

# Animal artist advances conservation efforts

RALPH J. BELLANTONI, CORRESPONDENT 12:04 a.m. EST December 23, 2016



*(Photo: courtesy of the artist)*

New Jersey's populous, urbanized character overshadows the rich biodiversity eking out survival in its hyper-developed environs. A multitude of wildlife species, many of them rare or imperiled, inhabit the wide range of ecosystems within the Garden State.

Studio 7 Fine Art Gallery in Bernardsville currently hosts a traveling exhibit in partnership with the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey and Omni Distribution, LLC, that spotlights the state's key endangered species. "Rare Wildlife Revealed" features 25 exquisitely rendered watercolor portraits of such creatures as the Eastern Box Turtle and the Golden Winged Warbler by renowned sports artist James Fiorentino.

"Mr. Fiorentino's incredibly evocative artwork inspires viewers," said David Wheeler, author of "Wild New Jersey" and executive director of the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ. "His art helps educate and engage viewers about the precipitous declines that many of these species have undergone."

The exhibit benefits the foundation's nonprofit efforts towards protecting at-risk species of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and invertebrates throughout the state via field studies, habitat restoration, banding and tracking, and education.

"By putting a spotlight on these charismatic yet often overlooked wildlife species," Wheeler continued, "Mr. Fiorentino's nationally recognized art brings unparalleled attention to the very tangible steps people can take to save and strengthen these wildlife populations."

The exhibit will next travel to the Mayo Performing Arts Center in Morristown, followed by stays at the Salmagundi Club in New York City, Hiram Blauvelt Museum in Oradell, Duke Farms in Hillsborough, Pollak Gallery at Monmouth University in West Long Branch, and at the Korn Gallery of Fiorentino's Alma Mater of Drew University in Madison.

"By bringing together audiences for both art and wildlife conservation," said Wheeler, "we hope to educate and inspire adults and students on the immense power of the arts to illustrate conservation issues."

Fiorentino resides in Hunterdon County, and grew up an avid sports enthusiast with a natural flair for art that surfaced early. He started painting sports celebrities as a means for getting their autographs, which led to his portrait of Reggie Jackson earning him the honor of becoming the youngest artist ever featured in the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

Fiorentino has acquired countless accolades and commissions since then, while expanding his subjects to include political icons, leading financiers, Nobel Peace Prize Winners, and animals. He employs a self-taught style that emphasizes the fluidity of watercolors, yet using a dry brush technique that enables his signature detail and definition.

"Just as a poet expresses himself through words, I express myself through paint," Fiorentino said. "I feel fortunate to be able to use my art as a means of communication."

Fiorentino's passion for wildlife has come further to the fore as his career progressed. He serves as a trustee of the Raptor Trust of New Jersey and as a signature member of the Artists for Conservation Foundation and the Society of Animal Artists. He has enjoyed a long association with Studio 7 and its director, Kathleen Palmer.

"We're honored to be one of the venues for the traveling wildlife exhibit by James," said Palmer. "It's an important exhibit that brings awareness to our citizens and lawmakers about the effects of pollution on soil, water, and air, and the loss of habitat, that affects all our lives."

Fiorentino's paintings showcase creatures rarely spotted in person, revealing their unique and special beauties. It would be a great shame if such paintings became the sole remaining vestiges of the animals they portray.

"These creatures are the 'canary in the coal mine,' the warning flag for us to be aware of our environment," said Palmer. "We're the stewards of the land and its wildlife, and responsible for doing all we can to protect them."

**RARE WILDLIFE REVEALED: WATERCOLOR PAINTINGS BY JAMES FIORENTINO**

**WHEN:** 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesdays to Saturdays, through Jan. 14

**WHERE:** Studio 7 Fine Art Gallery, 5 Morristown Road, Bernardsville

**ADMISSION:** Free

**INFO:** 908-963-0365, or [www.studio7artgallery.com](http://www.studio7artgallery.com)

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