

sports & outdoors

Now is the time for all good Nantucketers
to come to the aid of ... Brockton

While conducting extensive sports research recently, I happened upon this headline that could have been ripped from any newspaper of today: "Nantucketers Go to Brockton, Get Whipped, but Have a Fine Time."

Getting "whipped" in Brockton could have any number of meanings these days, but in 1908 it referred to members of the island's Athletic Club losing a bowling match to the city's esteemed Commercial Club. No matter, for, as was gleefully pointed out: "That the islanders had a good time no one need be informed, for never was there a Nantucketer who went to Brockton who did not have a good time."

And then came the kicker: "Some how or other, Nantucket and Brockton always seem to belong to each other, and one place is always loyal to the other."

News to you? It shouldn't be. The similarities between our idyllic island and our sister city to the north are striking. Consider these parallels:

- Both places are known for their sports teams. Nantucket has been to nine Super Bowls, while Brockton has won 11.

- Nantucket has restaurants; Brockton has restaurants.

- Nantucket's citizens wear shoes; Brockton is known as "Shoe City."
- Nantucket has the Madaket Ditch; Brockton has the Salisbury Brook.
- A train runs through Brockton; Nantucket once had a train.

I could go on and on. Through the decades a favorite pastime of Nantucketers was their annual pilgrimage to the Brockton Fair. The fairgrounds remain to this day and its buildings, like so many of our revered historic houses, are still standing but could use a little work. There are scores of islanders who can claim deep ties to the officially-sanctioned "City of Champions," but, because they are humble by nature, you'd probably never know it.

And so it was that I came upon this news item last week: "Brockton Feels a Low Blow: Boston to get statue honoring Marciano." The gist of the story is this — the World Boxing Council, headquartered in Mexico City, wants to honor Rocky Marciano, the only undefeated boxing champion in history, the "Brockton Blockbuster," by erecting a statue of him in Boston. The reasoning behind the arbitrary decision is that more tourists visit Boston and, hence, more people will see this tribute to the legendary boxer. Who knows, the story pointed out, perhaps the statue will prompt some to make the trip down to Brockton.

Foul, the people of Brockton cry. Another shot below the belt for the once proud city that, did you know, is the place where the very first department store Santa Claus appeared. You can look it up. Judging by the line of people waiting outside the Pacific National Bank to see Santa at Saturday's Christmas Stroll, it's a tradition that seems to have caught on.

It's time to reinvigorate the Nantucket-Brockton connection and come to the aid of our Plymouth County brethren. Let's erect the statue of Rocky here, on Nantucket, where boxing was once a staple at our old, historic fairgrounds and where the great John L. Sullivan wanted to visit. Speaking of visitors, the people in Mexico City should know that we get loads of them, from all over the world. I'd lay down good odds that there are a few boxing aficionados among them.

Nantucket needs a statue anyway. Where could it go? At the foot of the Pacific National Bank atop Main Street, just like that other statue atop the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art? Now, Philadelphia, like us, certainly prides itself on its place in American history, and if Philadelphians can see fit to honor a fictional fighter, why can't we pay homage to a real sports hero, one who went undefeated in 49 professional bouts, with 43 knockouts?

Is it a coincidence that our own legendary football coach Vito Capizzo, like Rocky, is also of Italian heritage? I think not.

People in Brockton say they've wanted to erect a statue in Rocky's memory for some time now, but the price tag is too high, around \$70,000. In the spirit of our generous summer residents who have recently seen fit to save our beloved Dreamland Theater and purchase the Island Spirits property for the island's use, couldn't we come together as one island and assist those who so graciously hosted our forebears? In Nantucket dollars, \$70,000 doesn't seem to steep a price to commemorate the Nantucket-Brockton connection. Wouldn't it make you flush with pride to read: "Erected by the citizens of Nantucket in thanks for Brockton's 'unbounded hospitality' which 'brought pleasure to our eyes and a full measure of joy to the inner man' a century ago."

Kind of makes you want to go a few rounds, doesn't it? In this season of giving, the people of Brockton deserve our best.

If nothing else, we can e-mail the World Boxing Council (info@wbcboxing.com) and let them know where they can put their statue. ■



by Steve Sheppard

Independent Sports Editor

BIRDS OF NANTUCKET

by Kenneth Turner Blackshaw

BIG BLACKHEAD?

I hope that's not the skin condition on the person next to you in the elevator. Oooh — break out the Clearasil. But of course this is another bird nickname. Does 'big bluebill' sound better to you — perhaps the state flower of Texas? But no, that would be the 'bluebEll.' Our feathered friend is known by both these names.

This is a bird that can be tricky to identify but you need to remember what Edie Ray says: "G's are round and L's are pointy!" I'll just let you mentally munch on that as we proceed.

You can guess from the illustration that this week's bird is a duck. You can even guess that the boys are very different from the girls. This is a duck that is very common here every winter and flies a long way just to get here. Birders know it as the Greater Scaup (rhymes with 'stop'). They have a very close relative, the Lesser Scaup, that is also common here. You may think that size matters, but only to the birds. Since the sizes overlap, birders don't get much of a break.

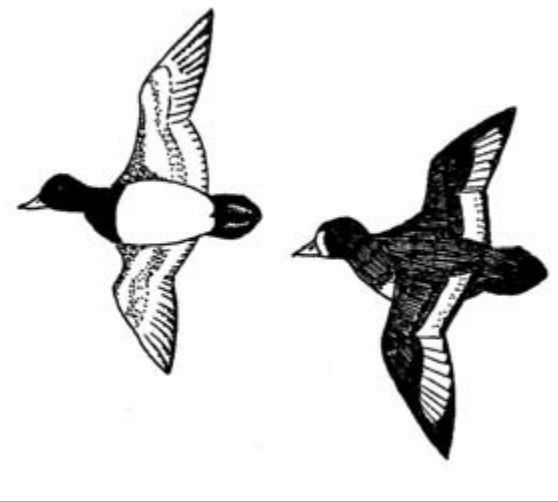
The scientific name, *Aythya marila*, a charcoal waterbird, is kind of generic and boring, could describe many birds, some of them ducks! They are close relatives of other diving ducks like the Canvasback and the Redhead. The name 'scaup' is more interesting, relating to an old Scottish word for a bed of shellfish and actually has the same origin as the name for Nantucket's favorite shellfish, the scallop!

Greater Scaup nest on the tundra of northwestern Canada and Alaska. It is an abundant duck. Scientists have trouble distinguishing Greater from Lesser (more on that later, watch your Gs and Ls) so they estimate the total of both species together. There are over five million in the U.S. There are millions more in Europe and Asia, but those are all Greater Scaup over there. The Lesser Scaup is a strictly American species.

Scaup nest on the ground very near water. They weave the nest with grass stems and line it with feathers right from the mother's belly. Oftentimes they nest in colonies with many nests close together. Once the eggs are laid Mr. Scaup abandons his family and heads out into the salt water. There, like most ducks, he sheds all his flight feathers in his annual molt and spends several weeks unable to fly as he grows his new wings.

Mrs. Scaup spends a month and a half incubating her eggs and teaching her precocious young to catch insects, swim and dive. Diving is a key part of this species' existence. Almost all their food is secured this way and it is also how they hide when startled. They are unable to spring into the air like mallards. Instead they run along the water to take off into the wind.

Scaup start arriving on our island in October and become more abundant in November and December. A typical Christmas Bird Count will find over 500 and they've been observed on every count. One of the best places to find Greater Scaup is Sesachacha Pond on the east end of Nantucket. Typically there are several



Greater Scaup

hundred of them bobbing up and down in the middle. It takes a spotting scope to really appreciate them. The males appear black on both ends and white in the middle. The females are solid chocolate brown with a white patch around the bill. Scaup, Greater and Lesser, are the only ducks you are likely to see that have a stripe down the wing in flight.

When I was learning my birds a lot was made of the 'fact' that Greater Scaup show a greenish gloss on their head and Lesser Scaup have a purplish gloss. This seems useful when gazing at a picture in a bird book but becomes very frustrating when staring at an actual bird since the sunlight must strike the bird's head just right to see any color at all.

David Sibley's new bird guide tells us that the whole color gloss thing really doesn't work at all. Depending on the way the light strikes the bird, you can see either color. Oh brother! Actually birders have been experiencing this paradox right along and thinking we were visually deficient or something.

The current best way to identify scaup goes back to Edie Ray's method in the beginning of this article. Greater Scaup have nice round heads and Lesser Scaup heads look pointy at the top. G's are round (for Greater) and L's are pointy (for Lesser). Even this doesn't always work, but it's the best we can do.

The other thing is that Greaters prefer salty water. If you see a scaup in Miacomet Pond for instance, it's likely to be a Lesser. You can work backwards on this trick as well. Since we see many Greater Scaup in Sachacha Pond that gives you a clue that Sachacha is a salty pond.

You can see these hardy diving ducks all through the winter. When the ponds freeze they head for the ocean. Most all of them are gone by the first of May as nature calls them a thousand miles or more to the northwest to lay their seven to 10 eggs and keep the scaup population thriving. Scaup live as long as 18 years so they log a lot of miles in their lifetimes. An old Greater Scaup must know the bottom of Sesachacha Pond really well. ■

George C. West creates illustrations for these articles. If you enjoy 'social' birding, join the Nantucket Bird Club at 8 a.m. Sundays in front of Nantucket High School for a two to three hour birding trip. Call 228-1693 for more information. To hear about rare birds, or to leave a bird report call the Massachusetts Audubon hot line at 1-781-259-8805. Ask Ken a question at: kenandcindy1@comcast.net