

# Soundside Learning

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## This Week on Core Sound

### Down East School Children Take Walk Through History

On April 7th, 1942 *U-352* departed the U-boat pens of St. Nazaire, France under the command of Kapitänleutnant Hellmut Rathke, bound for the east coast of the United States. The newly commissioned Type VIIC U-boat had been assigned to participate in Operation Paukenschlag or “Drumbeat”, which began in early 1942 and was meant to take advantage of the scant coastal defenses of the United States’ east coast at the outset of war between the United States and Germany. The ultimate goal of Rathke and other U-boat commanders participating in the operation? Sink as many tons of allied merchant shipping as possible, in hopes of hampering the production capabilities of the United States and Great Britain.



The wreck of the *U-352*

Photo: [NOAA.gov](https://www.noaa.gov)

Rathke’s type VIIC U-boat was 220 feet long, could range roughly 8,000 nautical miles, carried a crew of 48, and 14 torpedos. On the morning of May 2nd, *U-352* surfaced 200 miles off the coast of New Jersey; close enough to the American coastline for the crewmen to tune into and enjoy American Jazz radio stations. From there, Rathke and his crew made their way south for the coast of North Carolina, the area already known by then as “torpedo junction” where U-boat commanders had found easy, unsuspecting prey in recent months. North Carolina’s coast was in 1942, as it is today, a busy shipping highway packed with merchant vessels as they traveled to and from ports to the North and South, carrying fuel oil, foodstuffs, and other supplies vital to the war effort.

On the afternoon of May 9th, *U-352* arrived and surfaced just 20 miles off of Cape Lookout in search of a target. Before sunset the *U-boat* spotted what Rathke thought was a small freighter and he quickly ordered two torpedos fired at the ship on the horizon. Both torpedoes missed their target, with one exploding on the shallow sea floor to the stern of the target. It soon became apparent to Rathke as he surfaced to check for possible hits that he was not dealing with a freighter, but instead an armed U.S. Coast Guard Cutter, the *Icarus*. The errant torpedoes had given away the submarine’s position and the *Icarus* prepared for an attack. The cutter, relying upon sonar contacts, maneuvered near the target and proceeded to drop depth charges. In an engagement that lasted just over an hour, *Icarus* prevailed over *U-352*. The thirty three survivors from *U-352* were taken to Charleston, South Carolina for interrogation.

On Thursday, April 14th, 2022, eighty years after the arrival of *U-352* off Cape Lookout, twenty school children from Smyrna Elementary’s fifth grade class gathered on what remains of a concrete WWII gun mount in the sand dunes of Cape Lookout to hear of the story of *U-352*, of outer banks homes shuddering as torpedoes struck tankers off the beach, and of Down East fishermen braving war-torn waters because life still “went on”. Though their great-grandparents living along the shorelines of Down East communities can recall the nightly ritual of drawing blackout curtains closed, so as not to aid the U-boats operating just offshore, these children are left with just the stories of those hard times when real danger was lurking just offshore. In the passing of those eighty years, many of those stories have been lost, laid to rest with those who knew them, those who *lived* them. It is, therefore, the duty of each generation to ensure that theirs is not the last to know of these stories, and to instill in the *next* an understanding that we sit in the shade of trees planted by those who came before.

## Willow Pond's Permanent Residents

### The American White Ibis

One of the marked pleasures for visitors to the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum & Heritage Center's Willow Pond is the chance of catching a glimpse of the pond's flock of American White Ibis. Their number in the hundreds, these striking birds of pure white plumage punctuated by a bright orange beak are a sight (and sound) to behold as they synchronously take flight from their treetop roosts, circling the skies above the pond before descending onto the water's surface in search of a meal.

Coastal North Carolina's mild winters, coupled with Willow Pond's lucrative sources of insects, small fishes, and other macroinvertebrates for ibis to feed upon provide the ideal home for these birds. We are now firmly within the breeding season of the white ibis, and with their incubation period usually at three weeks, one should expect to see juvenile ibis within a month. But how does one know when they have spotted a juvenile white ibis?

Like many avian species, juvenile ibis are often mistaken for other various species before gaining their adult coloration within a year. One of the more common mistakes is to confuse the juvenile ibis with the long-billed curlew. Both the curlew and the juvenile ibis exhibit brown plumage and the long, curved bill used for foraging along shallow mud flats. The distinguishing factor, of course, is the orange bill and legs of the ibis.



A juvenile American White Ibis.

Photo: [audubon.org](http://audubon.org)

The spring breeding season can be an especially challenging time for the male ibis, as they will undergo a self-imposed starvation period during the three-week incubation period. Typically forming monogamous mating pairs, at this time males will opt in favor of defending his nest from various predators instead of foraging for food. Once the eggs hatch, the males will break their "fast" in order to forage for food to bring back to the nest. This duty of feeding the young hatchlings will be shared by both males and females.

Though our Willow Pond ibis enjoy a pristine sanctuary, relatively free from danger, the same is not true for the ibis at large. Increasing coastal development throughout their range has introduced higher concentrations of toxins like methyl-mercury into the water column. Stemming from sources of untreated waste, methyl-mercury is bioaccumulative in organisms; as one goes "up" the food chain, concentrations increase as organisms are not able to breakdown the toxin, humans included. In the white ibis, these toxins cause hormonal imbalances that are adversely affecting their reproductive success across their range.

In addition to the threat posed by human pollution, the loss of nesting habitat is also proving to be a significant threat to the ibis; as it is to many coastal species. A NOAA study of coastal development in North Carolina completed during 2021 found that since 1996, land development within half a mile of marshland increased 22%. That rate increased another 18% when said development was within 300 feet of the marsh. These areas, once developed, are no longer suitable nesting or foraging areas for the white ibis, or other species.



### Core Sound Event Spotlight: *Core Sound on Canvas*

The Core Sound Waterfowl Museum & Heritage Center is excited to announce the return of Core Sound on Canvas: A night to eat, paint, and remember. This unique blending of Down East history and art will be held on Friday, April 29th at 6:00 PM. Registration can be completed by visiting our Facebook page, or by [clicking here!](#)