



SOUTH FORK NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM (SOFO)

SOFO's Bi-Weekly Newsletter



Four-toed Salamander

PAUL KING III PHOTO

NEW YORK'S SMALLEST SALAMANDER

By Paul King III

New York is home to 18 species of salamanders. The smallest and arguably the most unique is the Four-toed Salamander (*Hemidactylium scutatum*). This salamander which typically measures lengths of only 2-4 inches long, is hard to find and rarely seen throughout its range in the eastern United States. Being a lungless salamander, they respire through their skin, as well as through tissue linings in their mouths. They are the only terrestrial salamander with four toes on each foot (hence its name). Four-toed salamanders resemble one of our most abundant species of salamander, the red-backed, but can be distinguished by their toe count, a bright white belly speckled with black coloration, as well as a constriction at the base of the tail. This constriction is the spot where the salamander will detach its tail if threatened by a predator. Once the tail is detached, it will then wiggle around for several minutes to distract the predator while it makes its escape. The tail will grow back in the next couple of weeks. Other defensive techniques include playing dead, as well as curling up with its tail on its back, offering it in exchange for its life.

Four-toed salamander's breeding behavior is a bit different than all our other native salamanders. Instead of laying egg masses in vernal pools of water, the Four-toed finds wetlands that have lots of sphagnum moss. Only the females migrate to these wetlands, having previously mated in the fall prior. They will then find a good spot in the moss to make a specialized nest, where she will guard the eggs until they hatch and drop into the adjacent pools of water. These larvae that drop into the water will then develop until they metamorphosize. This time of year, in early spring is a good time to spot these elusive amphibians as they begin to lay their eggs.

FALSE EYES TO FOOL PREDATORS

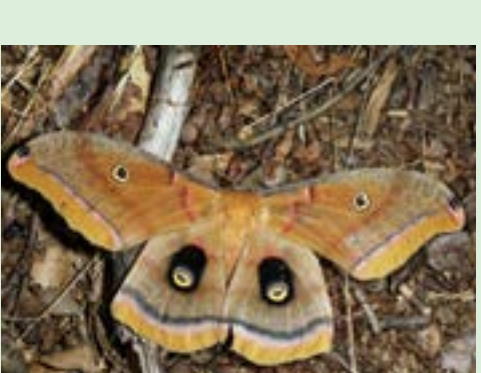
By Paul King III

The Polyphemus moth (*Antheraea polyphemus*) is one of our largest and most beautiful moth species with a wingspan of 5 to 7 inches. Its name comes from the giant cyclops



PAUL KING III PHOTO
Polyphemus Moth Cocoon found at SOFO

in Greek mythology known as Polyphemus. It gets this name because of the large eyespots in the middle of its hind wings. These eyespots are used as part of a distraction display, that serves to confuse predators. The eyespot pattern is a form of mimicry, meant to misdirect predators. The markings on the polyphemus moth are said to most closely resemble the head of the great horned owl.



JUDY GALLAGHER PHOTO
Adult Polyphemus Moth

Seeing an adult of this species is rare. Although they are widespread throughout North America, they only live as adults for less than a week. As an adult they have vestigial mouths, meaning they have reduced mouthparts that are not used to eat. An Adults sole purpose is to breed and lay eggs. In the United States there are two broods, one that hatches in early spring and one in late summer. Once they emerge from their cocoon, the females release pheromones that the male detects with his large, feather like antennae. The males may fly for miles to reach a female. Once they mate the female will then spend the rest of her life finding a good spot to lay her eggs. The male will continue to search for mates before it dies within the next few days. When the eggs hatch, they can feed on a variety of host plants including,

birch, willow, oak, maple, hickory, beech, honey locust, walnut, and elm trees. If you spot one of these beautiful moths in its adult form, consider yourself lucky.

STICK OR BUG?

By Paul King III

Spring is the time of year when many of our insects are emerging after winter's cold weather. One of those insects you may have never seen are the walkingsticks. Long Island is home to two species of walkingsticks. The Northern Walkingstick (*Diaperomera femorata*) and the Blatchley Walkingstick (*Manomera blatchleyi*). As their name implies walkingsticks look just like tree branches. This extreme form of camouflage helps them remain undetected to birds and other predators that may be looking for a snack. It also means that they are rarely spotted by humans. Walkingsticks have a life cycle that revolves around the tree foliage and temperatures. Breeding takes place in late summer and early fall after



Blatchley Walkingstick

PAUL KING III PHOTO

the walkingsticks have molted for the final time and reached their full size (3-5 inches). About a week later the eggs are laid one at a time, which is done by dropping them from the tops of trees onto the forest floor. These eggs are only 2.5mm long and get mixed in with the leaf litter. They will remain in the leaf litter over the winter. They will then hatch the following spring, and climb up the trunks of the trees, and feed on the foliage before going through up to six molts and repeating the process.

Walkingsticks are known as leaf skeletonisers, eating all the tissue between the leaf veins. They will eat any time of the day but seem to prefer to eat during the night. Since they spend so much time up in the canopy, the only time we usually get to see them is if they fall to the ground. The Blatchley Walkingstick is known to prefer shrubs and goldenrod in open fields and meadows but is still rarely seen. If interested in seeing one of these unique insects up close, SOFO exhibits a similar species at the museum.

[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 one hundred (100) 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!



SCOTT SPANO PHOTO

MERLIN FALCON

(*Falco columbarius*)

By Frank Quevedo

This image of a Merlin taken by Scott Spano was seen perched on a telephone pole on Dune Road in Southampton. Merlin is a small dashing falcon that prey on other birds. They use their speed to attack a flock of birds and snatch one that is slow to react. They also eat flying insects such as dragonflies and damselflies. They can be seen soaring over grasslands and prairies with their flat-wingbeats and fanned tails. They are highly active this time of year as many birds are migrating through the area and they do not want to miss out on any easy meals.



FRANK QUEVEDO PHOTO

RED-EARED SLIDER TURTLE

(*Trachemys scripta elegans*)

By Frank Quevedo

This Red-eared Slider found in a local pond in East Hampton is a perfect example to not release non-native pets into local habitats. These turtles are common pets throughout the world and are not native to Long Island. Their native areas range from southeast of Colorado to Virginia and Florida. As pets, these beautiful reptiles can live up to 30-40 years. When released into a local pond after caring for them as pets, they can displace many of our native species such as painted turtles. Red-eared sliders are aggressive and territorial when basking and can push out local wildlife overtime. A good example of this displacement of native animals is in Central Park, New York where all the turtles there are all non-native. If you have a pet turtle that you cannot care for anymore, please call the Museum and we will inform you as to how to proceed with a proper transfer for their well-being and our native species well-being.



CHRIS PAPARO-FISHGUY PHOTO

HARBOR SEAL WITH SHARK BITE

By Frank Quevedo

This image of a harbor seal with a shark bite, taken by Chris Paparo of FishGuy Photos was most likely caused by a juvenile white shark. Based on the bite size and healing status of the wound, this seal was most likely attacked in the Fall/Winter of 2020. This attack on this seal is a natural occurrence of predator/prey interaction between sharks and the food resources available to them. As wintering seals enter our marine waters in the fall, larger sub-adult and adult white sharks are migrating through to warmer southern waters and search for large prey along their journey. This interaction is vital and necessary for a healthy robust marine ecosystem.

APRIL 14- 28, 2021 PROGRAMS

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

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

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

EARTH DAY CELEBRATION

SATURDAY, APRIL 24

For All Ages

Schedule

11AM-1PM - Water Quality Testing & Beach Cleanup

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

MONDAY, APRIL 26, 7:30PM - Full Pink Moon Hike, Cosponsored by Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA

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 and 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.