

SOFO naturalist



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

Living With Deer

by Mindy Block, SOFO Member, Founder & President Quality Parks

When my new neighbor mentioned the deer were acting pretty strange, crossing from his front lawn into mine, where a stone wall separated our properties, it came as no surprise to me. I laughed and explained that I expected as much. I saw the evidence: deer prints in pots, and pots tipped over. The deer cautiously picked their way over to my yard. We both eyed the dozens of nursery pots and landscaping fabric I set up to protect Quality Parks home grown nursery.



My front yard - Mindy Block

I live in Port Jefferson, where deer regularly cycle through the neighborhood every other week or so. They leave unexpected damage and loss of more than a few favorite plants. Deer seem to be opportunists, following familiar paths through the neighborhood, occasionally nipping at plants, here and there, whenever something catches their interest. Surprisingly, they also go for common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*), a plant with an unpalatable milky sap. So I recommend



Common Milkweed - Mindy Block

planting more than one, until your colony is established. Fortunately, the deer, for the most part, focus on getting through the jumble of nursery pots.

But deer also frequent familiar foraging grounds, which would explain why they repeatedly browsed the wild grape (*Vitis vulpina*) vines growing on my front doorstep's handrail. It would also explain how they devoured one spot of naturally regenerating sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) in my backyard, while many downslope sassafras



Mapleleaf Viburnum

saplings survived. More knowledge came with watchful experience. I mentally categorize deer preference and plant response.

Based on my experience, I decided to give up on my vegetable garden. It wasn't high priority. I could shop at the farmers market instead. If I wanted to raise vegetable crops, I suspect I would need to enclose it, which I wasn't ready to do.

Next to go were plants that didn't tolerate dry soil conditions, long summer droughts, and deer browsing. This rule came about after my run-in with red chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*) shrubs. Magnificent and flush with white flowers, I couldn't resist buying three. Red chokeberry prefers moist soils, and will resprout at the base. While attempting to protect them with deer repellent spray, nylon netting, and soil moisture amendments (peat moss), it wasn't a path to coexistence. Sadly, gone were their magnificence.

I'm now considering mapleleaf viburnum (*Viburnum acerifolium*) which tolerates dry soils, spreads by suckers, and can be found in nearby naturally wooded uplands. It may be a better survivor of deer browse.

I also sell native plants. It's an eye opener in how to convey environmental awareness in thirty seconds. A typical conversation might sound like, "Bee friendly pollinator plants? Get your native plants here. Do you have a garden? Great. Sun or shade? Partial shade... hmmm. What about soils, dry or moist? Dry? How about this lovely, fall blooming, low growing plant that does well in woody soils, and is aggressive enough to overcome deer browsing? It's White Wood Aster. Found it growing naturally. Then grew it out from seed. Now

Continued on next page

Continued from page 1

it's just waiting for someone like you to plant her." I point to a picture and price it out for them. Selling also means that plants must look vibrant, lush, and sometimes even cute.

Returning to the aforementioned pots and deer response to them, garden structure is important as well, which bodes well for the many



White Wood Aster, showing partial shade tolerance - Mindy Block

reasons to plant native Long Island grasses. Besides their benefits as pollinator plants, wildlife cover, and their deer resistance, they're good at keeping deer on the path. I've been "hiding" highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) in tall stands of grasses. By the way, rhododendron (*Rhododendron spp.*) thickets are deer browsed on the outside edges and not in the interior, where young tree saplings thrive.

Living with deer is an ongoing educational project for both the deer, the evolving natural landscape of my yard, and me. It benefits my own personal understanding of deer behavior and plant adaptability. Yet, there are limits. If you're surrounded with hundreds of deer instead of four to six, one must consider regional wildlife management approaches. And that is another story.

About Me: I grow and sell native plants for Quality Parks of which I'm also its President & Founder. Quality Parks specialty is Long Island parks and conservation, helping you take the next step in your environmental awareness. On the website, www.qualityparks.org, do check out our "Find Parks Near Me" and "Environmental Directory" to learn more about the natural world around you. How to contact me: mblock@qualityparks.org

Footnotes on Nature

A Diamond in the Rough

by Paul King III, SOFO Environmental Educator

As temperatures warm in the spring the Diamondback Terrapin, (*Malaclemys terrapin*), our unique brackish-water turtle, emerges from its winter rest. Early in June mature females come out of the water to look for suitable nesting areas. They look for somewhere sandy, usually a spot in the dunes, above the highest tide, so that their eggs do not get washed away into the bay. In late spring you can walk on the beach and, if you look carefully, you'll spot their tracks heading up into the dunes. The tracks are very distinct, a swooping "J" print, with a flat spot between the tracks where the shell drags along the sand. The turtles will often use the man-made paths to reach their destinations but once they lay and cover their eggs it is almost impossible to know the nest's location.



Female Diamondback Terrapin

While you can't see an occupied nest, you're likely to see a predated nest. Ripped up eggshells, up to about 20 per nest, as well as a dug-out hole are common all over the dunes. The likely culprits are raccoons or foxes. The lucky 3% of nests that survive usually hatch later in the summer, in August or September. The eggs that were laid later in the season will overwinter and the newly hatched turtles will emerge next spring.

Once they hatch it is a bit mysterious what these tiny turtles do. At first it was thought that they head straight for the water. But when released hatchlings were placed on the shoreline they ran back up towards the dune. Many are observed staying in the wrack line for up to a few years until they are ready to begin their fully aquatic lives.

These hatchlings will face many threats, and few will make it to breeding age. Terrapins suffer from increased coastal development, injuries from boat propellers, drowning in commercial crab traps, and fall victim to the illegal pet trade. While many states have strict protection, and have terrapins marked as endangered or threatened, New York has taken much longer to act. In just 2017 New York State made it illegal for diamondback terrapins to be commercially harvested.

Next time you visit one of our bays, keep an eye out for these elusive turtles. Their presence is an indication of a healthy salt marsh, and it is vital to these turtles that we keep our waters as clean as possible.

If you are interested in learning more about terrapins, and their habitat, join us on a *Paddle through Terrapin Territory* on June 26 at 11 AM. For more information about the paddle go to www.sofa.org/calendar. To reserve your spot contact the museum at info@sofo.org or 631-537-9735.



Terrapin Tracks in the Dunes - Paul King III

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

April, May, & June

PLEASE NOTE!

The programs listed in this Calendar of Events will take place either in person or virtually, 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, unless otherwise stated.

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

For SOFO non-members: there is a 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

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.

Calendar Highlights—Zoom Presentations

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



Alewives – Byron Young

Saturday, April 3, 10:30AM Zoom—Amazing Alewives with Peter Topping, Peconic Baykeeper: A/T/C5+

Saturday, April 10, 10:30AM Zoom— Searching for the Southern Leopard Frog with Jake Kushner, SOFO Environmental Educator: A/T/C10+



Southern Leopard Frog - Judy Gallagher



White Shark approaching a seal in the surf. - Wayne Davis

Saturday, May 1, 10:30AM Zoom—Sharks, Awareness Inspires Conservation - A Shark Education Program by the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy: AA

Saturday, May 8, 10:30 – 11:30AM Zoom—*Moonglow* – Meet the author and illustrator of this enchanting children’s book: AA. Cosponsored by the Peconic Land Trust



Eastern Mud Turtle - Judy Gallagher

Saturday, May 15, 10:30AM Zoom—Searching for the Eastern Mud Turtle with Jake Kushner, SOFO Environmental Educator: A/T/C10+

Saturday, May 22, 10:30AM Zoom—Live Raptors, Owls Included & Introduction to the Evelyn Alexander Wildlife Rescue Center: AA.



*Red-tailed Hawk
Non-releasable due to injured wing.*



Thursday, June 3, 5PM Zoom— So You Wanna Grow Your Own Oysters? with John “Barley” Dunne, Director, Town of East Hampton Shellfish Hatchery: A/T/C10+

Calendar At A Glance

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

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

Advance reservations are required for all programs.

April

Spring School Break Outdoor Nature Programs

10:30 – 11:30AM

For Children of All Ages

Thursday, April 1—Scavenger Hunt, Beware of April Fools!

Friday, April 2—Learn About Our Local Salamanders

SOFO Members Free

Non-Members \$10 Adults \$7 Children

Saturday, April 3, Sag Harbor Partnership Self-Guided Walking Tours— you pick the time. There are 17 tours to choose from. To find them either download the free app *Sag Harbor Walking Tours* or go to: www.ssagharborpartnership.org, then go to the drop-down menu and click on Walking Tours. We suggest “Remarkable Trees of Sag Harbor” and “Eastville Community: Unique Diversity” to launch your tour choice. AA

Saturday, April 3, 10:30AM Zoom Presentation—Amazing Alewife with Baykeeper Peter Topping: A/T/C5+

Sunday, April 4, 10:30AM Online Video—Introducing the Peconic Estuary Partnership: A/T

Monday, April 5, 7PM American Woodcock Walk: A

Saturday, April 10, 10:30AM Zoom Presentation—Searching for the Southern Leopard Frog: A/T/C10+

Saturday, April 10, 3PM SOFO Cleans the Beach—Help Needed: AA

Monday, April 12, 7PM American Woodcock Walk: A

Saturday, April 17, 7PM A Search for Singing Frogs—Spring Peepers: AA

Sunday, April 18, 10AM Young Birders Club Meeting: Ages 8-18

Saturday, April 24, 10AM Young Environmentalists Society (YES!) Meeting: Ages 10–16

Saturday, April 24

Earth Day Celebration

for all ages

Schedule

10:30AM-11:30AM Nature Walk in SOFO's Vineyard Field

11AM-1PM Water Quality Testing & Beach Cleanup

3PM-4PM Nature Walk in SOFO's Vineyard Field

Saturday, April 24, 9:45AM – 1PM Nature & Birdwatching Cruise, SOFO Members \$35 per person, Non-Members \$40 per person. Limited Enrollment: A/T/C10+

Monday, April 26, 7:30PM Full Pink Moon Hike, Cosponsored by Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA

May

Saturday, May 1, 10:30AM Zoom Presentation—Sharks, Awareness Inspires Conservation - A Shark Education Program by the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy: AA

Sunday, May 2, 10:30AM Online Video—Feminist Bird Club Presents Birds After Flight: The Art & Importance of Bird Taxidermy: A/T

Saturday, May 8, 10:30AM Zoom Presentation—*Moonglow*, on a moonlit night in the forest, magical things can happen when forest animals are transformed by moonbeams. Meet the author and the illustrator of this enchanting children's book. Cosponsored by the Peconic Land Trust: AA

Continued on next page

May

Continued from page 5

- Saturday, May 8, 3PM** SOFO Cleans the Beach—Help Needed: AA
- Saturday, May 15, 10:30AM Zoom Presentation**—Searching for the Eastern Mud Turtle: A/T/C10+
- Saturday, May 15, 1PM** Secret Life of the Pond—Hands-on Activity: C8+
- Sunday, May 16, 10AM** Young Birders Club Meeting: Ages 8 – 18
- Sunday, May 16, 1PM** Trail Walk (2.5 miles) at The Nature Conservancy's Mashomack Preserve: A/T/C8+
- Saturday, May 22, 10:30AM Zoom Presentation**—Live Raptors, Owls Included & Introduction to the Evelyn Alexander Wildlife Rescue Center: AA
- Sunday, May 23, 10AM** Let's Go Birding at Lazy Point: A/T/C 8+
- Wednesday, May 26, 8:30PM** Full Flower Moon Hike, Co-Sponsored by Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA
- Saturday, May 29, 9:30AM** Black Racer Snake Search with Andy Sabin: AA
- Saturday, May 29, 10AM** Salamander Seining...and Some Frogs Too, with Andy Sabin: AA
- Saturday, May 29, 10AM** Young Environmentalists Society (YES!) Meeting: Ages 10 - 16
- Sunday, May 30, 10AM Online Video**—NYC Audubon Presents the World of Birds with Aurora Crooks: C11 – 14,

June

- Thursday, June 3, 5PM Zoom Presentation**—So You Wanna Grow Your Own Oysters?: A/T/C10+
- Saturday, June 5, 8:30AM** Bird Migration & Breeding Warblers in Hither Hills with Wayne Whitmore: A/T
- Sunday, June 6, 11AM** Bay Beach Safari—Exploring a Bay Habitat: AA
- Saturday, June 12, 8:30AM** Birds of the Meadow & Woods—Eric Salzman Memorial Bird Walk, Cosponsored by Eastern Long Island Audubon: A/T/C8+
- Saturday, June 12, 10:30AM** Guided Exploration of Quogue Wildlife Refuge's Fairy Dell—History, Flora & Fauna: A/T/C8+
- Saturday, June 12, 3PM** SOFO Cleans the Beach—Help Needed: AA
- Sunday, June 13, 10AM** Chasing Eagles with Frank—A Search for Bald Eagles: A/T/C8+
- Saturday, June 19, 9AM** Black Racer Snake Walk—A Beautiful & Beneficial Reptile: A/T/C5+
- Sunday, June 20, 10AM** Young Birders Club Meeting: Ages 8 – 18
- Thursday, June 24, 8:30PM** Full Strawberry Moon Hike Cosponsored by Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA
- Saturday, June 26, 10AM** Young Environmentalists Society (YES!) Meeting: Ages 10 – 16
- Saturday, June 26, 10:30AM** “Meet the Martins”—The Purple Martins with John Shemilt: AA
- Saturday, June 26, 11AM** Paddle through Diamondback Terrapin Territory: A/T
- Sunday, June 27, 10:30AM** “BioBlitz”—Surveying the Life of Vineyard Field: A/T/C6+

Dear SOFO Members

In this spring calendar we've added programming that includes other nature/environmental organizations and different ways of looking at our natural world.

Let us know what you would like to see included in future SOFO nature/environmental programming. **We know what we can offer, but we don't know what you would like us to include.**

Send your nature/environmental program ideas, suggestions, and your contact information to sofoedcomdir@optonline.net. We will make every effort to follow through on your ideas and suggestions. If we can't fulfill your requests we'll try to find an organization or an individual who can.

Thanks so much. We look forward to hearing from you.

Carol Crasson

SOFO Education and Communications Director

Email: sofoedcomdir@optonline.net



*Young Environmentalists Club (YES!)
Project Featured at Guild Hall and the
Southampton Arts Center*

by Mare Dianora, Young Environmentalists Club (YES!) Leader, Educator and Interdisciplinary Artist, whose practice involves building community and exploring connections to home and place.

This past autumn, I was approached by Anthony Madonna, the Patti Kenner Fellow in Arts Education, to have our YES! group participate in the Guild Hall "Student Art Festival" which opened Saturday, January 16th, 2021. This is a special year for Guild Hall as it is celebrating its 90th anniversary. The theme of the exhibit is "Past-Present-Future". The exhibit asks participants to look at our collective and shared past as we study the past and imagine a new and exciting future. Anthony felt that our group fit into this concept as we have been working so hard to spread awareness, be activists, and push our own education further through special guests, artist collaborations, documentary viewing, and book discussions.

We started our discussion about this collaboration at our in-person meeting in October with the idea of doing an outside group exhibition. We developed the idea together to create a small wind farm. Each member came up with a design for their own set of propellers. The 12 group members who participated worked with themes based on ecology, renewable energy, recycle/reduce and other environmental and nature motifs. It is a very special group because it includes students in grades 2 through high school. This project comes together in unity with each member working within their own experience and knowledge. I do feel this is the strength of our group - we are mixed ages, mixed backgrounds and circumstances, and we all learn from each other.

In addition, Amy Kirwin, the former Artistic Director of Southampton Arts Center (SAC) and now the new Chief Creative Officer of Guild Hall, asked us to include this group project in SAC's upcoming "eARTh - Artists as Activists" exhibition which opens on April 17, 2021. The exhibition will be on view at the Arts Center from April 17 through July 11, 2021. For more information on the exhibition visit the Southampton Arts Center's website at: <https://southamptonartscenter.org/event/earth-artists-activists/>

Both requests are a huge honor, and I am so proud of this group for being recognized in the community. The members have been working so hard on such a diverse set of projects and issues. I look forward to seeing the new directions and projects the group comes up with as we continue to work together!

*SOFO Is Happy to Announce a New STEAM
Enrichment Program for the
Bridgehampton Child Care & Recreation Center
(BHCCRC) in Bridgehampton, NY
Project-Based Learning That Connects
Observations In Nature To Technology*

SOFO is pleased to announce our new educational alliance in After School STEAM Enrichment programming with the Bridgehampton Child Care and Recreation Center (BHCCRC), located at 551 Sag Harbor Turnpike in Bridgehampton, NY. Students at BHCCRC will explore science, technology, engineering, art, and math through visits to the museum and outdoor guided nature walks led by SOFO environmental educators, as well as hands-on workshops at the child care center with SOFO and Innovation Camp (iCAMP) instructors. STEAM enrichment workshops focus on project-based learning that connects observations in nature to the technology tools we use to

make our observations better and to understand the world around us. Winter to Spring 2021 sessions will focus on our Earth. Fall 2021 sessions will focus on living things and their relationships to the Earth and to each other. The program is supported by a grant to SOFO from an anonymous donor. For more information, please visit www.sofo.org or contact Melanie Meade at mmeade@sofo.org.

*Cutting Edge Tech Coming to SOFO's
Shark Research Program*

by SOFO Shark Research & Education Team

It is with great appreciation and excitement that SOFO's Shark Research and Education Program is a beneficiary of two recent grant
Continued on next page

*the
Nature
clubhouse*

*Bridgehampton Child Care & Recreation Center
visits SOFO*

by Robert King, Bridgehampton Child Care & Recreation Center
After-School Director

The children at the Bridgehampton Child Care & Recreational Center were very excited to be invited to the SOFO Museum. During our visit, they experienced a nature walk where they observed several different animals that live in the wild. They learned about the animal habitats and what they eat, and were even able to try and figure out what animals they were looking at from the bones that were found. Everyone really enjoyed the walk and examining the different scenery around the museum. The children, ages 6 to 14, were even thrilled to discover there were actual owls living in the trees outside. Since some of our children have never seen owls before, it was fun for them to spot them in the wild. The children also loved learning about the different surroundings and how nature is distinct for some animals on the East End.

After the nature walk they went inside the museum. There, they saw the museum's native animals, such as turtles and fish. We really enjoyed our experience at the SOFO Museum and are glad we were able to be a part of this amazing experience. Our children look forward to working with the museum in the future and seeing more of what the SOFO Museum has to offer. Here is what some of our children had to say about their visit:

"It was fun looking for different bones on the floor at the SOFO Museum." – Michael M.

"I liked the SOFO Museum because I have never been on a hike before and it was cool to go on the hike. It was also fun learning about the wild and all of the animals." – Kaylee M.

"It was fun looking at the turtle and learning about the fish." – Ashli R.



All photographs: Bridgehampton Child Care & Recreation Center

Continued from page 7

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 experimental 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.

South Fork
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(SOFO)
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South Fork
Natural History
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