

# Bird artist makes it big

By Chris Simon

The next time a letter is mailed, it might have Nigel Shaw's stamp attached.

Last Spring, the Alcona artist was named the winner of The Canadian Wildlife Habitat Conservation Stamp and Print Program, meaning his painted image of a Wilson's Snipe would appear on letters across the country. The contest, which is organized by Environment Canada and Wildlife Habitat Canada, has been running for the last 23 years. Past winners have been amongst some of the best wildlife artists in Canada, including Robert Bateman, Michele Clarkson, Pierre Leduc and Chris Bacon, said Shaw.

"It's a two-fold competition. Habitat Canada prints stamps and prints and they sell that for money for conservation and habitat research," he said. "It was fantastic. I just painted how I paint, and it was chosen."

Shaw's first professional show took place at the Davidson Gallery in Toronto at the age of 15, however he has been sketching birds since childhood. Throughout his career, Shaw has always painted wildlife, specifically rare and unusual birds. He was inspired by his uncle, a watercolour painter.

But Shaw also shows respect for his subjects, as an active bird-bander for the Canadian Wildlife Service.

The experience has paid off, through knowledge,

understanding and inspiration of the birds he chooses to paint. Shaw uses photographs and dead birds recovered while banding for artistic inspiration.

"This is all just what I've learned," he said, discussing never receiving formal training. "A lot of people use birds as a subject matter, but they paint a lot of different things. Myself, it's birds. If I wasn't painting birds, I wouldn't be doing this. The knowledge you get from (bird-banding is great). For me, (a painting) has to be right."

Revenues from the stamp fund Wildlife Habitat's conservation programs. Since 1985, over \$52 million has been donated to various conservation, restoration and enhancement projects run by the national non-profit organization.

The contest helps raise awareness about the pressures facing Canadian wildlife, said Shaw.

"I don't paint a lot of common birds, money isn't the driving force behind why I do this," he said. "At show's I'll talk more about the bird, that it's endangered or the habitat. At the end of the day, we all do our part. I want to leave my mark some way."

Winning the contest has also helped bring notoriety to Shaw's work. Over the next year, his paintings may appear at art shows in California, New Jersey and Wisconsin.

"If you want to be in the



Photo by Chris Simon

Bird artist Nigel Shaw poses with a photo of a Wilson's Snipe that he painted. The painting earned Shaw a Canadian Wildlife Habitat Conservation Stamp and Print Program award last year. The contest has been running for over 20 years. and that's a show that's hard to get into. "A lot of conservation groups have jumped on board with (art shows)."

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## Health unit urges province to pass smoking ban

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit is calling on the Ontario Government to support a private member's bill that would amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act to include a ban on smoking in private vehicles carrying children under the age of 16.

"Given that the harmful effects of secondhand smoke are well documented, the health unit is taking a lead role to protect all children and is asking all members of the legislature to do the same and support this bill," said health unit board member Doug Skeaff.

"By making it law, more people will become aware of the severe health impact secondhand smoke has on children," he said. "Once they do, we fully expect voluntary compliance will become the rule rather than the exception, similar to the use of children's car seats."

The unit's resolution has been sent to Premier Dalton McGuinty, Health Promotion Minister Margaret Best, Transportation Minister Jim Bradley as well as all local members of provincial parliament.

The health unit joins a large number of others with-

in Ontario, as well as the Association of Local Public Health Agencies, that supports the ban as an important step to reduce the ravages of tobacco use — the number one cause of preventable death and disease in Canada, said Skeaff.

"Ontario has made significant gains in protecting people in public and workplaces from secondhand smoke," said Leslie Gordon, tobacco program coordinator with the health unit. "By extending the legislation to include vehicles carrying children we can ensure those who are most vulnerable,

and least able to speak for themselves, will receive that same protection."

It also provides positive role modeling for children, sending the message that tobacco use is not a socially acceptable behavior, she said.

"Long-term, that will help youth make the decision to stay tobacco free," said Gordon.

The momentum to ban smoking in cars carrying children continues to build across the country and is now law in New Brunswick. It moved to centre stage in Ontario in late 2007 when

David Oraziotti, MPP for Sault Ste. Marie presented a private member's bill in the legislature.

To ensure its passage into law, the health unit is encouraging all residents to call or write their local MPP and Premier McGuinty to express support for the bill.

For more information about the health effects of breathing secondhand smoke, visit the health unit website at [www.simcoemuskokahealth.org](http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org), or call Your Health Connection at 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 from Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.

## Arts and crafts association plans heritage textile day

Simcoe County Arts and Crafts Association is presenting a heritage textile sampler day on March 1 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the county museum in Midhurst.

This event will showcase spinning, weaving, quilting, rug hooking, stitching and knitting, leading to a course in each craft to be held in April. Everyone interested in

learning about these crafts is invited to attend.

Those attending will have a chance to win a year's membership in SCACA, and those registering for a course

during the sampler day will have a chance to win that course free. The day is supported by the Trillium Foundation and the museum. Admission is free.

The museum is located on Highway 26, five minutes north of Barrie. For more information, call events coordinator Melanie Dielmann at 721-2799.