

SOFOnaturalist



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

eco links

MIGRATORY MARVELS

by Jackie Avignone, SOFO Environmental Educator

There are two groups of marine mammals that inhabit our local waters—Pinnipeds (seals) and Cetaceans (whales, dolphins, and porpoises). During the summer on Long Island most seals have migrated north to cooler waters. Meanwhile whales, also a migratory species, swim north to our coast this time of year.

There are several species of whales that can be found living and hunting off the South Fork of Long Island in the summer and early fall. Some of the more common species you might see are Sperm Whales, Finback Whales, Humpback Whales, Minke Whales, and North Atlantic Right Whales.

Sperm Whales are the largest of the odontocetes (toothed whales) and are most commonly seen in New York in the



GABRIEL BARATHIEU PHOTO

A mother sperm whale with her calf off the coast of Mauritius.

spring and early summer. Males are often larger than females, making them sexually dimorphic. Males also have a migratory range farther north into cooler waters than females. They can dive from 30 - 60 minutes and commonly feed on squid. This species is listed as "vulnerable" by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Finback Whales, also known as Fin Whales, are the second largest species of whale. They feed on a wide variety of prey, depending on availability, which includes krill, bunker, copepods, and squid. They are an extremely fast and sleek baleen whale. Baleen plates are brush like projections inside the mouths of whales. They filter feed by taking large gulps of water and straining the water through their baleen plates to

consume small creatures like krill left behind in the oral cavity. They are listed as "endangered" throughout their range.

A fan favorite are the Humpback Whales. These whales are notorious for their full body breaches and tail fin slaps. They have unique feeding behaviors, such as bubble feeding in which a group of whales encircle their prey, and exhale from their blowhole beneath the school of fish. They create a net-like ring of bubbles to trap their prey. A feeding call will be



NOAA/NEFSC MARJORIE FOSTER PHOTO

The distinct V-shaped head of the Finback whale.



PIXABAY.COM/PHOTO

This Humpback whale is preparing for a terminal dive.

sounded to signal the group to then simultaneously swim upwards with their mouths open and trap the food inside. They then strain the water through their baleen plates and swallow their hard earned meal of bunker or krill. This behavior is learned, not instinctual, and takes organized communication amongst the group of whales. These whales can even be seen breaching just a few miles off the coast of our ocean side beaches on the South Fork. If you see this whale, or any whale for that manner, in the bay please stay a respectful distance away and report the sighting to the New York State of Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). This whale species' IUCN status is currently under review in NY.

Minke whales, or stinky-minkes, take a keen eye to spot. They are one of our smallest baleen whale species and are frequently boat shy when spotted off our coast. If you happen

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to catch a glimpse of one it will be just that; they will rarely put on a show like the humpbacks do. However, what they lack in size they make up for in abundance. They have one of the highest populations in the US Atlantic Coast and are listed by the IUCN Red List as "least concern."



The elusive Minke whale.

FLICKR.COM/LEN2040 PHOTO

Last but not least is the North Atlantic Right Whale. They were given their name because they were the "right" whale to hunt in the 1600s due to their slow speed as well as the high volume of blubber to harvest, making them easier to collect as they would float after death. The Right Whale is also a baleen whale. They feed almost solely on small crustaceans and copepods, adding to the complexity of their



FILE PHOTO BY PETER DULEY @NOAA

Note the distinctive white callouses on the head of this North Atlantic right whale.

survival. They have a limited variance in DNA and reduced reproductive success due to overhunting leading to inbreeding. This species is listed as "endangered" in New York and "Endangered/Critically Endangered" federally. It is illegal to be within 500 yards of a North Atlantic Right Whale.

According to the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) you should remain at least 50 yards from any marine mammal on both land and at sea. There are plenty of opportunities to view these magnificent giants from a respectful and lawful distance. Bring some binoculars to the beach, hop on board a nature cruise, or if you have the privilege of owning a boat, go out and explore off shore to observe them in their natural habitat. Don't forget to idle your engine!

Footnotes on Nature

What's the Most Abundant and Widely Distributed Salamander in New York State?

IT'S THE EASTERN RED-BACKED SALAMANDER!

By Jake W. Kushner, SOFO Environmental Educator



JAKE W. KUSHNER PHOTO

Eastern Red-backed Salamander hiding within the forest leaf litter.

The Eastern Red-backed Salamander (*Plethodon cinereus*) is a small terrestrial salamander belonging to the family Plethodontidae. Salamanders of this family are known as the lungless salamanders, breathing directly through their skin through a process known as subcutaneous respiration. The eastern red-backed salamander is a forest specialist, found in almost every forest ecosystem of the Northeast. In fact, these salamanders are considered to be the most abundant vertebrates in these forest ecosystems. Although very abundant, the majority of their year is spent underground, hidden in the dark tunnels that line the forest floor. However, fall is a time of movement and activity for these secretive salamanders. Red-backed salamanders emerge from their underground burrows and venture across the surface in search of food and potential mates. The increased surface activity makes the fall an excellent time to survey these salamanders.

Given their underground lifestyle, eastern red-backed salamanders make excellent ecological indicators. Changes in the populations of indicator species represent changes in ecosystem health and function. Red-backed salamanders are one of the most important indicators of forest health in our region. These salamanders provide information regarding the health of the forest soil and leaf litter communities. These communities are comprised of small, soil-dwelling organisms, such as soil mites. Soil dwelling organisms are essential to forest health as they provide a food source for larger organisms

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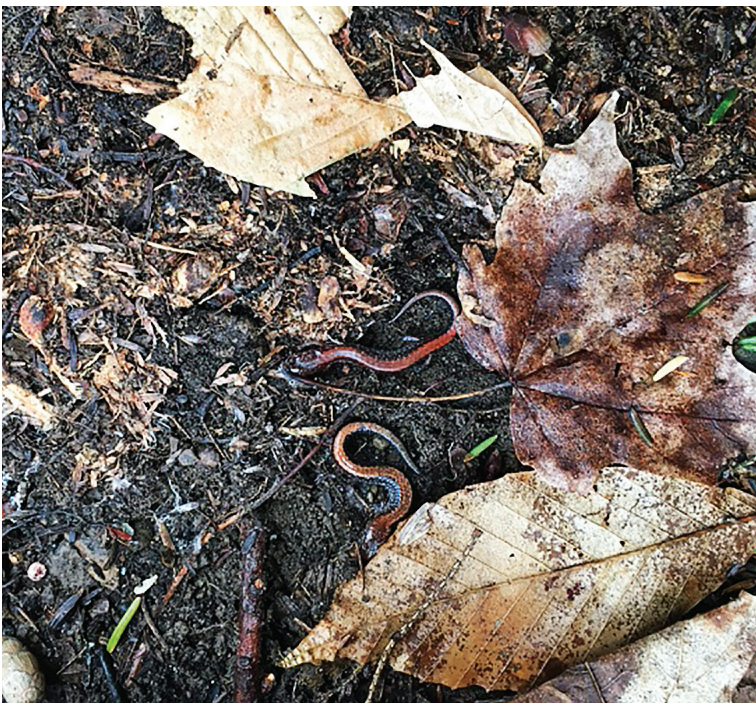
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JAKE W. KUSHNER PHOTO

Eastern Red-backed Salamander hiding within the forest leaf litter.

and facilitate the flow of the nutrient cycle as they break down dead and decaying organic matter. However, these organisms are extremely difficult to survey given their size and preferred habitat. On the other hand, eastern red-backed salamander survey techniques are quick and efficient, providing accurate data regarding changes in population. Red-backed salamanders are also very sensitive to changes in the ecosystem, as are soil-dwelling organisms. Therefore, fluctuations in population represent changes within the ecosystem itself. Given their abundance, reliable survey techniques, and sensitivity to ecosystem changes, the Eastern red-backed salamander is an important ecological indicator and is essential for monitoring forest health.



JAKE W. KUSHNER PHOTO

Two Red-backed Salamanders on the surface searching for food.

SOFO News

SOFO ANNOUNCES ITS NEW BUSINESS OF THE MONTH INITIATIVE

By Diana Aceti, Director of Development, South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO)

As part of our commitment to support our generous sponsors and other local businesses, SOFO is pleased to launch a new initiative recognizing sustainable companies each month.

***Congratulations to our September 2020
Business of the Month***

Hampton Coffee Company



Hampton Coffee Company, Water Mill, NY.

Our September highlighted business, HAMPTON COFFEE COMPANY, is an award-winning, family-run, environmentally friendly business that has been a longstanding supporter of SOFO, as well as over a hundred other organizations, schools, and charities each year. A true landmark in our community, this company is committed to keeping our planet green. Each of its five Green Cafés, from Westhampton Beach to Montauk, feature LED lighting, recycling programs, solar panels [at its Water Mill café], oil recycling, compostable java jackets, marine biodegradable paper straws, and more.

Hampton Coffee Company is owned by the Belkin family and has been a generous sponsor of SOFO benefits and other initiatives for many years. The acclaimed eatery offers the finest quality food and hand-roasted coffee, family friendly service, and believes in giving back both locally and nationally. We are very honored to feature this wonderful business as SOFO's first Business of the Month.

"Hampton Coffee Company has been honored to be a sponsor of SOFO the past several years. The resources, programs, and events that SOFO provides to the adults and children of all our communities here on the East End

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throughout the year are first-class. We are so fortunate to have an organization like SOFO here in our community,” Jason Belkin said.

“Hampton Coffee Company is very happy to have been chosen as SOFO’s first-ever Featured Business. We are celebrating our 25th Anniversary during a unique year, during which we proudly opened our newest cafe in Montauk over the summer to great success. Thanks to the support of our guests and organizations, like SOFO, we are able to continue to employ almost 100 staff members in year-round positions with family and school friendly schedules as we support all our local schools.”

DID YOU KNOW? Hampton Coffee Company (HCC) opened for business at its Water Mill location more than twenty years ago in a 1940s-era service station. It became one of the first micro-roasteries on the East Coast, roasting the highest quality estate-grown coffees daily. Today, HCC is Long Island’s largest independent coffee roaster and retailer consisting of a small chain of espresso bars and cafés, a mail order website, and a custom-built Mobile Espresso Unit –a Mercedes van with an entire espresso bar inside of it. Hampton Coffee Company’s Coffee Roastery delivers fresh hand-roasted coffee to many of the top restaurants and gourmet markets (and even a baseball stadium) from Manhattan to Montauk every week. They ship their coffee all over the country and internationally.

Please visit HAMPTON COFFEE COMPANY at one of its many green cafes and Coffee Roastery at its headquarters in Water Mill, NY; in Westhampton Beach, NY; in Southampton, NY; in Aquebogue (North Fork), NY; and Montauk, NY. For more information, please visit HCC’s website at <https://hamptoncoffeecompany.com/>.

SOFO will be featuring a new Business of the Month each month throughout the year. To become a Business Supporter, please contact Diana Aceti at daceti@sofo.org. More details are available at <https://sofo.org/membership/>

Help us Support our Sponsors, which you can explore on our website at <https://sofo.org/support-our-sponsors/>.



Owner Jason Belkin and the team.

The Nature Clubhouse

MARTINS, PLOVERS & SOFO’S YOUNG BIRDERS CLUB

*By Rachel Speckenbach, SOFO Environmental Educator
& Staff Leader of SOFO’s Young Birders Club*

Our educators have been safely getting outdoors for socially distanced nature walks with visitors. While there is plenty to discover in our ecosystem, there is endless wonder when it comes to the world of birds. In recent months SOFO has been exploring our natural habitats and observing both year-round resident birds and summer migrants that frequent the South Fork. The museum has always offered birding programs, but these excursions have shown that the lifestyle of birding can persevere and provide exciting opportunities – even in unprecedented times.



DERMOT QUINN PHOTO

Prairie Warbler.

SOFO’s Young Birders Club (YBC), for children ages 8 to 18, occurs monthly and continues under the new leadership of Environmental Educator Rachel Speckenbach. In summer meetings the club observed many unique birds in different habitats. During each outing Rachel and YBC members set out to find species unique to the season or utilizing specific

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locations. At Northwest Landing in East Hampton the Young Birders recorded a diverse group of species from the prairie warbler to the bank swallow to the horned lark.

As they explored the trails of the Long Pond Greenbelt the group encountered many species, notably a male scarlet tanager (a neotropical migrant). For most in attendance this was their first time seeing the particular species — an exciting moment.



FRANK QUEVEDO PHOTO

Least Tern photographed in July on SOFO's YBC outing.

Rachel also led a group on a walk at Sagg Main Beach in Sagaponack to observe the nesting piping plovers and least terns, as well as other shorebirds from an appropriate distance. In this program, participants encountered piping



FRANK QUEVEDO PHOTO

Snowy Egret.



FRANK QUEVEDO PHOTO

Purple Martins.

plovers and their chicks feeding at the wrack line, observed social behaviors and least terns incubating their nests, learned how to properly identify different species using field marks, and learned the importance of sharing our beach habitat with these threatened and endangered bird families.

Additionally, we have gourds in Vineyard Field behind the museum housing SOFO's purple martin colony – North America's largest swallow. This impressive iridescent passeriform has developed a unique relationship with humans, with eastern populations nearly exclusively nesting in these artificial cavities. They arrive in April and May and can be viewed hunting insects over the field and raising their young throughout the summer months.

If interested in joining SOFO's Young Birders Club, please email info@sofo.org or call 631-537-9735.



DERMOT QUINN PHOTO

Bank swallow.

OCTOBER, NOVEMBER & DECEMBER

A full description of each program is listed on the SOFO website at: www.sofa.org/calendar. Advance reservations are required for all programs. To register please call SOFO at 631 537-9735 or contact us by email at: info@sofo.org

PLEASE NOTE!

The programs listed in this Calendar of Events will take place either in person or online, depending upon the COVID-19 situation. For that information, please look at the calendar listings on the SOFO website at: www.sofa.org/calendar.

For SOFO members: programs are free.

Level of membership indicates the number of people entitled to a free program.

For SOFO non-members: there is a nominal fee.

Please contact us at: info@sofo.org for fee information or refer to the SOFO website at: www.sofa.org.

If you are not already a member we invite you to join the museum. Find out about membership levels at www.sofa.org/membership

For full information on the South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO), including entrance fees and hours of operation, please refer to the website: www.sofa.org.

CALENDAR HIGHLIGHTS: ZOOM PRESENTATIONS

Find full program descriptions at: www.sofa.org/calendar

MONDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2020, 2:00PM



HERWIN QUEHUARUCHO CONCHA PHOTO

Patricia Paladines and Carl Safina at Salinas de Maras, Peru.



SOPHIE DINWALL PHOTO

Erica Cirino documenting plastic pollution in the Atlantic Ocean while sailing with eXXpedition.

Our Careers in Conservation and Education; One Mission, Differing Approaches
with Patricia Paladines – *educator, naturalist, photographer*; Carl Safina – *MacArthur Prize winning ecologist, author, and founding president of the Safina Center at Stony Brook University*;
Erica Cirino – *writer, artist, wildlife rehabber, Safina Center Launchpad Fellow*.

For: Adults/Teens/Children 10 years of age and older

The Safina Center
at Stony Brook University
Making a case for life on earth

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SATURDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2020, 10AM



SOUTHAMPTON TRAILS PRESERVATION SOCIETY PHOTO

Standing in Long Pond. Learn how to map this Long Pond Greenbelt Trail.

How to Map Your Hikes Online From Home

with Mark Potter – *President, Southampton Trails Preservation Society.*

For: Adults/Teen/Children 8 years and older

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2020, 10:30AM



Jeffrey Petracca

The Secret Life of Spiders & Other Creepy Crawlies – Just in time for Halloween!

with Jeffrey Petracca – *Curator of Entomology, Entomologist, Long Island Aquarium and Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory DNA Learning Center.*

For: All Ages

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SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2020, 11AM



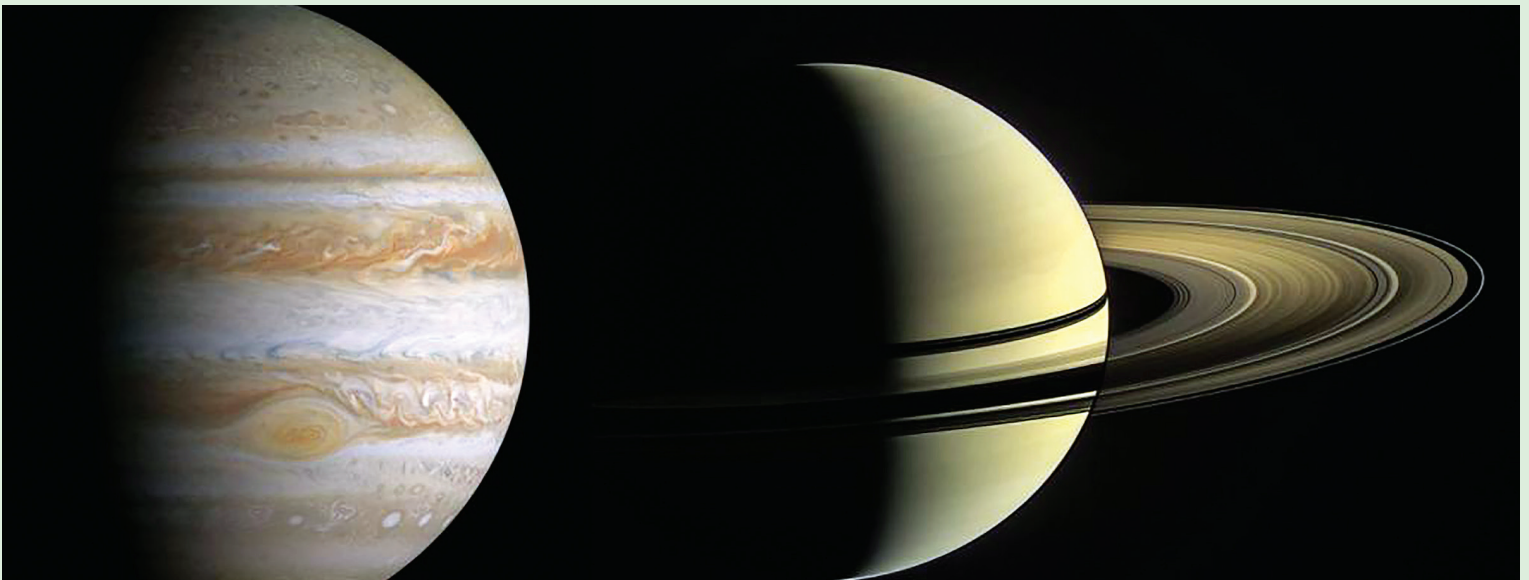
Child planting a tree.

People and the Environment: Highlighting Indigenous Perspective and History to Promote Intersectionality and Accessibility Within Natural Places

with Rachel Speckenbach – *SOFO Environmental Educator*.

For: Adults/Teens/Children 10 year of age and older

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2020, 7PM



Jupiter (left) and Saturn as filmed by space probes.

NASA/JPL/UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA/SPACE SCIENCE INSTITUTE PHOTO

Presentation by the Hamptons Observatory: The Great Conjunction & Other Celestial Events

with William F. Taylor – *NASA Solar System Ambassador and the Hamptons Observatory's Senior Educator*.

For: Adults/Teens/Children 8 years of age and older

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Calendar at a Glance

KEY: A–Adults, T–Teens, C–Children, F–Family, AA–All Ages, *Live Animals

OCTOBER

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1, 7PM - Full Hunter's Moon Hike – *cosponsored by the Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt:* AA

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3, 9AM - Birding and Hiking in Hither Hills – *with Wayne Whitmore:* A/T

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3, 10AM - Andy Sabin's Annual Salamander Log Rolling: AA

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3, 3PM - Early Fall Insect Search: AA

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 4, 10:30AM - Coastal Dune Ecology Walk: A/T/C8+

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10, 9AM - Black Racer Snake Walk. A Beautiful & Beneficial Reptile: AA

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10, 10AM - SOFO's Young Environmentalist's Society (YES) Meeting: Ages 10 - 16

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10, 10AM-NOON* - Long Pond Greenbelt 22nd Annual Family

Celebration – Hike, Play, Explore: Discover the Long Pond Greenbelt. (tentative): AA

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10, 3PM - SOFO Cleans the Beach - the SOFO Staff: AA

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11, 7:30AM - Passerine Fall Migration at Promised Land – *with Joe Giunta:* A

MONDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2PM - **Zoom Presentation: Our Careers in Conservation and**

Education, One Mission, Differing Approaches – *with Patricia Paladines, educator, naturalist, photographer; Carl Safina, MacArthur Prize winning ecologist and author, founding president of the Safina Center at Stony Brook University; Erica Cirino, writer, artist, wildlife rehabber, Safina Center Launchpad Fellow:*

A/T/C10+

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 10AM - SOFO's Young Birders Club Meeting: T/C Ages 8-18

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 10:30AM - Forest to Long Island Sound Walk: A/T/C8+

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 24, 10AM - **Zoom Presentation: How to Map Your Hikes Online from**

Home – *with Mark Potter, President, Southampton Trails Preservation Society:* A/T/C8+

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 24, 10:30AM - Searching for Red-backed Salamanders – A Forest

Excursion: A/T/C8+

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31, 10AM - SOFO's Young Environmentalists Society (YES!) Meeting: Ages 10-16

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31, 10:30AM - **Zoom Presentation: The Secret Life of Spiders**

and Other Creepy Crawlies – *with Jeffry Petracca, Curator of Entomology, Entomologist, Long Island Aquarium and Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory DNA Learning Center:* AA.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31, 6:30PM - Full Blue Moon Hike – *Co-sponsored with the Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt:* AA

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NOVEMBER

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 11AM - Zoom Presentation: People and the Environment:

highlighting indigenous perspective and history to promote intersectionality and accessibility within natural places – *with Rachel Speckenbach, SOFO Environmental Educator: A/T/C10*

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 10:30AM - Exploring Sharks Through Their Form and Function – *with Greg Metzger: AA*

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 10:30AM - Honoring “Take a Hike Day” – A Forest Walk to View Vernal Pools: A/T/C8+

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 10:30AM - A Journey into the Walking Dunes: A/T/C8+

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 3PM - SOFO Cleans the Beach *with the SOFO Staff: AA*

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 10AM - SOFO’s Young Birders Club Meeting: Ages 8 -18

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 10:30AM - Animal Phenomena: A/T/C5+

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 10AM - Day After Thanksgiving “Walk it Off Walk” – *Cosponsored by Southampton Trails Society & Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: A/T/C8+*

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 10AM - SOFO’s Young Environmentalists Society (YES!) Meeting: Ages 10-16 (Date may change)

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 10AM-1PM - SOFO’s Annual Thanksgiving Celebration, Outdoor Nature Walks – *with SOFO Environmental Educators: AA*

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 7PM - Owls by the Light of the Moon – *with Joe Giunta: A*

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 6PM - Full Frost Moon Hike – *co-sponsored by the Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA*



Some of the animals you might see at a SOFO autumn program. Eastern Screech Owl, Harbor Seals, Diamondback Terrapins or a Blue-spotted Salamander

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DECEMBER

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3, 7PM - *Zoom Presentation:* by the Hamptons Observatory:

The Great Conjunction & Other Celestial Events – *with William F. Taylor:* A/T/C8+

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5, 10AM - Birding with Frank – Winter Birding by Car: A/T/C8+

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6, 10:30AM - Hiking Hither Hills State Park: A/T/C 12+

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, 10:30AM - SOFO's Annual Decorate a Holiday Tree for the Birds,

A Family Workshop: AA

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, 3PM - SOFO Cleans the Beach – *with the SOFO Staff:* AA

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 12PM - Seal Walk at Cupsogue County Park, Westhampton: A/T/C5+

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19, 10AM - SOFO's Young Birders Club Meeting: T/C Ages 8-18

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19, 10AM - Hike from SOFO and Vineyard Field through the Long Pond Greenbelt – *with Chip Dineen.*

OUTDOOR NATURE ADVENTURES WITH SOFO ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATORS

Winter School Break - 10:30AM – 11:30AM

For Children of All Ages

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20

Where do bugs go in Winter?

MONDAY, DECEMBER 21

Let's Learn About the Birds of Vineyard Field!

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22

What do I Hear? A Listening Walk.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 23

Evergreen Adventure – Why are they Evergreen?

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 26

Brrr, It's Cold Outside. All About Winter Weather!

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 26, 10AM - SOFO's Young Environmentalists Society (YES!) Meeting:

Ages 10-16 (Date may change)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27, 11AM - Wildlife of Cupsogue County Park, Westhampton – A Family

Program: A/T/C 6+

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 29, 6PM - Full Cold Moon Hike – *Co-sponsored by the Friends of the*

Long Pond Greenbelt: AA

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



SOUTH FORK NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM (SOFO)

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