



# SOUTH FORK NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM (SOFO)

## SOFO's Bi-Weekly Newsletter



Tent caterpillar nest. FRANK QUEVEDO PHOTO

### EASTERN TENT CATERPILLAR NEST

By Frank Quevedo

Eastern tent caterpillars (*Malacosoma Americanum*) are one of the only a few insects recognized by their homes rather than their appearance. Their homes are like Hamptons share-houses where they live together in a nicely fashioned silk nest built on branches of cherry and apple trees. They feed on the leaves of these trees and in large numbers can defoliate their host trees entirely. But most of the time, they rarely do enough damage to kill a healthy plant. When not feeding, these caterpillars retreat to their silk nests. As they develop, the caterpillar spins a white powdery cocoon (Pupa stage) in a sheltered location usually on sides of houses or mailboxes. When moths emerge, usually around three weeks from pupa stage, they fly in search of mates in May and June and live just long enough to reproduce. If you see this caterpillar, do not be alarmed and confuse it with the destructive gypsy moth. If you are a birder, look around in trees in the vicinity of the nest, you may come across a yellow-billed cuckoo who love to feed on these caterpillars.

### MEMORIAL DAY MOCCASIN FLOWER

By Frank Quevedo

It is that time of year again when orchids emerge from their winter dormancy and grace us with their

beauty here on eastern Long Island. There are approximately 24 different species of orchid plants that we can see throughout the year, all blooming at different times beginning in late May with Whorled Pogonia (*Isotria verticillata*) and ending in early November with the Autumn Coralroot (*Corallorhiza odorathiza*). My favorite is the Moccasin Flower (*Cypripedium acaule*) or better known as the Pink-lady Slipper. It blooms



Pink Lady Slipper FRANK QUEVEDO PHOTO

right around Memorial Day and is one of the most frequently encountered orchids in eastern North America. It prefers mixed hardwood and coniferous forests. It will be in bloom now through mid-July. The defining characteristic of this plant is the lip petal, which has evolved into a very lovely looking pouch-shaped slipper used for pollination. One of my favorite places to visit and observe this orchid is at Napeague State Park in Amagansett and Lazy Point Road in Napeague.

### A LIFE HERP, THE EASTERN WORM SNAKE

By Frank Quevedo

I took a road trip to Manorville with SOFO board President, Andy Sabin and SOFO nature educator Jake Kushner in search of the rarely observed eastern worm snake (*Carphophis amoenus*). Andy got a tip from

a friend that worm snakes were once observed decades ago in a habitat in Manorville that supports this species. Some expert naturalists, in over 50 years exploring Long Island have never seen this species due to its morphological adaptations for living and burrowing below ground. They are rarely seen on the surface and finding one on this day was a longshot. They prefer thick woodland habitats that borders wetlands where they can find their favorite prey, earthworms. They are most active during March-April to October-November. During the warmer months, they retreat underground to escape overheating and desiccation. On this day, the conditions were ideal to see one, if they still existed. This species is considered a "species of great concern" in New York State. Once reaching our destination, we started turning over logs and leaf litter. After several minutes of searching, Andy yells out "worm snake...worm snake!!" To the excitement of us all, the snake was a beautiful chestnut brown with smooth scales and black eyes. We took photos and wished our new reptile friend a wonderful life. It was a magical find and a great experience in finding this life herp.



Eastern Worm Snake FRANK QUEVEDO PHOTO

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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 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](mailto:info@sofo.org). Stay safe and be on the look out for Nature news in your backyard!



OAKES FAMILY PHOTO

### SEVEN-SPOTTED LADY BEETLE LARVA

(*Coccinella septempunctata*)

By Crystal Oakes

This strange looking critter on a chive flower is a good sign for this gardener, this is a larval Seven-spotted Lady Beetle (*Coccinella septempunctata*), a European introduced agricultural species. Commonly called ladybugs, true bugs have a different life cycle known as incomplete metamorphosis. True bugs hatch out into a nymph stage that resembles the adult but without wings; the wing buds start small and



OAKES FAMILY PHOTO

grow with each molt (complete skin shedding) until the final adult molt. Like a butterfly and caterpillar, a lady beetle looks very different from the adult when it hatches as a larva and undergoes complete metamorphosis to become an adult beetle. After three larval molts, known as four instars, the larva will molt into its pupal (chrysalis) stage, you can see the old larval skin where the pupa is attached by its abdomen to the leaf (Mugwort in the middle picture). Anywhere from 3 to 12 days later (depending on temperatures) an adult lady beetle emerges. The recently emerged Seven-spotted



OAKES FAMILY PHOTO

Lady Beetle outer wing covers (elytra) start off yellow and slowly change to red with black spots as they harden. Most lady beetles (*Family Coccinellidae*) are predators that prefer many of our agricultural pests, such as aphids and scale insects, but some feed on mold, fungi, and pollen, and a few are agricultural pests, feeding on crop leaves. Many lady beetles have contrasting colors usually red, orange, or yellow with black spots, or black with red, orange, or yellow spots. This is to warn potential predators that they taste bad and usually will 'bleed' a distasteful fluid from their leg joints if disturbed.

## JUNE 12 - JUNE 24, 2021 PROGRAMS

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

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

**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

## 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/)

## 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://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.