

SOFOnaturalist



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

SoFo's Bluebird Program

by Joe Giunta, Bluebird Trail Monitor

The Eastern Bluebird was always my favorite bird. It has a beautiful blue back, a red breast and a white belly. A truly all-American bird. I remember seeing my first bluebird in early spring as a male came off the ground and the sun illuminated the striking blue on its back. Something like that you remember forever.



Male Eastern Bluebird.

This bird, the state bird of New York, is a cavity-nesting bird with a very interesting nesting cycle. In early spring, the male escorts the female to numerous cavities and lets her pick out the one for nesting. Once the cavity—usually a bird box—is selected, the female builds a grass nest. Usually five eggs are laid and incubated by

the female for 14-16 days. The nestlings all hatch on the same day.

The young remain in the cavity for 16-18 days, fed by both parents, and then they fledge. For the next two weeks, the fledglings are cared for by their parents. After another week or so, the bluebirds go for a second nesting. This time the female usually lays four eggs, and the incubating, nestling stage, and fledging are repeated. Sometimes the young from the first nesting help with feeding and caring for the young of the second nesting. I have witnessed this, as it becomes a real family affair. In early autumn, the bluebirds usually migrate south to avoid the harsh winters that we sometimes get in the northeast. If the winters are not too severe, a few will overwinter feeding on fruits and berries that they find.

The cavity is the key to their success. Years ago, natural cavities were found in tree snags and the like, but for safety reasons, development, and other concerns, many snags were removed and the bluebird numbers decreased, due to the dearth of the snags, because they had no place to nest.

In the early 1990's, the South Fork Natural History Society/SoFo—the founding name of the South Fork Natural History Museum—recognized the need for bird boxes and established many bluebird trails on the east end of Long Island. The East Hampton Airport



Nestlings in bluebird box. —
Roads End Naturalist.



Standing tree snag with cavities. These snags are of vital importance to the life history of many animals.

Being a trail monitor is not easy and at times can be very disappointing. Nestling failures, dead birds, and bird predators are all causes of great concern. The raccoon is a nighttime raider of unprotected boxes. The House Sparrow is a deadly competitor of bluebirds in areas where they are present.

The House Wren is another bluebird predator, taking over their boxes by destroying their eggs and then filling the cavity with sticks and making it unusable. In spite of all this, I was going to give it a try.

The raccoon problem was easy as I noticed none of the boxes had climbing predator guards. I installed them at my two trails. House Sparrows and House Wrens are an ongoing problem, but placing boxes in areas with no brush and staying away from horse farms, the main breeding grounds of house sparrows, has reduced predation. So I had some success. Not perfect but OK. I saw reports that the East Hampton Airport, with its trail of some 60 plus boxes, was hardly producing any bluebirds. It was now 2005 and, having recently retired, I had more time to spend on bluebirds. I took over all the trails, almost 200 boxes, and made some changes. All the boxes at the East Hampton Airport, South Fork Country Club, and Barcelona Neck Golf Course, as well as those on all trails were fitted with pole predator guards.

Trail boxes where there were house sparrows were removed. The results were slow but good and, over time, became great: 2005—38 bluebirds, 2008—78 bluebirds, 2011—90 and then 2012—143 bluebirds. An all-time record. Then came the disaster.

had the best habitat, because a grassland with perching spots on the edges for the ground-feeding bluebird to find food, is the perfect location. They need at least six acres of this grassland habitat for success. They do not nest in the woods or in suburban backyards. They are grassland birds.

In the mid 1990's, I became a trail monitor for SoFo. I had a lot of experience with tree swallows, also a cavity-nesting bird, from my years of monitoring bird box trails at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn and Breezy Point in Queens. Now I was going to monitor bluebirds on the east end of Long Island. In Amagansett, I established a trail at Quail Hill and took over a trail on Town Lane.



Example of a bluebird nest box trail, this one at the East Hampton Airport.

Continued on next page

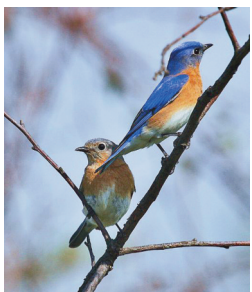


Nest box with
predator guard.

birds and birds' eggs. They really don't fly, but glide from one spot to another.

Historically, they were never present on the South Fork, and their presence here is probably due to human relocation, because they could not have crossed the Shinnecock Canal on their own. Nothing else happened the rest of that year, and the bluebird numbers were excellent. The next year, 2012, was our best year ever. But on June 18, 2012, I found body parts of half-eaten bluebirds and the nesting material of a flying squirrel. I then found another two flying squirrels. I knew there was a growing problem. Over time, the number of nesting birds started to decrease. I then found flying squirrels outside the airport, on the other side of Daniel's Hole Road. Other areas of the airport now had flying squirrels and more half-eaten bluebirds. Flying squirrels were spreading, and I didn't know what to do. Our work on the trail at Abraham's Path, miles away, was destroyed, and flying squirrels were in the boxes. The trail of boxes at Shaarey Pardes Accabonac Grove Cemetery, again miles away, also had flying squirrels and was destroyed. Numbers went from 143 bluebirds in 2012 to nothing in 2015!

"We take negatives and change them into positives" is one of my favorite expressions. After considering possible solutions, I decided to move all the boxes at the airport 35 feet from the tree line. This would put the boxes out of reach of the flying squirrels. Thankfully, the airport manager gave us permission to do this. Remember, it is an airport and not a park, so we were very grateful that this could be done. We could not do it for all boxes, so about 20 boxes were removed. Boxes could not be moved at the Abraham's Path and Shaarey Pardes Accabonac Grove Cemetery trails, so they were removed. By moving the boxes at the airport, we also reduced the number of house wrens, because free-standing boxes away from brush and trees are not suitable for them.



Pair of Eastern
Bluebirds –
Sandysphotos2009.

As we approach the end of the 2018 breeding season, the great news is that we have restored the breeding success of bluebirds and are closing in on a cumulative total of 1000 bluebirds fledged.

Joe Giunta is a birding instructor for the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, trip leader for New York City Audubon, lecturer for many Audubon local chapters, and owner of Happy Warblers LLC, a birding & educational travel company.

It started on July 3, 2011, and I didn't realize it. I opened a bird box at the airport and found a flying squirrel inside.

I'd never seen a flying squirrel before, and I thought at the time, "Well, OK, I have a squirrel in one box."

Flying squirrels are a little larger than a chipmunk. They are nocturnal, arboreal creatures whose favorite foods, among other things, include



Southern Flying
Squirrel – MimiMia
Photography.

Black Racers at SoFo

by Molly Vorhaus, SoFo Summer Intern

Sliding through the tall grass of Vineyard Field, the curious Black Racer looks for something small to eat—perhaps a vole, mole, or mouse—as part of his daily routine.



Northern Black Racer – Anne Devan-Song.

There are many snakes found on Long Island, all non-venomous, including an Eastern Garter Snake, Eastern Ribbon Snake, Eastern Hognose Snake, Northern Ringneck Snake, Eastern Worm Snake, Smooth Green Snake, Eastern Milk Snake, and Northern Black Racer. The mature Black Racer is slender, relatively large—60 inches in length—and smooth-scaled, often with some white coloration under the chin. The belly is generally uniformly dark gray or black. Black Racers are found throughout the eastern United States.

This summer, SoFo interns Jake Kushner, Miles Todaro, and Molly Vorhaus conducted a survey during the months of May and June to count how many Black Racers (*Coluber constrictor*) could be found in Vineyard Field, the old field habitat behind the museum. Every morning at 9am, they searched under the wooden boards, placed along the field's Loop Trail, and counted the number of snakes present. The purpose of this was to see if there was a correlation between the temperature and the presence of snakes underneath the boards. Black Racers often seek out burrows or coverings, such as these boards, as refuge during cooler weather. Because they surveyed early in the summer and early in the day, Kushner, Todaro, and Vorhaus found that cooler temperature during these times was most conducive to finding Black Racers, since the snakes were searching for warmth underneath the boards. They also found that they were more likely to see the snakes on a cloudy day. SoFo is particularly interested in the habits of Black Racers because these snakes are beneficial to our ecosystems on Long Island. Black Racers help control the small mammal population and maintain balance in the food web by playing the role of both predator and prey.

Black Racers are defensive instead of aggressive. If you and a Black Racer happen to come eye-to-eye when lifting up a board along the Loop Trail or going for a walk in the woods it is important to know that upon seeing you this snake will most likely just slither away. However, if cornered it may bite in defense. But keep in mind, these animals are important beings in our local (and global) ecosystems, we need not fear them, but rather respect and appreciate them.

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www.sofo.org email: sofo@hamptons.com

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A full description of each program is listed on the SoFo website:
www.sofo.org/calendar

October, November, & December

Museum Admission & Program Information

SoFo Members

Admission to the Museum is free. Programs are free unless otherwise specified.

Advance reservations are required for all programs.

Non-Members

Museum Admission Only – Adults \$10, Children \$7.50 (Ages 3-12),

Ages 2 and under free

Museum Admission and Program – Adults \$15, Children \$10 (Ages 3-12),

Ages 2 and under free

Advance reservations are required for all programs.

To make reservations and find out about meeting places, please call SoFo at 631.537.9735
or email sofo@hamptons.com.

SoFo's Holiday Charity Drive Is Going to the Dogs ... and Cats

The mission of the South Fork Natural History Museum is to help create a bond between the individual and the natural world. Frequently, a child's first introduction to an animal is through a pet dog or cat. We believe that this relationship is an important step in building empathy for all living things. For this reason, SoFo has decided to partner with the Animal Rescue Fund (ARF) and the Southampton Animal Shelter Foundation (SASF)—two local shelters that place rescued animals in forever homes—for our Holiday Charity Drive. From Thanksgiving through the winter holidays up to the New Year, you can drop off monetary contributions, gently used blankets, sheets, towels, and new dog and cat toys to be shared by the two organizations. These items will be delivered to ARF and SASF by January 5, 2019.

Below are pictures of the SoFo staff with their rescued forever friends.



SoFo Executive Director
Frank Quevedo with Emerson
adopted from ARF.



SoFo Environmental Educa-
tor Eleni Nikolopoulos with
Kato & Kahlua adopted from
SASF.



SoFo Environmental Educa-
tor Melanie Meade with
Grayson adopted from a feral
cat colony.



SoFo Membership & Devel-
opment Associate Crystal
Oakes with Fergie & Zoe
adopted from SASF.



SoFo Environmental Educa-
tor Xylia Serafy with Twigs
adopted from ARF.

Calendar At A Glance

Key: A-Adults T-Teens C-Children F-Family AA-All Ages

A full description of each program and time frame is listed on the SoFo website at www.sofo.org/calendar
Advance reservations are required for all programs.

| | | | |
|---------|----|--|----------|
| October | 5 | • <i>Dark Energy & the Accelerating Universe</i> —Lecture by Neelima Sehgal, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Physics & Astronomy, Stony Brook University cosponsored by the Montauk Observatory: A/T • | 7pm |
| | 6 | • Andy's Annual Salamander Log Rolling: F • | 10am |
| | 6 | • Long Pond Greenbelt—20th Annual Family Celebration with FLP: AA • | 10am-1pm |
| | 6 | • <i>Tickwise for Children</i> : "Train Your Eyes to be <i>Tickwise</i> ": F • | 1pm |
| | 7 | • Associate Professor of Geology Sean Tvelia—Geology Walk in Montauk: A/C8+ • | 10:30am |
| | 7 | • Nature Drawing for Children—Birds & How They Move: F/C6+ • | 1pm |
| | 13 | • SoFo Cleans the Beach—Monthly Beach Cleanup: AA • | 8am |
| | 13 | • Protecting our Sacred Land—Finding a Common Ground, A Conversation with the Center for Humans & Nature & other Conservationists: A/T • | 3-6pm |
| | 14 | • Passerine Fall Migration Walk with Joe Giunta: A • | 7:30am |
| | 20 | • SoFo's Young Birders Club Meeting: C8+ • | 10am |
| | 20 | • Animal Origami with Crystal, SoFo Environmental Educator: F/C6+ • | 10:30am |
| | 20 | • Atlantic Marine Conservation Society—Sea Turtle Stranding Training: A/T • | 2pm |
| | 21 | • Montauk Trail Hike with CCOM at Money Pond: F • | 10am |
| | 21 | • Feeding Time at the Museum with SoFo Environmental Educators: C3-5 • | 10:30am |
| | 21 | • Feeding Time at the Museum with SoFo Environmental Educators: C6+ • | 2pm |
| | 24 | • Full Hunter's Moon Hike at SoFo with Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA • | 7pm |
| | 27 | • Nature Walk at Scallop Pond with Biologist Dr. Keith Serafy: F/C6+ • | 10am |
| | 27 | • Birding with Frank at Good Ground Park, Hampton Bays: A/C8+ • | 10am |
| | 27 | • The Northern Long-eared Bat on Long Island—Talk by Ph.D. Candidate Samantha Hoff: A/T • | 2pm |
| | 28 | • Come Draw with Us with Artist Muriel Appelbaum: A/T15+ • | 10:30am |
| | 28 | • Arachnid Tactics—How Spiders Catch their Prey: C6+ • | 2pm |
| | 29 | • Wellness Foundation Potluck Dinner & Mindfulness Presentation: AA • | 6pm |

| | | | |
|----------|----|--|------------|
| November | 3 | • Poxabogue County Park Nature Walk with Xylia, SoFo Environmental Educator: AA • | 10am |
| | 3 | • Autumn Nature Storytime with Eleni, SoFo Environmental Educator: C3-5 • | 2pm |
| | 3 | • <i>The Lost Rainforest of Crystal Mountain, Madagascar</i> —Talk by Dr. Patricia Wright, Primatologist, Anthropologist, & Conservationist: A/T • | 7pm |
| | 4 | • Late Fall Bird Migration at Promised Land, Amagansett, with Joe Giunta: A • | 8am |
| | 4 | • Nature Drawing for Children—Insects & How They Move: F/C6+ • | 1pm |
| | 10 | • SoFo Cleans the Beach—Monthly Beach Cleanup: AA • | 8am |
| | 10 | • Birding with Frank at Good Ground Park, Hampton Bays: A/C8+ • | 10am |
| | 10 | • <i>OceansWide</i> Remotely Operated Underwater Vehicle Workshop Part I: C8+ • | 10:30am |
| | 11 | • <i>OceansWide</i> Remotely Operated Underwater Vehicle Workshop Part II: C8+ • | 10:30am |
| | 17 | • Nature & Birdwatching Cruise Aboard the <i>R.V. Peconic</i> : A/C10+ • | 9:45am-1pm |
| | 17 | • SoFo's Young Birders Club Meeting: C8+ • | 10am |
| | 17 | • Let's Make an Eco-Friendly Bird Feeder: AA • | 10:30am |
| | 18 | • Come Draw with Us with Artist Muriel Appelbaum: A/T15+ • | 10:30am |
| | 18 | • Mashomack Preserve Nature Walk with Miles, SoFo Environmental Educator: AA • | 10:30am |
| | 23 | • Southampton Trails Preservation Society Annual Walk-It-Off Hike: A/T/C8+ • | 10am |
| | 23 | • Full Frost Moon Hike at SoFo with Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA • | 6pm |
| | 23 | • Owls by the Light of the Moon—Annual Foray with Joe Giunta: A • | 7pm |
| | 24 | • Free Thanksgiving Open House—Everyone Welcome! AA • | 10am-4pm |
| | | • Shinnecock Blessing & Traditional Dancing • | 11am-Noon |
| | | • Introducing SoFo's New Shark Exhibit • | 1-4pm |
| | 25 | • <i>Who Lives in a Tree?</i> —Storytime with Melanie, SoFo Environmental Educator: C3-5 • | 10:30am |

Calendar At A Glance

Key: A-Adults T-Teens C-Children F-Family AA-All Ages

A full description of each program and time frame is listed on the SoFo website at www.sofa.org/calendar
Advance reservations are required for all programs.

| | | | |
|----------|-------|---|----------|
| December | 1 | • Over in a River—Story Time & Craft with Xylia, SoFo Environmental Educator: C3-5 • | 10:30am |
| | 1 | • Nature & Art—Where do Amphibians go in Winter?: C8+ • | 1pm |
| | 8 | • SoFo Cleans the Beach—Monthly Beach Cleanup: AA • | 8am |
| | 8 | • SoFo Members-Only Holiday Event: AA • | 10am-4pm |
| | 9 | • Winter Beach Exploration with Miles, SoFo Environmental Educator: AA • | 10:30am |
| | 15 | • SoFo's Young Birders Club Meeting: C8+ • | 10am |
| | 15 | • Decorate a Holiday Tree for the Birds: AA • | 1pm |
| | 15 | • Searching for Seals— Winter Seal Walk with SoFo Environmental Educator: A/T/C6+ • | 12:30pm |
| | 16 | • Nature Drawing for Children—Mammals & How They Move: F/C6+ | 1pm |
| | 22 | • Falconry—An Ancient, but not Forgotten Sport— Meet Falconer Chris Paparo & his Hawk, Emmy: A/T/C6+ • | 10:30am |
| | 22 | • Nature Walk at Morton Wildlife Refuge with Xylia, SoFo Environmental Educator: AA • | 10am |
| | 22 | • Full Cold Moon Hike at SoFo with Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA • | 6-7pm |
| | 23 | • Owl Moon—Storytime with Melanie, SoFo Environmental Educator: C3-5 • | 10:30am |
| | 26-28 | • Winter School One Hour Recess Programs for Children of All Ages • | 10:30am |
| | 26 | • The Nature of Juggling & Animal Adaptations with Miles, SoFo Environmental Educator | |
| | 27 | • Winter Birds of Vineyard Field with Xylia, SoFo Environmental Educator | |
| | 28 | • Winter Weather with Eleni, SoFo Environmental Educator | |
| | 29 | • Feeding Time at the Museum with SoFo Environmental Educators: C3-5 • | 10:30am |
| | 29 | • Feeding Time at the Museum with SoFo Environmental Educators: C6+ • | 2pm |



Animals you might see and/or learn about at a SoFo autumn program.

Red-tailed Hawk - Mark Bohn of USFWS, Harbor Seal and Pup, Blue spotted Salamander - Greg Schechter, Black Widow - Miles Todaro
 Downy Woodpecker - Wolfgang Wander, Hermit Thrush, Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle, Eastern Screech Owl - Greg Hume



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To learn about business circle categories and to join online, please go to <http://sofo.org/membership>

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The South Fork Natural History Museum & Nature Center (SoFo) is a 501(c)(3), non-profit, environmental education organization chartered by the New York State Department of Education. Your membership/donation is tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.

SoFo's 29th Annual Summer Gala Benefit

Saturday, July 14, 2018

by Diana Aceti, Director of Development

We are happy to report that our 29th Annual Summer Gala Benefit honoring Courtney Ross, Founder of the Ross Institute, Ross School and the Ross Learning System; Don Church, President of Global Wildlife Conservation; and Russell Mittermeier, Chief Conservation Officer of Global Wildlife Conservation, was a huge success as we welcomed over 500 guests to benefit educational and environmental programming and initiatives at the Museum. SoFo sends a huge thank you to our wonderful Honorees; our Chairs Sammi and Scott Seltzer and Patsy and Jeff Tarr; and to our co-Hosts Leslie Clarke, Alex Guarnaschelli and Debra Halpert. We also salute our generous Alcohol Sponsors—Amagansett Wines and Spirits, Channing Daughters Winery, Doña Sarita Mezcal, Edinburgh Gin, and the Montauk Brewing Company; Bridgehampton Florists for its donation of beautiful flowers; and Hampton Coffee Company for donating the coffee.

Our VIP Cocktail Reception from 6–7 pm was a huge success, thanks to the delicious tasting menu created and presented by our featured chefs from The Bell and Anchor * Calissa * East Hampton Grill * The Golden Pear * Grand Banks * Hayground School * Ketcham's Seafarm * Manna Restaurant * Mecox Bay Dairy * Montauk Shellfish Company * Page At 63 Main * Saaz Restaurant * Southampton Social Club.

Our main reception included an Honoree Presentation, a buffet dinner catered by Elegant Affairs Catering, coffee provided by the wonderful Hampton Coffee Company truck, live and silent auctions, and dancing with the great Nancy Atlas and the Nancy Atlas Project Band, sponsored by Bill Miller and Associates.

Our live auction, presented by Guest Auctioneers Dr. Gerry Curatola and Ann Ligouri, featured a number of VIP experiences including a once-in-a-lifetime ten-day trip to Madagascar with Honoree Russ Mittermeier. Other auction winnings included an exclusive golf outing for four at the prestigious Maidstone Club; a NYC getaway with a two-night stay at the Bowery Hotel with two Broadway hit shows donated by the Nederlander Organization, dinner at Chef Alex Guarnaschelli's Butter Restaurant, and limo service donated by Hamptons VIP Ride; a two-and-a-half hour yacht trip donated by Charles Charters, with lunch and wine by Towne Cellars; and a private performance by Nancy Atlas and the Nancy Atlas Project Band.

We were happy to welcome new sponsors this year: Bai Antioxidant Infusion Drinks, Bridgehampton Florist, Danielle Hamptons, Davinci Haus USA—John Healey, Sotheby's International Realty, Decco by Party Up Productions, Edinburgh Gin, Hamptons VIP Ride, Hampton Coffee Company, J.A.Baczewski Monopolowa Vodka, Madoo Conservancy, and Summerhill Landscapes, who joined our noteworthy roster of auction donors; and Media Sponsors *Dan's Hamptons Media*, *East Hampton Star*, *Hamptons Magazine*, *The Independent Newspaper*, and the *Sag Harbor Express*.

SoFo was delighted to present these scholarships at the event: the 2018 SoFo Scholarship Award, made possible by a donation from BNB Bank, was awarded to Hanna Mirando. The 2018 Mulvihill Family Environmental Scholarship, made possible by Mary Mulvihill, was presented to Ava Kiss. The Blackmore Family Foundation presented its first annual high school merit scholarship to Catherine Spolarich.



Chairs Sammi & Scott Seltzer



Honoree Don Church, Andy Sabin, Honoree Courtney Ross, Kathy Qian, and Honoree Russell Mittermeier



Susan and David Rockefeller



Nejma Beard, Peter Beard, and Zara Beard
All photos Rob Rich Societyallure.com



Peter Brown, Nancy Brown, Diana Aceti, and Chair Jeff Tarr



Mulvihill Family Environmental Scholarship Award Recipient Ava Kiss, Mary Ann Mulvihill-Decker, and Andy Sabin



Photo, Richard Lewin

SoFo WELCOMES DEBRA HALPERT TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

We are very happy to welcome Debra Halpert, Branding/Marketing expert, motivational speaker, philanthropist, advisor, activist, and past publisher of *Hamptons Magazine*, to SoFo's Board of Directors. Debra, who has long been a great friend and supporter of our museum, is a wonderful addition to our Board. Debra has a great spirit, endless energy, and a genuine commitment to nature and to the environment.

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South Fork
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