



SOUTH FORK NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM (SOFO)

SOFO's Bi-Weekly Newsletter - January 13, 2021 Edition

NATURE NEWS



Painted Bunting - ANTHONY COLLERTON PHOTO

MONTAUK CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS

By Frank Quevedo

I had the pleasure of being a territory leader for the 91st Annual Montauk Christmas Bird Count which took place on December 19, 2020. Regional compilers, Brent Bonkamp and Angus Wilson, formed survey teams covering five areas: Montauk Point South, Montauk Point North, Gardiners Island, Napeague and Accabonac territories. A total of forty-three participants joined the count. Some participants started at 5AM to count owls but most began at sunrise and surveyed through sunset. A day count of 129 species was recorded, representing the second highest total of species in ten years, only to be eclipsed by 132 species in 2012.

The following highlights are from Brent Bonkamp's post on ABA Birds New York. Highlights included the first count record of Wood Thrush in the Point North area, the continuing Painted Bunting previously discovered by Aidan Perkins near Culloden Point (third count record), a male Barrow's Goldeneye off the eastern coast of Gardiners Island (fourth count record), and a fly-over Western Kingbird near Montauk Downs Golf Course (sixth count record). Evening Grosbeak (sixteenth count record) was recorded for the first time since 2001, with teams observing single birds near the Montauk Airport and Camp Hero State Park. Otherwise, finch totals were surprisingly low for an irruption year: only three Red Crossbills, eleven Common Redpoll, five Purple Finches, and zero Pine Siskins were recorded. A White-winged Crossbill was observed along East Lake Drive the Friday before the count.

Montauk regularly records several species that are unusual elsewhere on Long Island, and this year was no dif-

ferent. Yellow-breasted Chat was seen for the seventh time in the last ten years, Dovekie for the fourth time in ten years, and Rough-legged Hawk for the tenth time in ten years. Similarly, certain population trends prevalent elsewhere on Long Island remain absent in Montauk. For instance, American Crow numbers remain high (480) while Fish Crow went unrecorded for the third consecutive year. In addition, new high counts were set for Hooded Merganser (209), Sanderling (1159), Bald Eagle (19), Northern Saw-whet Owl (15), Hairy Woodpecker (21), Common Raven (6), and Carolina Wren (313). For those interested in participating in future surveys, the 2021 Montauk Christmas Bird Count will take place on Saturday, December 18, 2021.



MATT BERKHOUT PHOTO

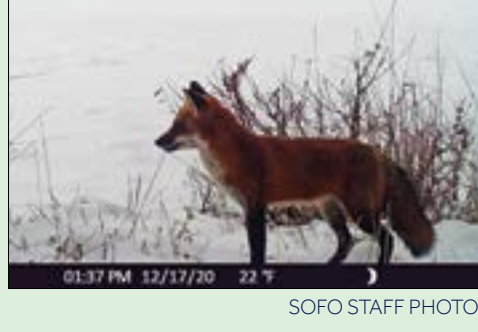
CUTTING EDGE TECH COMING TO SOFO'S SHARK RESEARCH PROGRAM

By SOFO Shark Research and Education Team

It is with great appreciation and excitement that SOFO's Shark Research and Education Program is a beneficiary of two recent grant awards that will bring exciting new technology to our team. The first is through a partnership with the University of Delaware, NOAA, and others to develop and field test a new shark "biologging" tag designed to collect oceanographic data in Mid-Atlantic waters. The nearly \$1.2 million grant from the National Oceanographic Partnership Program (NOPP) will help support the shark team's field operations as we deploy these experi-

mental tags on blue and white sharks over the next couple years.

The second award was for two underwater remotely operated vehicles (ROVs) from the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). These ROVs, enabled with HD video cameras and 300 ft of cable, will allow us to explore all the South Fork's underwater environs, from Big Fresh Pond to Shinnecock Bay to Montauk's white shark nursery. The video we collect will allow us to bring the underwater world from the field into the Museum for a variety of educational programs. SOFO is grateful to these grant programs and our partners for these exciting new opportunities.



SOFO STAFF PHOTO

SOFO COYOTE CAM IMAGE

By Frank Quevedo

During the week of December 17th, SOFO's coyote cam located in Sagaponack, and monitored weekly by SOFO environmental educator Rachel Speckenbach, captured an image of a beautiful and healthy Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*). Though not the coyote we are targeting, the red fox image is still a welcomed sight. Native to Long Island, the red fox was once more common in previous decades.

Their populations have decreased immensely due to habitat development and pesticide poison consumed by their prey. They are carnivores and eat mice, voles, rabbits, and birds. Here on the east end, they can occasionally be seen in their preferred habitats of meadows and sand dunes. Once the second most common to the gray fox, now most likely extirpated from the South Fork, the red fox has adapted to live in urban areas and can be seen in people's backyards or farm fields here on the east end. Last week, a SOFO member and I observed a red fox drinking water from the back pond in Vineyard Field. It is only the second time I have seen a red fox in Vineyard Field in ten years. I hope to see more of them in the future.

[JOIN / RENEW](#)

[DONATE](#)

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 fifty (50) 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. Stay safe and be on the look out for Nature news in your backyard!



CRYSTAL OAKES PHOTO

WILD TURKEYS

(*Meleagris gallopavo*)

By Crystal Oakes

This flock of Wild Turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*) spent the night roosting in the trees behind this house and was heard clucking as they foraged when they descended the next morning. They search along the ground for nuts, seeds, and invertebrates; food is eaten quickly and stored in the crop for later digestion. Males (one in the foreground) are most easily identified by the beard or bunch of feathers hanging from the chest and iridescent brown body feathers; females lack the beard and their feathers are a less iridescent brown for camouflage as they will nest on the ground in spring. Most of New York's Wild Turkeys are descendants of relocated flocks from healthy populations in Pennsylvania in the 1950's and 60's. Even though Wild Turkeys are still shy around humans, they seemed to be watching the photographer closely, as they have adapted well to living closely with humans whose houses are near forest and fields.



MELANIE MEADE PHOTO

PRAYING MANTIS EGG CASE CHINESE MANTIS

(*Tenodera aridifolia sinensis*)

By Crystal Oakes

This mass of hard foam is the egg case of a Chinese mantis (*Tenodera aridifolia sinensis*) and is one of three species found in our area. The oothecae (a hard, purse-like egg case formed by many orders of insects) of the European mantis and Narrow-winged mantis are more flat and oval while the Chinese mantis ootheca is more rounded with a flattened end. All mantis oothecae are composed of three layers: the eggs are in rows of five to 10 long attached to the stick or other support; liquid foam sides that harden into a tough insulating layer; and, down the center over the rows of eggs, series of channels covered by overlapping scales that the hatching mantids can emerge through. Mantis oothecae are sometimes purchased by farmers and homeowners for natural pest control but the mantid diet is so varied that they can eat as many beneficial insects as problem insects. Most predators find the hard foam of the ootheca a deterrent but some small, parasitic wasps have specialized stingers (also known as an ovipositor) that are able to break through the foam to deposit eggs onto the mantis eggs. If the mantis ootheca is found in the summer with the center 'zippered' open, then yomantids emerged, but if there are exit holes through the foam sides, then wasps emerged.



FRANK QUEVEDO PHOTO

KNOBBED WHELK EGG CASE FRAGMENT

(*Busycyon carica*)

By Crystal Oakes

Known by many beach explorers as a 'mermaid's necklace,' this uncommon find is a fragment of a sea snail's egg case. Two large species of predatory snails make similar egg cases in our area. The Channeled Whelk (*Busycotypus cnaliculatus*) produces a string of pouches whose top and bottom pinch together; this is from a Knobbed Whelk (*Busycyon carica*), notice the flat coin-like edge to the individual pouches. A complete egg case can be up to 3 feet long with the bottom several empty pouches anchored in the sand or other substrate. Each pouch can contain 25 to 50 eggs that will develop into miniature snails with a complete spiraled shell about 2 to 4 millimeters long. If a whelk egg case is found after the young snails hatch, an emergence hole will be found on the edge opposite the supporting strand.

JANUARY 13 - JANUARY 27, 2021 PROGRAMS

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

FRIDAY, JANUARY 15, 7P.M. - Online Video The Moths of Long Island: Long Island Natural History Conference: F

SATURDAY, JANUARY 16, ALL DAY - Rain date Sunday, January 17, Birding with Frank: NYSOA Annual Winter Waterfowl Count: A/T

SATURDAY, JANUARY 16, 10A.M. - Long Pond Greenbelt Trail Walk: SOFO the Mashashimouk Park & Back: A/T

SUNDAY, JANUARY 17, 10A.M. - SOFO's Young Birders Club: Ages 8 - 18

FRIDAY, JANUARY 22, 7P.M. - Online Video Bird Migration on Long Island: Long Island Natural History Conference: F

SATURDAY, JANUARY 23, 8A.M. - The Chickadee's World: A Walk at the Elizabeth Morton National Wildlife Refuge with John Turner: A/T/C8+

SATURDAY, JANUARY 23, 1P.M. - Trail Walk at Montauk's Big Reed Pond (3.0-mile): A/T/C8+

SUNDAY, JANUARY 24, 10:30A.M. - Seal Walk at Cupsogue Beach County Park A/C6+

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/

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/

YOUNG BIRDERS CLUB

Our Young Birders Club meets the third Saturday of every month and is open to anyone ages 8-18 who is interested in learning about birds. We concentrate on birding in local areas since Long Island has so many great habitats that are home to a wide variety of species.

We remain very appreciative of your support, and we welcome you to visit us at the Museum. Reservations only by calling the Museum at 631-537-9735. Daily sessions from 10-11:30 and 1-2:30. Please watch for announcements on our social media pages [facebook.com/sofomuseum](https://www.facebook.com/sofomuseum) and [instagram.com/sofomuseum](https://www.instagram.com/sofomuseum), and feel free to email us at 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.