

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

The Alewife—A Harbinger of Spring

by Melanie Meade, South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO)
Education and Outreach Coordinator

One of the earliest signs that spring is just around the corner is the presence of a small, shiny, silver fish in local bays and estuaries. The Alewife, scientific name *Alosa pseudoharengus*, appears in large numbers at this time of year. Their arrival usually coincides with the white blooms of the Shadbush along the Peconic River and other Long Island estuaries.



Shadbush, also called Serviceberry, in bloom

Averaging 10 to 14 inches in length and weighing less than one pound, the alewife is one of the smaller members of the herring family, in the subgroup called shads or river herrings. Its body is gray-green above, gray-silver with a black spot on each side, and white on the belly. Their large eyes and jutting lower jaw make them easy to distinguish from other river herrings.



Alewives – Byron Young

Each spring, the adult fish make spawning runs up freshwater streams from the sea in late March and April to lay their eggs in coastal lakes and ponds. Fish that move from saltwater to freshwater in order to lay their eggs or spawn are termed anadromous. Females

shed eggs that stick to twigs on the bottom; the eggs are then fertilized by waiting males. After spawning, adult alewives return to the sea.



Alewife swimming upstream – Peconic Estuary Program

After a few weeks, the eggs hatch and the baby fish, called fry, feed on the plentiful plankton and aquatic insect larvae in the quiet waters. By November, cooling water temperatures signal the 3-to-4-inch fry that it is time they were on their way to the sea where they spend two to three years until they are mature and can make the return trip to complete the alewife life cycle.

While traveling up and down rivers and along coastal bays, alewives are an important prey item for wildlife. Osprey, eagles, loons, and great blue herons all dine on them.



Great Egret and Alewife – Byron Young

In the ocean, they sustain whales and seals. Basically, everything eats alewives: commercially important fish like striped bass, bluefish, and tuna in salt waters, and in freshwater, the largemouth bass. Mammals and other animals munch on alewives too: otter, mink, fox, raccoon, and even snapping turtles.

Historically, large spring migrations or runs of these fish occurred in many tidal creeks throughout the East End, and humans, too, used these fish as a food resource. Overfishing at sea and dams on rivers and tidal creeks seriously reduced the alewife runs. Conserva-

Continued on next page

Continued from page 1

tion efforts since then have resulted in commercial fishing limits at sea, the removal of some river dams in other states, and, locally, the installation of fish ladders on the Peconic River and Carmen's River that allow fish to pass safely by dams on their way to spawning areas.



Fish Ladder at Grangebél Park in Riverhead – Peconic Estuary Program

In recent years, alewives have even been protected from human dip-net fishing pressures except in the Hudson River where runs are still large. Because of these efforts some runs on

Eastern Long Island are returning, with increasing numbers of fish counted annually during volunteer surveys organized by the Peconic Estuary Program (PEP). For more information, visit the PEP website at <https://www.peconicestuary.org/protect-the-peconic/outreach-and-education-programs/>. To see for yourself how the alewives are doing just look along the side of a creek, near a road culvert leading to a lake or pond where the fish are running, and see how many fish you can count as they swim rapidly upstream, a sure sign of nature announcing another spring.

Join Peter Topping, the Peconic Baykeeper, to learn first-hand all about the Alewife on Saturday, April 4, 2020, for a special SOFO nature walk "Searching for Alewife—A Migratory Fish," from 9am – 11am in Southampton. This program is for adults and children five years of age and older. Reservations are necessary, so please call SOFO at (631) 537-9735 or email info@sofo.org to sign up for the walk.



Alewife navigating a road culvert
– Peter Topping

Footnotes on Nature

Why did the Turtle Cross the Road?

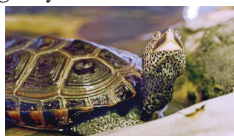
by Paul King III, South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Environmental Educator

As the weather warms up and spring approaches, wildlife is back on the move. The turtles wake up from their winter rest and begin to return to their mobile lives. But why are they so often seen crossing the road? The answer could be for a number of reasons.

Turtles start to search for new territories, food, or opportunities to breed during this time of year. It's also the time of year when female turtles search for nesting grounds to lay their eggs. The most common turtle you will likely encounter is the Eastern Box Turtle, easily distinguished by its bright yellow color. Even aquatic turtles like



Eastern Box Turtle



Diamondback Terrapin



Common Snapping Turtle

diamondback terrapins and snapping turtles will cross roads to find a good area for their nest.

If you see a turtle on the road, there are some things you can do to help it safely avoid trouble. First, you should always consider your own safety when stopping to check out a turtle in the road. Make sure you pull off to the side of the road and put your hazards on to alert other drivers. Always be aware of traffic and your surroundings.

While you may want to pick up the turtle to examine it, it's best to avoid handling it if possible to avoid disrupting its normal behavior. If there's no oncoming traffic and it's a rather quiet road, try to observe from a distance and allow the turtle to cross without assistance. If you get too close, you may startle the turtle and it may retreat and hide in its shell.

If a turtle is startled or is located on a busy road with traffic, then it may be necessary to move the turtle. To do this, very gently grasp the shell edge near the middle of the body with both hands (with the exception of snapping turtles, which are covered later). It is very important to maintain the direction that the turtle was heading. If you bring it back to the side of the road it was originally on, instead of the side of the road in the direction it was headed, it's very likely it will soon try to cross the road again.

Proper way to move an Eastern Box Turtle, a Diamondback Terrapin, an Eastern Painted Turtle, or other native small to medium sized turtles, but not a Common Snapping Turtle.



While you may think it's better to bring aquatic turtles back to a nearby pond, always put them in the direction they are headed. They almost always know where they are going and have a reason, and they will likely just try to cross the road again if this is done. Try to place the turtle at least 20 feet from the roadway if possible, to avoid it running back toward the road, as it can become startled by being handled and get disoriented.

Proper way to pick up a Common Snapping Turtle.



If you find a Common Snapping Turtle, you want to make sure to pick it up or gently lift and drag it across the road with two hands from the back of the shell; they have long necks that can reach back and bite with their very powerful jaws, doing a lot of damage. As tempting as it may be, never pick up any turtle by its tail to move it, as this will injure the turtle. Common snapping turtles can get very large, and may be too heavy to pick up safely; in this case you can use a car floor mat, towel, piece of wood, or anything else you can gently drag the turtle onto, and then take it across the road.

If you come across a turtle that is visibly damaged or seems injured, contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitator such as Turtle Rescue of the Hamptons (631-779-3737).

To learn more about our native turtles, come to this spring's SOFO turtle events. These programs are listed on the back page of this publication.

All photos by Miles Todaro, South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Environmental Educator.

Continued on back page




South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Calendar At A Glance Spring 2020

377 Bridgehampton/Sag Harbor Turnpike

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www.sofa.org email: info@sofo.org

Find us on Facebook  Twitter  Instagram 



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

April, May, & June

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 info@sofo.org



Aurora Robson

eARTh: Artists as Activists at the Southampton Arts Center April 18, 2020 through July 5, 2020

Presented in collaboration with the

South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO), Peconic Land Trust, & Oceana

Public Opening Reception: Friday, April 17 • 6-8 pm

Gallery Hours: Thursday-Sunday, 12-6 pm • Admission: \$5 Suggested Donation

From April 18 through July 5, 2020, visit the Southampton Arts Center's exhibition *eARTh: Artists as Activists*. This timely exhibition will feature artists who use their talents to create works in a variety of mediums that focus on environmental conservation.

Artists include Roisin Bateman, Scott Bluedorn, Erica Cirino, Rossa Cole, Janet Culbertson, Tom Deininger, Alejandro Duran, Jim Gingerich, Mamoun Friedrich Grosvenor, Kara Hoblin, Michael Light, Pam Longobardi, Janine Martel, Steve Miller, Patricia Paladines, Aurora Robson, Cindy Pease Roe, Lauren Ruiz, and Kathryn Szoka.

For more information visit southamptonartscenter.org.



Steve Miller

Calendar At A Glance

Key: A—Adults T—Teens C—Children F—Family AA—All Ages *—Live Animals

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

Advance reservations are required for all programs.

April

SOFO's Nature Photography Club will meet on a Saturday in April;
time, date, and location, **TBD: A/C12+ •**

- 2 • SOFO Table at Southampton Arts Center,
"Takeover 2020! Artists in Residence": AA • 6-8pm

Spring School Break—For Children of All Ages (+ see below)

Free Programs—10:30-11:30am

Monday, April 6: Insect Search

Tuesday, April 7: Who Lives in the Pond?

Wednesday, April 8: Herpetology Walk

Thursday, April 9: Spring Scavenger Hunt

Friday, April 10: Birds of Vineyard Field

+For non-members of SOFO, attendance at these free programs
does not include entrance to the museum
or to other programs during this period.

Advance reservations are required for all programs

- 4 • Searching for Alewife—A Migratory Fish—with the Peconic
Baykeeper, Peter Topping: A/C5+ • 9-11am
- 4 • Weaving Class with Laurie Lambrecht—*Inspired by Nature*: A/T • 11am-1pm
- 7 • Full Pink Moon Walk—
Cosponsored with Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA • 8-9pm
- 9 • Tree Identification Walk: A/C7+ • 1pm
- 11 • *Search for Singing Frogs—Spring Peepers: AA • 7pm
- 11 • SOFO Cleans the Beach: AA • 3pm
- 13 • *Secret Life of Vineyard Pond: A/C6+ • 10:30am
- 18 • SOFO's Young Birders Club: Ages 8-18 • 10am
- 18 • Invasive Species—Mile-a-Minute Removal in Vineyard Field:
Cosponsored with Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA • 10:30am
- 18 • Hands-on LEGO Workshop—Designs for a Mars Colony: C8+ • 10:30am
- 18 • Private Guided Tour of the Watermill Center—
Gardens/Art/Building: Fee \$10: A • 2pm
- 18 • Calls of the Night: A Search for Spring-Breeding Frogs: A/T • 7:30pm
- 19 • Birding with Joe Giunta at Promised Land—
Early Spring Migration: A • 8am
- 21 • Meteor Shower Observation with the Hamptons Observatory: A/C8+ • 7:30pm
- 25 • *SOFO Free Earth Day Open House—At SOFO It's Earth Day Every Day,
Nature Walks, Solar Observation with Hamptons Observatory,
Local Animals, Community Groups: AA • 10am-4pm
- 25 • SOFO's Young Environmentalists Society (YES!): Ages 10-16 • 10am
- 25 • Oysters— Diseases, Pests, Predators, and Proper Handling of Harvested
Oysters for Human Consumption—East Hampton Shellfish
Enhancement & Education Directive: A/T • 5:30pm
- 26 • Visit SOFO at Southampton Art Center's
Earth Day Celebration: AA • 12-4pm
- 26 • Beach to Forest Nature Walk at Clam Island Park: A/C6+ • 10:30am

May

SOFO's Nature Photography Club will meet on a Saturday in May;
time, date, and location, TBD: A/C12+ •

- | | | |
|----|---|-------------|
| 2 | • *Eleventh Annual Peconic Family Fun Day—
Free Children's Carnival at CMEE: C All Ages • | 10am-12pm |
| 2 | • *Join SOFO for World Migratory Bird Day at Wertheim National Wildlife
Refuge: Outdoor Activities, Live Animals, Music, & More—
Fun for All Ages! AA | 10am-3pm |
| 3 | • Beach Walk at Maidstone Park Beach: AA | 10am |
| 7 | • Full Flower Moon Hike with Friends of the
Long Pond Greenbelt: AA • | 8:30-9:30pm |
| 9 | • Birding with Frank at Good Ground Park to Celebrate
World Migratory Bird Day: A/C8+ • | 10am |
| 9 | • Sagg Swamp Insect Search: A/T/C6+ • | 10:30am |
| 9 | • SOFO Cleans the Beach: AA | 3pm |
| 16 | • Spring Migration Birding with Wayne Whitmore
at Hither Hills State Park: A/T • | 9am |
| 16 | • SOFO's Young Birders Club: Ages 8-18 • | 10am |
| 16 | • *Visit a Horseshoe Crab Research Lab—
See Adult Horseshoe Crabs & All Their Life Stages: A/C8+ • | 10:30am |
| 16 | • Invasive Species—Mile-a-Minute Removal in Vineyard Field:
Cosponsored with Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA • | 10:30am |
| 16 | • Beach Walk at Circle Beach with Biologist Dr. Keith Serafy: AA • | 1:30pm |
| 23 | • Black Racer Snake Search with Andy Sabin: AA • | 9:30am |
| 23 | • Salamander Seining...and some frogs too, with Andy Sabin: AA • | 10am |
| 28 | • Artifacts of Human Space Flight, "Relics of the Space Age": Presented
by Paul Siegel; cosponsor, Hamptons Observatory: A/T/C10+ • | 7-8:30pm |
| 30 | • SOFO's Young Environmentalists Society (YES!): Ages 10-16 • | 10am |
| 30 | • Tour of the Mushroom Grow House at Open Minded Organics:
with Owner David Falkowski A/C8+ • | 10:30am |
| 30 | • *Shellebrate World Turtle Day—Native Turtles in the Wild,
Up-Close & Personal: AA • | 2pm |

June

SOFO's Nature Photography Club will meet on a Saturday in June;
time, date, and location, TBD: A/C12+ •

- | | | |
|----|---|------------|
| 5 | • Full Straw Moon Walk with Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA • | 9-10pm |
| 6 | • Birds of the Meadow & Woods with Frank: Eric Salzman Memorial
Bird Walk; Cosponsor, Eastern Long Island Audubon Soc.: A/C8+ • | 8am |
| 6 | • *Identifying Insects: A/T/C12+ • | 10:30am |
| 9 | • Birding with Joe Giunta—
Breeding Warblers at Hither Hills State Park: A • | 8am |
| 13 | • Chasing Eagles with Frank—
Illustrated Talk & Search for Bald Eagles: A/C8+ • | 10am |
| 13 | • Invasive Species—Mile-a-Minute Removal in Vineyard Field:
Cosponsored with Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA • | 10:30am |
| 13 | • SOFO Cleans the Beach: AA • | 3pm |
| 18 | • <i>The Importance of Pollinators</i> , Talk & Walk at
Peconic Land Trust's Bridge Gardens: A/T • | 11:30am |
| 20 | • Nature & Bird Watching Cruise with Frank: A/C10+ • | 9:45am-1pm |
| 20 | • SOFO's Young Birders Club: Ages 8-18 • | 10am |
| 26 | • * <i>The Turtle with Clown Lips</i> —Diamondback Terrapins with John Turner,
Illustrated Talk: (Live Diamondback Terrapins will participate;
see June 27 & June 28 for more Diamondback Terrapin events): A/C8+ • | 7pm |
| 27 | • SOFO's Young Environmentalists Society (YES!): Ages 10-16 | 10am |
| 27 | • *Meet the Martins—Purple Martins Life Cycle & Hatched Chicks
with John Shemilt, SOFO's Purple Martin Steward: AA • | 10:30am |
| 27 | • Diamondback Terrapins by Land & Sea: Part 1, by Land: A/C6+ • | 2:30pm |
| 28 | • Diamondback Terrapins by Land & Sea: BYO Kayak,
Part 2, by Sea: A/C10+ • | 10am |

SOFO Holiday 2019 Toy Drive Benefiting East Hampton's Youngest "Scholars"

Imagine that you are 18 months old and attending "school" for 10 hours a day, or you're 4 years old, or some age in between—learning better be fun. For the kids ages 18 months to 5 years old who attend the Eleanor Whitmore Early Childhood Center in East Hampton, that is exactly what it is. FUN. And it just got more so thanks to the very successful SOFO Holiday Toy Drive this past winter. Because of you, we received six crates loaded with age-appropriate learning toys, which we sent to classrooms for Toddlers, 3's and Pre-K students. Lots of toys that will provide hours of joy as they inspire learning and development of language, fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, color and number recognition, and so much more. Thank you for your donations, and for inspiring a love for learning. The SOFO toy drive... providing so much more than just toys.

Many thanks to all.

Joan Overlock

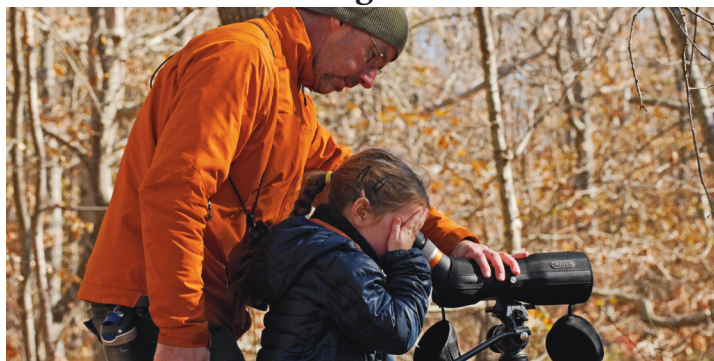
Director of Development

Eleanor Whitmore Early Childhood Center



Children from the Eleanor Whitmore Early Childhood Center pictured with toys for their classrooms

Special SOFO Year-round Activities for Young People SOFO's Young Birders Club



Member of SOFO Young Birders Club learning to use a spotting scope

In case you are not aware, SOFO's Young Birders Club, for ages 8 – 18, has grown in popularity since its inception in April of 2017 and is now fully fledged. Membership has increased under the fine tutelage of the Club's leader, Miles Todaro, first-rate birder and a SOFO Environmental Educator, and the Club's advisors—experienced birders Frank Quevedo, SOFO's Executive Director, and Barbara Blaisdell, veteran educator and artist. The Club is free, and meets the third Saturday of each month, from 10am to 12pm. Birding takes place at many local

areas since the East End of Long Island has a number of diverse habitats that are homes to a wide variety of species. We welcome parents to bird with their children, and we have a few pairs of binoculars to lend.



"I've got my binocs on that Snowy Owl"

A rare experience, for birders of any age, was last year's opportunity to accompany John Shemilt, SOFO's Purple Martin Steward, as he lowered the nest gourds (home to SOFO's purple martin colony) and allowed Club members and program participants to see newly hatched purple martin chicks. This year, on Saturday June 27 at 10:30am, John Shemilt will once again introduce Club members and program participants to newly hatched purple martins, an unusual experience for anyone.



Newly hatched Purple Martins at SOFO – Frank Quevedo

If you know any 8 to 18 year olds, who have an interest in birding, we invite them to join this free SOFO Club.

SOFO's New Young Environmentalists Society (YES!)

The mission of SOFO's new Young Environmentalists Society, known as YES!, for ages 10-16, is to engage young minds in developing a fuller awareness and understanding of the current state of our environment. The group will work together—through experience-based learning, place-based learning, critical thinking processes, and local activism—to develop strategies for individuals and the community that are designed to shape how we live on this planet now and in the future.

The Club's leader, Mare Dianora—an interdisciplinary artist whose practice involves building community and exploring connections to home and place—is an educator and the mother of two young boys. The Club meets the last Saturday of each month, from 10am to 11:30am. This is a free, bilingual program, thanks to the generosity of a foundation which prefers to remain anonymous. There will be bilingual support for Spanish-speaking participants. Please visit sofo.org for further information, or contact info@sofo.org to join the Society.

SOFO's Summer Programs for Young People SOFO's Marine Science Program

For the eighth year in a row, SOFO offers three weeks of marine science programs for children during the summer. Please visit our website for further details. These photos are from previous years.



Fish printing



Planting oysters with the Town of East Hampton Shellfish Hatchery

Coming Soon ... SOFO's New Environmental Science Summer Program

This July and August, we are expanding our summer program offerings with two weeks of a new Environmental Science Summer Program focusing on climate change impacts on our local environment. Retired High School Science teacher Robert Gelling will lead the program and engage young naturalists in investigating terrestrial habitats and the wildlife that depend on these natural spaces. Activities will include trail hikes, vernal pond and coastal plain pond explorations by land and water, biological classification of organisms, and experimental analysis of soils and water. Please visit our website for further details.

SOFO's New Year-round Nature Photography Club for Adults & Children 12 Years of Age and Older



White-breasted Nuthatch - John Shemilt

SOFO is planning to start a nature photography club for adults and young people age 12 and older. The idea is to establish a core group (maximum 8 individuals to start) of committed nature photography enthusiasts who can inspire each other. John Shemilt, a keen birder, nature photographer, and our Purple Martin Steward will be a founding member. He will be assisted by Miles Todaro, SOFO Environmental Educator. The first meeting of the Club will be on Saturday, March 28 at 10am at SOFO. At this meeting you'll have a chance to meet John, learn about the impetus that led him to start the Club and how he sees it operating. There will be plenty of time for you to share your thoughts and ideas with him. Miles will be your SOFO contact while John will provide the inspiration and will be at some, but not all, of the Club meetings.

The only tangible requirement is a camera that supports at least a 200mm lens. There may be occasional material expenses which will be shared by the group.

If you are interested in becoming a member of the SOFO Nature Photography Club, please contact Miles by email at mtodaro@sofo.org or by phone, Saturday through Wednesday, at 631-537-9735.

We look forward to this new venture and to meeting you at the first Club meeting on Saturday, March 28 at 10am. If for some reason you are not able to attend the first meeting, please contact Miles and let him know that you are interested in becoming a SOFO Nature Photography Club member.

SOFO is happy to announce free or discounted admission to the following:

- Active military and veterans receive free admission for themselves and discounted admission for their family by showing either a Military ID Card, Veterans ID Card, or Veterans Designation on Drivers License or State Veterans ID Card.
- SOFO is now participating in *Museums for All* and offering free admission to individuals or families presenting a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/ Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card with a valid form of photo ID, with admission for up to 4 individuals per SNAP/EBT card.
- Senior citizens receive discounted admission for themselves with a valid ID card.

SOFO's Spring Native Turtle Programs

- "Shellebrate" World Turtle Day
Our Native Turtles in the Wild, Up-Close & Personal—Live Turtle Program: Saturday, May 30, 2pm
- "The Turtle with Clown Lips"—Diamondback Terrapins
Illustrated Talk & Introduction to SOFO's Live Diamondback Terrapins, with John Turner, SOFO Board Member: Friday, June 26, 7pm
- Diamondback Terrapins by Land & by Sea, Parts 1 & 2
Part 1—By Land—A Nature Walk: Saturday, June 27, 2:30pm
For adults and children age 6 and older.
Part 2—By Sea—a Kayak Adventure, BYO Kayak:
Sunday, June 28, 10am
For adults and children age 10 and older

For complete information about these programs, please refer to the SOFO calendar page on our website: sofo.org/calendar.



Mission: The mission of the South Fork Natural History Museum & Nature Center (SOFO) is to stimulate interest in, advance knowledge of, and foster appreciation for the natural environment, with special emphasis on the unique nature of Long Island's South Fork.

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South Fork
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