



N.H. Fish and Game Lt. Wayne Saunders, left, who is a past president of International Wildlife Crimestoppers, is seen Tuesday with artist Grant Hacking in Hacking's North Conway studio in front of "Eagle Valley," one of two paintings Hacking has provided to the IWC for sale in a fundraiser.

A local artist whose nature paintings command prices in the five figures, has donated his creativity and time to the global fight against poaching.

Grant Hacking first connected with Wayne Saunders, the then outgoing president of the International Wildlife Crimestoppers, last July following the IWC's 2017 annual meeting. A nonprofit organization with members in 39 states and in 11 provinces of Canada, the IWC works to eliminate "the illegal taking of the world's fish and wildlife resources through the exchange of information." At the annual meeting, the idea came up of doing a fundraiser for the IWC in which a wildlife artist would create two works, one of animals in North America, one of animals in Africa, which would be sold online.

Hitting the Internet, Saunders did a quick search for "wildlife artist/ North Conway" and immediately found Hacking. "I just shot him an e-mail," Saunders said Tuesday. Hacking, who coincidentally was looking for an opportunity to promote a wildlife conservation message, responded promptly.

Some six months later, Hacking produced "Eagle Valley" for the IWC and also provided it with "Leopard Valley," which he had earlier done for a client. Both paintings were scanned and sprayed onto canvas by digital printers using a technique known as giclee. Twenty-five signed, numbered canvas prints of each are available for purchase on the IWC website at <http://wildlifecrimestoppers.org/>. All proceeds, said Saunders, will be used to promote the IWC's mission, including grants to buy hunting decoys, anti-poaching marketing and other programs.

"Internationally, poaching is everywhere," said Saunders. It can include people who are looking to put food on their tables, or, like in New Hampshire, he said, poachers are doing it just for profit and/or trophies.

Poachers often take the largest and best animals, an action that diminishes the species' gene pool, he said. Although not as prevalent as in the past, some animals, such as black bears, are coveted in New Hampshire by poachers who know that their gallbladders remain a popular medicinal ingredient in some Asian countries. In recent past, elvers - baby eels - have been poached from the Granite State's seacoast, because they, like bear gallbladders, were in demand around the world, fetching more than \$1,000 a pound.

In its description of "Leopard Valley," the IWC notes that the cats have been hunted illegally and their body parts used in traditional medicine and decoration. "Eagle Valley" represents the tenacity of the raptor, which the IWC said is being "brought back from the brink of extinction."

The painting also is an example of how Hacking works. He starts with photos of the animals he wants to paint, imagines how the elements in the painting will fit onto the canvas, creates an appropriate setting and then applies the oil paint. The animals in the paintings are usually a composite of several photos. In "Eagle Valley," which features two eagles, the one in the foreground leaving the aerie is actually a photo of an eagle being released by a Maine game warden after it had been rehabilitated.

The game warden provided the picture to Saunders who then gave it to Hacking.

Born and raised in South Africa, Hacking is the son of the late Tom and Rosemary Hacking, both painters who met while attending art school in South Africa. In 1990, Hacking, who followed in his parents' professional footsteps, arrived in the U.S. for a vacation, which also included an exhibition of his paintings in Virginia. Although he had "no intention of living here," the exhibition went really well, Hacking recalled, and he stayed in the U.S. for nine years before returning to South Africa.

A father of two daughters, Hacking, 53, moved to North Conway in 2000 and has maintained a home-studio and a workshop nearby where he builds frames.

Hacking's work is widely known in the art world and is highly collectible. Most pieces sell for between \$5,000 and \$10,000, he said, whereas one painting sold for \$35,000. In February, Western Art Collector magazine named Hacking its 2018 Editor's Choice award winner for "Evening Huntress," which depicts a barn owl about to pounce on a mouse, whose presence is implied, rather than shown. Saunders said he quickly realized that Hacking was an accomplished artist, but "I just never dreamt that we'd find someone of Grant's caliber."

Hacking agreed that the timing of how he and Saunders met was "weirdly perfect," coming when he wanted to say something about wildlife and finding a perfect venue to do so thanks to the IWC.

"To me," Hacking said, "animals are extremely powerful."

