

SOFO naturalist



Each quarter SoFo features eco-links, written by a member or friend of the Museum. If you wish to submit an article please contact us.

eco links

"Once Upon a Midnight Dreary"

by Jim Ash

■ It all started in the spring of 2010 when a gentleman brought an injured Box Turtle into the SoFo museum. Since Crystal Possehl was the only employee living in Hampton Bays at the time, we decided she would take the turtle to the Wildlife Rescue Center of the Hamptons on her way home that afternoon. The following morning I asked her how she made out.

"Fine," she said "and they gave me a tour of the facility while I was there."

"What animals did you see?"

"Well, they had a swan, a deer, some ducks, a raven, some rabbits..."

"Wait! Wait! A raven?" I said, "What raven?"



Photo: David Iliff License CC-BY-SA 3.0

"The one that fell out of the nest."

"What nest?"

"The nest on the Hampton Bays Water Tower." she replied.

■ "It can't be, I said, "ravens don't nest on the coastal plain, never mind almost 100 miles out on Long Island. I have to see this for myself."

■ My first encounter with the Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) was in 1970 at the Chiricahua National Monument on the west side of the Chiricahua Mountains in southeast Arizona. In a canyon lined with fantastic rock formations, a pair of ravens performed spectacular aerobatics, swooping, diving, and doing barrel rolls, all the while croaking their distinctive brrronk—brrronk call. It was an exhilarating experience in a remote wilderness-like area that I remember vividly to this day.

■ Back then, to see a raven in New York State, you had to travel to the Adirondacks and hope to be lucky enough to see one of the few remaining ravens that were still hanging on in the remotest parts of the park. Fossil records in New York

indicate that the raven was present in the state as long as 9,500 years ago after the recession of the great Wisconsin Glacier. And as recently as the early nineteenth century, great numbers of ravens could be found in central New York and in many inland parts of the state. However, by the twentieth century numbers had diminished dramatically, and by the middle of that century they had been reduced to a relative handful of birds confined to the most secluded parts of the Adirondacks. The cause of this precipitous decline was probably due to loss of forest habitat to agriculture and human settlement, destruction of nesting territories, increased logging, and persecution by humans.

■ By the end of the 1970s, the outlook for the raven had taken a turn for the better with a noticeable increase in raven sightings throughout the state and, by the 1980s, we were able to travel no further north than Bear Mountain State Park to see ravens with relative ease—soaring over the Hudson River. This remarkable turnaround was probably brought about by reforestation of much of the state, changing attitudes toward wildlife, an increase in the raven's food supply from road kills and the remains of coyote predation, which had replaced a food supply formerly provided by wolves and other large predators. Like its congeners the American Crow and the Fish Crow, the raven is an omnivore, eating a wide variety of plant and animal matter. There is no doubt that scavenging on the prey of larger predators and road kills are what enable it to survive even the harshest winters.

■ The attitude of *Homo sapiens* towards the raven has varied widely by various cultures. In England during the Middle Ages, ravens were common throughout Britain and London because they scavenged on garbage thrown in the streets, and so they were looked upon as beneficial. Traditionally, ravens nesting on the Tower of London were believed to protect the Crown and the Tower. A superstition holds that "If the Tower of London's ravens are lost or fly away, the Crown will fall and Britain with it." To this day, captive ravens are kept at the Tower by pinioning them so they cannot fly away.

■ Native Americans, who were astute observers of the natural world, recognized the sagacity of the raven and held it to be the Creator of the world, and at times they considered it to be a trickster god because of its cleverness. On the other hand, Edgar Allan Poe, in his epic poem *The Raven*, the first line of which is the title of this article, presents the bird as an ominous and foreboding character connected with death.

■ That Spring, when I arrived at Hampton Bays, I drove directly to Road D and headed to the water tower directly on the south side of the railroad tracks. As I came up to the fence

surrounding the water tower property, I saw a recently fledged raven drinking from a puddle on the lawn. Excitedly I got out of the car and immediately heard and saw an adult raven circling overhead. I had seen it for myself, the first nesting ravens ever recorded for Long Island. Although, in all probability, the raven had been a Long Island resident in pre-Colombian times, long before we had started keeping records and the island was still a forested wilderness.

Differentiating a raven from a crow is not too difficult if you get a good look at it. When perched, it is much larger than a crow and has a massive bill and shaggy throat feathers like a bird with a goiter. Flying, you need to see the shape of the tip of the tail, which is wedge-shaped on the raven and simply rounded on a crow. In addition, ravens often soar while crows never do. To spot a raven, look for the wedge-shaped tail on any big black bird soaring overhead.

Fast forward to the third week in May 2016; I was returning home from Riverhead when I ran into a colossal traffic jam on the Sunrise Highway. The radio informed me that there was an accident on County Road 39 and it would be a while before it was cleared up. So I decided to kill some time and see if the ravens had returned to the water tower. It was six years since their initial nesting—was it possible that they would still be using the tower? As I drove down Good Ground Road, I found them sitting side-by-side on a high-voltage tower adjacent to the water tower, serenely watching the hustle and bustle of downtown Hampton Bays—as if to say “We’re back in spite of you, and we won’t be banished to the remotest regions of the state again.”



“Quoth the Raven, Nevermore.”

Jim Ash

Jim, SoFo's first Executive Director, is Vice President of the museum's Board of Directors and one of the museum's seven founding members. He is a consummate self-taught field naturalist and over his 50 years of studying the natural world has mentored many naturalists in a variety of fields.

Footnotes on Nature

Seals of Long Island

by Ashley Federici

There are a variety of animals that seasonally inhabit Long Island and its surrounding waterways. The summertime brings sea turtles, tropical fish, and an assortment of birds. When winter comes many animals head south, including seals, who consider arctic and subarctic climates their home.

Common species of seals on Long Island are harbor, gray, and harp seals. Harbor seals are the most common species to visit Long Island; they have a characteristically puppy-like face and speckled body. Gray seals are the next abundant species, with a more elongated snout that resembles that of a horse. Harp seals are more accustomed to colder climates, with a unique mottled pattern on juveniles and a distinct inkblot-like harp design on their backs as adults. They have a cat-like face and a shy demeanor. For this reason, harp seals freeze and cease movement when scared.

Depending on the severity of Long Island's winters, seals can be found in our waters and resting on our beaches from November to May. Though these animals may be reminiscent of household pets, they are wild animals that are federally protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. This protection makes it unlawful to get within 150 feet (50 meters) of any marine mammal, such as seals.

Concerned about the seals' health and well-being? There are a few things to look for to determine if a seal is in distress or simply resting on the beach. Take a look at the animal's behavior; an alert and healthy posture for a seal is one where it lifts its head and hind flippers up at the same time, like a banana shape. The seals may fan out their hind flippers or show their claws, as well as grunt or make other vocalizations, which are also signs of an alert animal. If a seal is not showing signs of being alert, it is still best to maintain your distance and call for assistance from the Riverhead Foundation for Marine Research and Preservation at (631)369-9829.

As our climate changes, Long Island is seeing altered patterns in the abundance of seals and the duration of time they remain in the area. Interested in learning more and observing these incredible animals at a safe distance in their natural habitat? Make a reservation to join SoFo for guided seal walks throughout the winter season for an unforgettable experience!



Gray Seal

Harbor Seal



Juvenile Harp Seal
Virginia State Parks

Ashley Federici

Ashley joined the SoFo staff as a Nature Educator in April of this year. She worked previously at the Riverhead Foundation for Marine Research and Preservation and Cornell Cooperative Extension. She graduated from Stony Brook University with a degree

by Diana Aceti, SoFo Director of Development

SoFo welcomes over 500 Guests to its two Annual Summer Events

The South Fork Natural History Museum has enjoyed a busy summer, hosting two successful events: our 2nd Annual Climate Change Symposium on June 18, and our 27th Annual Summer Gala on July 16. Both events took place at SoFo's state-of-the-art museum, overlooking the Long Pond Greenbelt in Bridgehampton, New York.

SoFo's 2nd Annual Climate Change Symposium



SoFo's expert team of Environmental Advocates (Photo: Kimberly Goff)

SoFo's 2nd Annual Climate Change Symposium featured a panel of esteemed speakers with backgrounds in government, energy, law, and architectural engineering. The theme of discussion focused on challenges and recommendations for sustainability on the East End of Long Island, paying particular attention to the East End's unique ecosystems. Panelists and audience members engaged in a discussion on climate change, chemical pollution, energy reductions, and ways in which to combat pollution and reduce energy use specifically on the East End, in addition to the consequences of failing to reduce pollution and energy waste. We send a special thank you to our expert panelists: Lynn Arthur, Energy Sub-Committee at Town of Southampton Sustainability and Executive Director at PeakPower LI; Peter Boyd, Founder of The Time4Good Group, Senior Advisor and Climate Lead for the B Team; Steven Englebright, New York State Assembly member for the 4th District and SoFo Board Member; Michael Gerrard, Andrew Sabin Professor of Professional Practice at Columbia Law School and Director of the Sabin Center for Climate Change Law; Nick Martin, AIA, Principal of the award-winning Martin Architects PC of Sagaponack, NY; and Edwina von Gal, Founder - President of Perfect Earth Project and noted Hamptons Landscape Designer.

The post-discussion reception featured a raw bar, wine donated by Channing Daughters Winery, beer donated by Montauk Brewing Company, and live music by Alfredo Merat. Guests and speakers enjoyed refreshments among SoFo's picturesque gardens while continuing discussion on local climate change and sustainability issues throughout the evening.



*Dr. Federenko True Organic's Julia Bitton and Perfect Earth Project's Edwina von Gal
(Photo: Kimberly Goff)*



*Guests Arriving at SoFo's
2nd Annual Climate Change Symposium
(Photo: Xylia Serafy)*

SoFo's 27th Annual Summer Gala

We also are extremely pleased to announce that SoFo's 27th Annual Summer Gala on July 16th was a huge success, with over 500 guests in attendance. This year, SoFo honored The Patsy & Jeff Tarr Family and Anke & Jürgen Friedrich for their outstanding humanitarian work and support of our museum. Our Featured Guest Chef was Alex Guarnaschelli, and our chairs were Ann Liguori and Kim & Greg Lippmann. The event was hosted by Tracy Anderson and Katie Lee.

Guests enjoyed a VIP cocktail reception with esteemed local chefs including Peter Ambrose, Endless Summer Grille; Matty Boudreau, Baron's Cove; Keith Davis, The Golden Pear; Greg Grossman, Orea Restaurant; Terry Harwood, Vine Street Café; Kerry Heffernan, Grand Banks Restaurant; Sarah Hong, East Hampton Grill; Mike Martinson, Montauk Shellfish Company; Sam McClelland and David Loewenberg, The Bell & Anchor.

The 7:00-10:00 pm Gala Reception featured a special table of exquisite vegetable dishes prepared by Chef Alex Guarnaschelli, and abundant farm-to-table hors d'oeuvres catered by Peter Ambrose, as well as an Honoree Presentation paying tribute to the Patsy & Jeff Tarr Family and Anke & Juergen Friedrich. The annual SoFo Scholarship Award, donated each year by the Bridgehampton National Bank, was given to Zoe

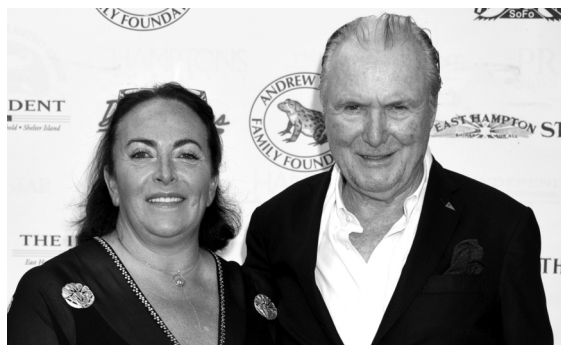
Dupree, and the annual Mulvihill Family Environmental Scholarship Award, donated by Mary M. Mulvihill, was presented to Hannah Jungck by Daniel Mulvihill-Decker. Guests enjoyed dancing to the spirited sounds of Nancy Atlas & The Nancy Atlas Project Band with special guest musician, world renowned trombone player Clark Gayton. We thank our special guest auctioneer, Ann Liguori, and congratulate all of our silent and live auction winners who helped make this SoFo's most successful auction to date.

Alcohol for the evening was kindly donated by Amagansett Wines & Spirits, and the evening's signature drinks – Keith's Nervous Breakdown Margaritas -- were donated by Keith Davis from the Golden Pear. Wine was donated by Channing Daughters Winery, and beer was donated by Montauk Brewing Company. The Kiembock Family also donated its Doña Sarita Mezcal spirits.

"Our 27th Annual Summer Gala Benefit is our most important fundraiser of the year, ensuring the long-term sustainability of SoFo. We thank all of our guests for supporting SoFo with such a great turnout. The museum is a very important East End resource that educates and inspires families to become engaged and responsible caretakers of our planet now and for the future. The museum is committed to conserving and preserving the natural resources of eastern Long Island," says SoFo's Executive Director, Frank Quevedo.



*Honorees the Jeff & Patsy Tarr Family.
Photo: Rob Rich/SocietyAllure.com.*



*Honorees Anke & Jürgen Friedrich.
Photo: Rob Rich/SocietyAllure.com*



*Co-hosts Chef Alex Guarneschelli,
Tracy Anderson and Katie Lee.
Photo: Rob Rich/SocietyAllure.com*



*Left to right, Frank Quevedo, SoFo
Executive Director, Andy Sabin,
SoFo Board President, Zoe Dupree,
recipient of Annual SoFo
Scholarship underwritten by the
Bridgehampton National Bank
(BNB), Susan Schaeffer, BNB
Bridgehampton Branch Manager.
Photo: Rob Rich/SocietyAllure.com*



*Left to right, Frank Quevedo, SoFo
Executive Director, Andy Sabin,
SoFo Board President, Hannah
Jungck, Mulvihill Family
Environmental Scholarship Award
winner, Daniel Mulvihill-Decker
presenting the award. Photo: Rob
Rich/SocietyAllure.com*



South Fork
Natural History
Museum (SoFo)

P.O. Box 455, Bridgehampton, NY 11932-0455
(631) 537-9735
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www.sofo.org

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