

Exhibit brings 'Avian Primitives' to life

Photographer spent years in wetland habitats, documenting egrets, herons and other water birds

By **BRIAN MAFFLY**
The Salt Lake Tribune

Rosalie Winard can't say what species of water bird is her favorite, but in college she was known as "the pelican lady."

"It's not fair to ask," the New York-based photographer says. "It's like asking which is your favorite child."

Still, Florida's brown pelicans occupy a special place in her heart. She studied the birds at New College, an experimental honors school where she majored in natural history in the 1970s. That work inspired her to spend the last 10 years of her career paddling and hiking around North American wetlands and shores, documenting the lives of egrets, herons, cranes, stilts and other long-necked birds that Utah author Terry Tempest Williams calls "avian primitives."

The fruits of Winard's labor, a collection of ethereal black-and-white photographs, have been packaged into a touring exhibit, "Wild Birds of the American Wetlands," which debuts next Saturday at the Utah Museum on Natural History.

"Winard focuses on a vivid array of birds with a keen eye, opening a window to their world," says Becky Menlove, the museum's director of exhibits and public programs. "Her images capture humor, complexity, struggle and power. The birds dance and run and land with unconventional grace. They wear their feathers like Sunday hats and strut with their unbelievably long legs. They fly and dive, wade and wander — you'll never look at birds the same way."

The images, many picked from Winard's recently published book of the same title, represent 18 species photographed in numerous locations from Florida to California, with a healthy share in Utah.

Williams introduced the photographer to Utah, inviting her to camp on the Great Salt Lake's Fremont Island during a 2002 Nature Conservancy retreat. Winard has been back so many times she's lost count, although she re-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROSALIE WINARD

Clockwise from above: Photographer Rosalie Winard's "Great Egret, Snowy Egrets, Laughing Gull;" American avocets at the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge; Winard holding a white pelican during a banding event in North Dakota.



Courtesy Rosalie Winard

calls making eight trips in a single year to Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge and other birding spots near Utah's inland sea.

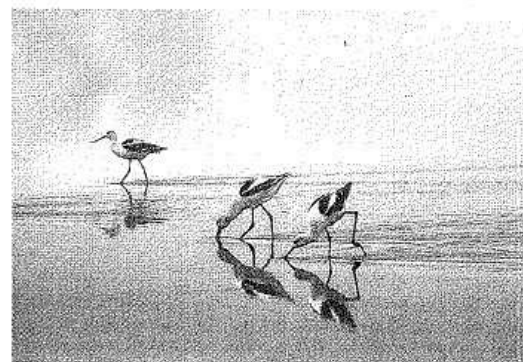
Williams characterizes Winard as "an artist of restoration," in reference to the habitat loss that is threatening the survival of North American waterfowl and Winard's attempts to convey what's at stake behind wetlands conservation.

"Through the act of witnessing these fragile, enduring birds of America's wet-

lands, she refuses to let their noble and imperiled lives remain hidden," Williams writes in the book's essay, "Avian Primitives."

That was the original title of Winard's book, which contains 100 tritone reproductions (Welcome Books, \$39.95).

"Unfortunately avian flu came along and, from a marketing standpoint, it was deemed too negative," she says. The artists use the word "primitive" because these predatory birds, which evolved long bills, legs and



necks to thrive in the margins where water meets lands, are some of the most ancient species, reaching back as far as 100 million years.

Menlove, museum exhibit designer Tim Lee and guest curator Anne Milliken waded through some 1,000 images to choose the 54 the exhibit now comprises.

"The first thing that struck me was the intimate quality of these photos; it was almost like I was peering into the private lives of these birds. But, I also noticed that she captured an amazing majestic quality," Lee says. "So, I felt it was important to balance the mo-

ments of intimacy with moments of broad magnificence. This exhibition allows people to step back to see their grandeur, but it also lets people get personal with the birds."

Lee chose three formats for the images to be displayed in the museum's Dumke Gallery. Most are superimposed on canvases, which enhances contrast and accentuates the inherent graininess resulting from Winard's signature use of infrared film. Five are mounted on light boxes, and another 10 on 8-foot vertical banners. Lee also created an interactive life-size image of a brown pelican, its wings out-

Photos take flight

"Wild Birds of the American Wetlands," an exhibit of Rosalie Winard's photographs of water birds runs Nov. 1 to Feb. 22 at the Utah Museum of Natural History on University of Utah's Presidents Circle. Exhibit hours are 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is \$6, \$3.50 for children 3 to 12 and seniors. Winard will also give a lecture on Dec. 1 at the museum and lead a Dec. 6 field trip to Farmington Bay. Visit the museum's Web site, www.umnh.utah.edu, for more details.

stretched as it lands on water. The idea is for children to measure themselves against the bird's 7-foot wingspan.

"I love the paradox of [the brown pelican], their gawkiness on ground, but elegance and focus in flight," Winard says. "They can dive in mist and fog, two feet away from another pelican and not hurt each other."

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