Show's heyday was sometime in the early to mid-'90s, he said. Nowadays there is a smaller audience for decoy collecting and other traditions, as the average age of the participants has steadily increased and recreational waterfowling in general has declined, partly due to lack of open space and increased regulations and costs.

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Over time, the participants and vendors may change, but the theme is always consistent, i.e. celebrating the bayman's way of life.

Interestingly, the weather doesn't play as big a part as one might guess in the event's overall success, he said. After all, it is for rugged outdoorsmen types. The devout won't be by deterred by less-than-ideal conditions. Moreover, serious collectors and buyers may appreciate less crowded tables for a better purchasing atmosphere.

The decoy show had a humble origin as a bunch of guys meeting in the parking lot for a tailgating event. From there it expanded to include contests and other special events, until it became the defining of the decoy and gunning community.