
Oregon artist wins 2023 California Duck Stamp Art Contest

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The winner of the 2023 California Duck Stamp Art Contest painting is Buck Spencer of Junction City, Oregon. The painting depicting two ring-necked ducks will be the official design for the 2023-2024 stamp.

Spencer previously won the 2020 California Upland Game Bird Stamp Art Contest and placed second in the 2021 and 2022 California Duck Stamp art contests.

The judges described being initially drawn to the photorealism of the painting. They said despite being relatively simple in terms of layout, they were impressed by the amount of detail in both the water and the birds. They appreciated the coloring of the feathers, specifically noting the iridescence and vermiculation (the salt and pepper coloring on the flank feathers) on the male.

Spencer used multiple glazes with his acrylic paints to help bring out the iridescent purple of the male's head and the red ring around his neck.

"I was inspired by a pair of ring-necked ducks I observed one evening," Spencer said. "The lighting made the male's head 'pop' and it looked as if the ducks were glowing. I wanted to try to capture this effect in my painting."

Artists from around the country submitted entries for the contest, sponsored by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). Jeffrey Klinefelter of Etna Green, Ind., placed second, Lloyd Ulmer of Tucson, Ariz., placed third and Samuel Timm of Wautoma, Wis., received honorable mention.

The top four paintings were displayed at the Pacific Flyway Decoy Association's Annual Classic Wildlife Art Festival in Sacramento this past weekend.

Since 1971, the California Duck Stamp Program's annual contest has attracted top wildlife artists from around the country. The contest is open to artists from all 50 states to ensure a wide pool of submissions. All proceeds generated from stamp sales go directly to waterfowl conservation projects within California.

In the past, hunters were required to purchase and affix the stamp to their hunting licenses. Today, hunters are no longer required to carry the stamps because California's modern licensing system prints proof of additional fees paid directly onto the license. CDFW still produces the stamps, which can be requested on CDFW's website at wildlife.ca.gov/licensing/collector-stamps.