



# SOUTH FORK NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM (SOFO)

Dear SOFO Families and Friends,  
Welcome to SOFO's July 31 Bi-Weekly Newsletter!

## NATURE NEWS

### TURTLE HATCHLINGS: TINY BUT MIGHTY

In the spring our native turtle species, from terrestrial to semi-aquatic, begin to lay their eggs in suitable soil. With our eastern box turtle (*Terrapene carolina carolina*), females can lay an average of four eggs that incubate for up to 90 days. When they hatch, the young dig themselves out of the nest and are on their own in the wild. Unlike mammals, many reptile species such as the box turtle exhibit no parental care. The turtle hatchling emerges looking like a tiny adult and is responsible for feeding and protecting itself.

When we are lucky enough to come across one on a trail walk there is a very understandable sense of urgency and desire to help this young animal. However, it is important that we leave this small turtle where he is – he is doing exactly what nature has intended. Relocating turtles will do more harm than good as they have home ranges and will not know how to navigate another area. So, leave him be – this turtle is small but mighty!

### OCEANFRONT NEIGHBORS

When we flock to our shores in the summer, the piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) also arrives to lay eggs and raise its young. This shorebird is endangered in New York State and is the main reason for the fencing we see on the beaches. Plovers do not have typical nests; they



make shallow dents or "scrapes" in the sand where the female will lay four camouflaged eggs. This can be a great strategy for protecting eggs from predators but not from increased pedestrian and automobile beach traffic. Protective fencing around plover nesting sites helps plovers successfully raise their young.

Both parents will incubate the eggs for four weeks until they hatch. Chicks then hatch as precocial young, meaning they can move about on their own and do not fully rely on their parents for survival. Over the next month, chicks develop to look more like their parents and learn to fly. In late summer, chicks and parents will all migrate south to their winter range.

We are lucky to share the beach with these summer residents. Keep an eye out for them and enjoy viewing them from an appropriate distance.

### IT'S A FLUKE!

The summer flounder or fluke (*Paralichthys dentatus*) is a native marine flatfish. This unique fish goes through a metamorphosis



from a larval stage with an eye on each side of the head to a juvenile that leaves both eyes on the same side of the fish. This unusual body plan proves very advantageous for this ambush predator. The fluke exhibits counter-shading camouflage and can change color to blend in with its surroundings. It will quickly bury itself under the sand – with its eyes exposed – and wait for smaller fish and even squid, shrimp, or crabs to pass by to surprise attack. The summer flounder, while mostly thought of as a bottom feeder, is also a rapid swimmer that will follow prey to the water's surface.

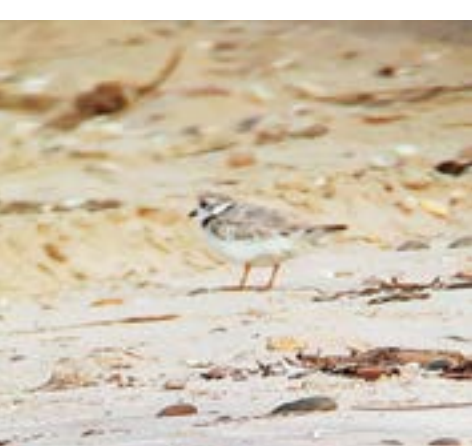
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SOFO is happy to announce that, in line with the issuance of the latest State Executive Order, we are now able to offer our outdoor nature walks for up to twenty-five (25) people, which includes our staff. Please note that we will at all times follow stringent six-foot distancing separation protocols required by the Department of Health for the safety of our participants and environmental educators. We will provide masks and gloves for all attendees. Please dress appropriately for tick protection. [Please check our website calendar for more details about upcoming nature walks.](#)

## JOIN OUR BACKYARD WATCH CITIZEN SCIENCE PROJECT

We are calling on all of our young environmentalists to observe and document nature awakening in your own backyards. We ask you to send us pictures of your findings with the date you discovered them, and your name and any notes you would like to include. We are happy to feature observations sent in by our fellow environmentalists with details about the nature sightings they shared with us. Please send your photographs and notes to [info@sofo.org](mailto:info@sofo.org). Stay safe and be on the look out for Nature news in your backyard!



SUBMITTED BY DOYLE-QUINN FAMILY



SUBMITTED BY MEREDITH BAGESKI



SUBMITTED BY LYNN MATSOUKA

### PIPING PLOVERS (*Charadrius melodus*)

A big thank you to the Doyle-Quinn family who noticed some Piping Plovers (*Charadrius melodus*) breeding on a beach near their home. The area was not fenced off to keep humans, dogs, and vehicles out of the nests so they alerted the town officials, who responded and fenced off the area to protect the camouflaged eggs and chicks. Fencing off breeding areas is very important to the survival of this species; the nest is a simple scraped bowl in the sand of a beach and the eggs are very well camouflaged against it. Once the chicks hatch, their main defense against predators is to hide in a sandy divot, staying very still so as not to draw a predator's eye toward them. This makes them vulnerable to being stepped on by unwary humans, driven over by vehicles, and sniffed out by curious dogs who might think they are a toy or tasty snack. Piping Plovers are listed as a Threatened Species by the US Fish & Wildlife Service, and it is esti-

mated that there are less than 9,000 worldwide.

### BARN SWALLOW CHICKS (*Hirundo rustica*)

These Barn Swallow chicks (*Hirundo rustica*) hatched in early July and have fledged (left the nest), or will very soon. The nest is made of mud and dried grasses, lined with soft feathers, and may take one to two weeks for the parents to complete. Barn Swallows are insectivores, catching a wide variety of insects while flying and can often be observed following mowers or farm tractors feasting on insects stirred up by the machinery. Since they feed on flying insects, the chicks migrate to Central and South America for the winter and are very rare in our area then. Barn swallows are found around the world, breeding in the Northern Hemisphere and wintering in the Southern Hemisphere, so keep your eyes to the sky when visiting another county – you might spy the distinctive forked tail and rusty belly flying by you.

### EASTERN TENT CATERPILLARS (*Malacosoma americana*) in Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*)

Not many animals can feed on the leaves of Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*) because of a chemical called hydrocyanic acid, which in small amounts is used by humans for medicinal purposes, but in large amounts is toxic to many insects that prey on tree leaves. Few insects have the ability to neutralize this chemical, with the Eastern Tent Caterpillar (*Malacosoma americana*) being one. The silk tent is a sanctuary for the vulnerable caterpillars to rest and molt their skins. Silk trails out of the tent show where the caterpillars emerge to feed on the surrounding leaves; a large infestation can defoliate cherry and apple trees. The caterpillars will pupate into a brown moth which will breed and lay a camouflaged brown egg mass on a twig where it will overwinter and hatch the following spring.

## AUGUST CALENDAR

[Please visit sofo.org/calendar/ for more details.](#)

- SATURDAY, AUGUST 1, 5PM-6PM** - The Last Resort: a novel about Montauk, the natural world and social justice Reading by the Author - *Program Leader: Kay Tobler Liss, author of The Last Resort, A Novel*
- SUNDAY, AUGUST 2, 9AM-12PM** - Kayak Tour Along the Riverside of the Peconic River (BYO Kayak) - *Tour Leader: Melanie Meade, South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Education & Outreach Coordinator*
- MONDAY, AUGUST 3, 8:30PM** - Full Sturgeon Moon Hike with Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt - *Hike Leader: South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Environmental Educator*
- TUESDAY, AUGUST 4, 7PM** - \*Zoom Program: Fish Guy Presents "Birding with the Fish Guy— "Long Island's Wading Birds, Waterfowl, & Raptors" - *Program Presenter: Chris Paparo, of Fish Guy Photos, is the Southampton Marine Science Center Manager at Stony Brook University's School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences at its Southampton campus.*
- SATURDAY, AUGUST 8, 10AM** - Birding with Frank—Shorebirds at Shinnecock *Walk Leader: Frank Quevedo, Executive Director, South Fork Natural History Museum*
- SATURDAY, AUGUST 8, 10AM** - SOFO Cleans the Beach - *Cleanup Crew: South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Environmental Educators*
- SUNDAY, AUGUST 9, 10AM** - Observing the Animals of Vineyard Field—Like a Scientist! - *Program Leader: Rachewl Speckenbach, South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Environmental Educator*
- TUESDAY, AUGUST 11, 7AM** - \*ZOOM Program: Fish Guy Photos Presents "Long Island's Tropical Drifters" - *Program Presenter: Chris Paparo, of Fish Guy Photos, is the Southampton Marine Science Center Manager at Stony Brook University's School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences at its Southampton campus.*
- SATURDAY, AUGUST 15, 10AM** - Log Rolling & Walk at Sagg Swamp Preserve *Walk Leader: Paul King III, South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Environmental Educator*
- SATURDAY, AUGUST 15, 10AM** - Young Birders Club Meeting - *Club Leader: Rachel Speckenbach, South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Environmental Educator*
- THURSDAY, AUGUST 27, 1PM** - Bayside Beach Exploration at Circle Beach - *Exploration Leader: Jackie Avignone, South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Environmental Educator*
- SATURDAY, AUGUST 29, 10AM** - Young Environmentalist Society (YES!) - *Club Leader: Mare Dianora, an educator and the mother of two young sons, is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice involves building community and exploring connections to home and place.*
- SATURDAY, AUGUST 29, 10AM** - Snapping Turtles—Andy's Annual Prehistoric Monster Hunt - *Walk Leader: Andy Sabin, President, South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Board of Directors*
- SATURDAY, AUGUST 30, 10AM-1PM** - "BioBlitz"—Surveying the Life of Vineyard Field *Program Leader: Rachel Speckenbach, South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Environmental Educator*

## SEPTEMBER CALENDAR

[Please visit sofo.org/calendar/ for more details.](#)

- SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 7:30PM** - Full Harvest Moon Hike with Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt - *Hike Leader: Dai Dayton, President, Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt*
- MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 10AM** - Birding with Frank to Celebrate World Shorebirds Day *Walk Leader: Frank Quevedo, Executive Director, South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO)*
- MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 6PM** - Who Lives in a Salt Marsh? - *Program Leader: Melanie Meade, South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Education & Outreach Coordinator*
- SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 10:30AM** - Beach Walk at Maidstone Park Beach *Walk Leader: Paul King III, South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Environmental Educator*
- SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 6PM** - SOFO Cleans the Beach *Cleanup Crew: South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Environmental Educators*
- THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 4PM** - What Tree is This? — Tree Identification *Walk Leader: Jackie Avignone, South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Environmental Educator*
- SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 9AM** - Birding with Frank – Fall Migration *Walk Leader: Frank Quevedo, Executive Director, South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO)*
- SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 10AM** - Young Birders Club Meeting - *Club Leader: Rachel Speckenbach, South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Environmental Educator*
- WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 4PM** - SOFO's Shark Research & Education Program Update: This Summer On-the-Water Panel Discussion with SOFO's Shark Research and Education Team
- SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 10AM** - SOFO's Young Birders Club - *Club Leader: Rachel Speckenbach, South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Environmental Educator*
- SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 10AM** - Young Environmentalists Society (YES!) *Club Leader: Mare Dianora, an educator and the mother of two young sons, is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice involves building community and exploring connections to home and place.*

## OUR YOUNG ENVIRONMENTALISTS SOCIETY (YES!) NEWS

Our YES! Group meets bi-weekly via Zoom. Click here to see the latest projects and activities!

[sofo.org/yes/](https://sofo.org/yes/)

## SOFO'S SHARK RESEARCH and EDUCATION PROGRAM NEWS

The sharks are back! Click here to follow the latest developments and upcoming shark tagging expeditions.

[sofo.org/sofos-shark-research-education-program/](https://sofo.org/sofos-shark-research-education-program/)

We remain very appreciative of your support, and we look forward to welcoming you back to the Museum as soon as we can. Please watch for announcements on our social media pages [facebook.com/sofomuseum](https://facebook.com/sofomuseum) and [instagram.com/sofomuseum](https://instagram.com/sofomuseum), and feel free to email us at [info@sofo.org](mailto:info@sofo.org) so we can keep connecting as we all continue to explore our natural world and strive to raise environmental awareness by providing the inspiration and tools for all of us to become caring and responsible stewards of our planet.