

SOFOnaturalist



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

Teaching Baby *About the Wonders of the World*

by Patricia Paladines

The family sat hidden in my attic for a long time. I had forgotten about them. They had been a gift from a friend when my daughter was little and I was considering fixing up a doll house for her.

In 2017 I recruited the family in my efforts to share stories of the natural world through my photography. Mother, father, and baby stand in as silent narrators in my *Teaching Baby About the Wonders of the World* photo series.



Teaching Baby About: The predatory plants of the bog, Thread-leaved Sundews. Amagansett, NY. 2021

I have a deep background in photography. A grandfather I did not get to meet was a traveling photographer in Ecuador. While I was growing up in Chicago my mother used to tell stories of how her father traveled by train out of Guayaquil into small towns where he sold his skill as a portrait photographer to the local people. I picked up a camera as a preteen and started taking what I called "action shots" of my family; my little sister running in the park, another one of her sitting on our kitchen table extending her arms out to me, my dad under a cherished urban backyard cherry tree. Like my grandfather, my focus was on people.

In my late teens I bought myself a Nikon camera—because that was the brand that Paul Simon sang about—and soon after that I had a hand-me-down photo enlarger. I learned to print my own black and white photographs. My camera and I roamed Chicago streets photographing mostly people. I captured vendors at the Maxwell Street market, Chicago's first Black Mayor - Harold Washington, anti-racist protestors downtown, anti-Reagan protestors on Michigan Avenue, etc. In the mid-1980's I moved to New York where I landed a job in the Prints and Photographs Department of the New-York

Historical Society. It was a research assistant position but because I had a background in black and white printing I was invited to also assist in the darkroom. The experience was exciting not just because I was printing from vintage glass plate negatives but because it afforded me a visual history lesson of New York City and the people who had been using photography for over a century to record it. I loved the work and spent long hours in the building's basement darkroom under Central Park West where subway trains rumbled by on the other side of a wall that ran parallel to the tracks.

Circumstances had me reluctantly move to Long Island in the 1990s where I found that positions at museums and historical societies were mostly volunteer based. My daughter was young, and I needed to make money. The National Audubon Society had an ad in the paper for a part-time office assistant at their Living Oceans Program office in Islip. My philosophy has always been to work at a place where I would learn something. I was hired. To say that accepting that job changed my world is an understatement. My world opened to a beauty that I had been blind to. Long Island was no longer just a place of shopping malls, LIE traffic and rowdy people on late night LIRR trains. It was a place where jewel-colored birds migrated through in May, where fish eating hawks that had spent their winter near the South American country of my birth returned every March to raise their young, where snapping turtles dragged themselves up from muddy banks to lay their eggs, it was an island surrounded by a wealth of marine life. I returned to school to study biology and not long afterwards, was leading environmental tours of the Peconic Estuary. As with my photographs, I enjoyed sharing the beauty of what we may ordinarily overlook—this time nature's beauty—which I had previously overlooked.

I returned to photography to compliment my environmental education work. Inclusion of the doll family came after I had started playing with other found objects to tell stories through my photographs. One of the first objects I incorporated was a little plastic ninja that I found on a beach. I named her Nellie. Nellie had a warrior soul and was ready to protect anyone from potential harm. A few images that include Nellie now live in other people's homes. What had been a piece of plastic trash on a beach became a source of amusing story telling. I liked that.



Ninja Nellie fighting off Milkweed Beetles. Setauket, NY, 2017

Continued on next page

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In that frame of mind, telling stories using found objects, I realized that I had the perfect pieces to help me share stories of the natural world stored away in my attic. We environmental educators know how important it is to teach children about nature, especially nature observed locally. Many people tend to think that interesting wildlife only lives in faraway exotic places. I was one of them. My little family, which a friend has unofficially named the Stiltions because of their cheese-colored hair (Brie - mother, Jack - father, and Baby Gouda), connect the viewer with the subject of the scene in a way that an image of just the subject would not. They add a little humor while inviting the viewer to observe a little deeper, they invite further inquiry; What is this that they are teaching Baby about?

The Stiltions now travel with me to distant and exotic places where I often find something they can help me share through a photograph, but they continue to enjoy teaching Baby about our wonderful, ever inspiring, Long Island environment.



Teaching Baby About: The beautiful flowers of the Novice Tree, only those unfamiliar with it will touch it.

Pantanal, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. 2022

Various prints from the *Teaching Baby About the Wonders of the World* series have been exhibited across Long Island. The series is currently available as limited-edition prints. Each image limited to 10 prints on 10" x 12" fine art paper and in 11" x 14" archival quality framing. I am currently working on a book where I can expand on the subjects of each image.

Bio: Patricia Paladines is a visual storyteller who uses photography to share stories about the natural world. Patricia lives on Long Island, in Setauket and Lazy Point, with her husband Carl Safina, 3 dogs and 5 hens. Patricia can be contacted by email at: patricia.paladines@me.com or via her website photographically.me

Saturday, January 14, 2023, 1:30PM, at SOFO

**Patricia Paladines, Photographer
and Carl Safina, Author**

"Curiosity through Art and Story Telling"

Reservations Required, call SOFO at 631 537-9735



What Makes Vernal Pools Special?

*by Jake Kushner, SOFO Environmental Educator,
Reptile & Amphibian Specialist*



Vernal pool in Bridgehampton, NY.

You've likely seen a vernal pool and didn't even know it. But what are these unique habitats? And what makes them so important?

Vernal pools are small, seasonal, depression wetlands, usually found in forested areas. These wetlands are defined by several characteristics—one of the most important being their ephemeral nature. Vernal pools are fed by snow melt and spring rains. They reach their highest points during the spring. Come summer and fall vernal pools may be almost or completely dry.

Given these seasonal drying periods, vernal pools are fishless and instead host a unique collection of other plants and animals. Some of these animals require vernal pools for breeding purposes. These species are known as vernal pool obligates. Here on Long Island, examples of vernal pool obligate species include various amphibians such as the marbled salamander (*Ambystoma opacum*), the blue-spotted salamander (*Ambystoma laterale*), the spotted salamander (*Ambystoma maculatum*), the eastern tiger salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum*), the wood frog (*Lithobates sylvaticus*), and the eastern spadefoot toad (*Scaphiopus holbrookii*), as well as invertebrates such as the fairy shrimp (*Anostraca spp.*).

During late winter/early spring, warm rainy nights stimulate the migration of these amphibian species into the vernal pools. After breeding, frogs and salamanders deposit gelatinous egg masses attached to underwater debris. Over several weeks these eggs will develop into larval salamanders and tadpoles. These young amphibians will spend the next few weeks feeding and living within the pools. As the pools begin to dry, tadpoles and salamander larvae undergo metamorphosis, transitioning to a life on land. Only once the pools begin to fill the next year will these amphibians return, this time to breed as adults.

Unfortunately, vernal pools face serious threats. Most vernal pools are too small to be considered a protected wetland under New York State law. This leaves them vulnerable to development and pollution. However, there are ways you can help protect these critical habitats. As you spend time in the woods, note the locations of any vernal pools you may come across and report these pools to local environmental organizations, such as the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Documenting these often-overlooked ecosystems is the first step in protecting these unique ecosystems.

Please see next page for a schedule of salamander walks,

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Bridgehampton, NY 11932-0455

www.sofa.org • email: info@sofo.org.

Find us on Facebook  Twitter  Instagram 



A full description of each program is listed on the SOFO website:

www.sofa.org/calendar

January, February, & March

To ensure the safety of our visitors, we will follow all COVID-19 safety protocols and are dependent on the State's changing guidelines.

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.

To experience a vernal pool and see firsthand some of the obligate species that breed in these ephemeral pools, join us on Andy Sabin's Nighttime Salamander Searches in February and March. Below, are the dates, times, and subjects of the walks. To register, please contact SOFO by calling (631) 537-9735. These programs are for all ages.

Saturday, February 11, 7:30PM: Andy Sabin's Annual Eastern Tiger Salamander Search:

Saturday, March 4, 7:30PM: Andy Sabin's Annual Blue-spotted Salamander Search

Saturday, March 11, 7:30PM: Second Blue-spotted Salamander Search with Andy

Saturday, March 18, 8PM: Andy Sabin's Annual Spotted Salamander Search



Blue-spotted Salamander



Spotted Salamander



Eastern Tiger Salamander

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.sofo.org/calendar.

Advance reservations are required for all programs.

January

Thursday, January 5, 7PM: Owls by the Light of the Moon—Annual Foray with Joe Giunta: A
Friday, January 6, 5PM: Full "Wolf Moon" Hike with Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA
Saturday, January 7, 10:30AM: Photographing Nature in Winter—Walk and Chat: A/T
Saturday, January 7, 2PM: Seal Walk at Cupsogue County Park: A/T/C5+
Sunday, January 8, 10:30AM: Evergreen Plants in Winter Walk: A/T/C8+
Saturday, January 14; DAWN to DUSK: NYSOA Annual Winter Waterfowl Count: A/T
Saturday, January 14, 9AM: Beach or Trail Cleanup: AA
Saturday, January 14, 10AM: Nature Walk from SOFO to Poxabogue County Park with Dai: A/T/C10+
Saturday, January 14, 1:30PM: Curiosity through Art and Story Telling with Patricia Paladines, Photographer and Carl Safina, Author: A/T
Sunday, January 15, 11AM: Owl Storytime and Craft: F/C3-5
Saturday, January 21, 10:30AM: How to be a Winter Nature Detective: F/C5+
Sunday, January 22, 10AM: Young Birders Club Meeting: Ages 8-18
Sunday, January 22, 11AM: What is a Groundhog? Will he see his shadow? AA
Saturday, January 28, 10AM: Young Environmentalist Society (YES!) Meeting: Ages 10-16
Sunday, January 29, 11AM-1PM: Building SOFO's Bluebird Nest Boxes – Opportunity for community service: A/T

February

Saturday, February 4, 9:45AM-1PM: Bird & Seal Viewing Cruise with Frank: A/T/C10+
Sunday, February 5, 5:30PM: Full "Snow Moon" Hike with Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA
Saturday, February 11, 11AM: Where Do Our Local Sharks Go in Winter: A/T
Saturday, February 11, 7:30PM: Andy Sabin's Annual Eastern Tiger Salamander Search: AA
Sunday, February 12, 9AM: Beach or Trail Cleanup: AA
Saturday, February 18, 9AM: Winter Specialties of Shinnecock —A Search for Avian Visitors of the North: A/T/C 10+
Saturday, February 18, 1PM: Seal Walk at Cupsogue County Park: A/T/C5+
Sunday, February 19, 10AM: Young Birders Club Meeting: Ages 8-18

Winter School Break Outdoor Nature Programs 10:30AM – 11:30AM

**For Children of All Ages
Led by SOFO Environmental Educators**

Monday, February 20: Woolly Bear Caterpillar Search—Hidden insects and other signs of animal activity.
Tuesday, February 21: Sensory Walk— Use all your senses on a walk in Vineyard Field.
Wednesday, February 22: Searching for Animal Signs— Who left their mark in Vineyard Field?
Thursday, February 23: Nature Scavenger Hunt. Let's see what we can find.
Friday, February 24: Winter Weather. Brrrrrr, it's cold outside!

Saturday, February 25, 10AM: Young Environmentalist Society (YES!); Ages 10-16
Saturday, February 25, 10AM: Long Pond Greenbelt Nature Walk with Dai: A/T/C10+
Saturday, February 25, 1PM: Exploration of Promised Land, Amagansett: A/T
Sunday, February 26, 10:30AM: Sea Star Sensation: F/C5+

Saturday, March 4, 10:30AM: Birds! Birds! Birds!: F/C3+

Saturday, March 4, 7:30PM: Andy Sabin's Annual Blue-spotted Salamander Search: AA

Sunday, March 5, 10AM–12PM: Rare, Big, and Odd Tree Tour at Mashomack Preserve, Shelter Island: A/T/10+

Tuesday, March 7, 6:30PM: Full "Worm Moon" Hike with Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA

Saturday, March 11, 9AM: Beach or Trail Cleanup: AA

Saturday, March 11, 10:30AM: Southern Pine Beetle Infestation Walk With the Town of East Hampton's Land Management Staff: A/T/C9+

Saturday, March 11, 7:30PM: Second Blue-spotted Salamander Search With Andy Sabin: AA

Sunday, March 12, 11AM: Get Buzzy. Help Save Our Bees: F/C6+

Saturday, March 18, 10:30AM: What Does Horseshoe Crab Blood Have to Do With COVID-19? A/T/C10+

Saturday, March 18, 8PM: Andy Sabin's Annual Spotted Salamander Search: AA

Sunday, March 19, 1PM: Seal Walk at Cupsogue County Park: A/T/C5+

Sunday, March 19, 10AM: Young Birders Club Meeting: Ages 8-18

Saturday, March 25, 10AM: Young Environmentalist Society (YES!): Ages 10-16

Saturday, March 25, 10AM: Vernal Pool Exploration: A/T/C5+

Saturday, March 25, 10AM: Moderately paced 3+Mile Nature Hike Through the Anna and Daniel Mulvihill Preserve & William Mulvihill Preserve with Dai: A/T/C10+

Saturday, March 25, 1PM: Shake off the Winter Blues with a Walk Outside: F/C8+

Sunday, March 26, 1PM: Observing Glacial Erratics Along the Ronkonkoma Moraine: A/T

SOFO winter program highlights!



Common Loon Credit, Gary J. Wege, USFW



Finished example of a SOFO Bluebird Nest Box



Full Moon, Credit, NASA



Glacial Erratic, Credit, Paul King



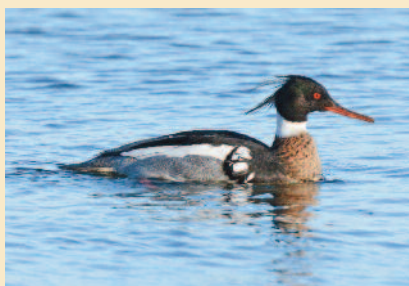
Harbor Seals, Credit, Xylia Serafy



Great-horned Owl, Credit, Dick Daniels



Mulvihill Preserve Vernal Pool



Red-breasted Merganser, Credit, Jim Hudgins, USFW



You never know what you'll find at a beach cleanup

SOFO Launches its Annual Farm to Table Community Program



Frank Quevedo, SOFO Executive Director, presenting check to Evelyn - Evie - Ramunno, at Sag Harbor Food Pantry

SOFO is pleased to announce our new Farm to Table Community program to support the distribution at local food pantries of fresh local produce and healthy Thanksgiving and Christmas Holiday meals to families in our community who have been negatively impacted by the pandemic and are suffering economic duress. This initiative is funded by SOFO's new Special Families Hardship Relief Fund.

The East End is home to people from all walks of life and socioeconomic statuses, many of whom lack opportunities to explore and appreciate the natural world. Donations enable our museum to expand our educational and

environmental programs, and to partner with other non-profit organizations that serve the needs of the community. Some examples of this initiative include: support for local food pantries; zoom and on-site programs at local schools and libraries; scholarships for our marine and environmental science program, visits on charter buses enabling inner city youth opportunities to experience open spaces and to observe nature firsthand.

SOFO Brings Local Wildlife to East End Senior Care Centers



SOFO and The Fish Guy, Christopher Paparo, have partnered to create a window on wildlife for East End senior care center residents. Seniors and care center staff will now experience Long Island nature and wildlife via Zoom presentations as well as in-person lectures with vivid wildlife photography and stories of animal encounters.

Chris creates engaging presentations that entertain and educate people who may not be able to get outdoors much but are still interested in learning about our local habitats and wildlife. "From Plankton to Whales" is one topic, and there are many others; "Birding with the Fish Guy", "Exploring Long Island's Underwater World", and "Wild Long Island", to name a few. There's an entire world to explore and Chris makes that world accessible.

These presentations are supported by a grant to SOFO from a donor who wishes to remain anonymous.

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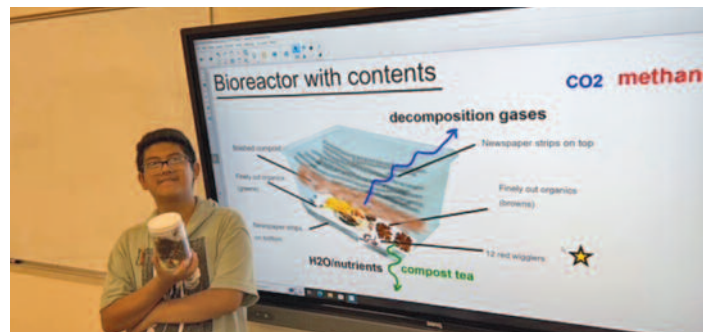
"The opportunity from SOFO to speak at senior homes has been extremely gratifying. Most of my lectures take place at public libraries where my audience is made up of families. Families always enjoy my lectures, but when I walk into one of the senior centers, the seniors' eyes light up with excitement. They have been waiting in anticipation since my last visit and are quick to ask when I will come back again. I might not be changing the world by teaching the next generation about the importance of our natural world. But being able to brighten the day of our seniors has been very rewarding." —Chris Paparo

SOFO Connects with Bridgehampton School's 21st Century Community Learning Center Enrichment Program

October 13th marked the start of SOFO's involvement in Bridgehampton School's 21st Century Community Learning Center Enrichment Program (21CCLC). The following is a description of the program offered by school administration:

The district is pleased to inform you that we are one of only two districts in Suffolk County to be awarded the 21st Century Community Learning Center grant. Our district will be receiving nearly \$2.25 million in funding, over the next 5 years, which will allow us to expand our after-school and summer enrichment programs for our students, pre-K4-12.

SOFO's program is offered by Environmental Educator & Aquarist, Rob "Rockfish" Gelling, and focuses on composting as a process which can turn kitchen waste into rich soil some call "gardener's gold". The first session took place in a science lab and provided students with an introduction highlighting the science of composting and its benefits to society and our ecosystems. The lesson culminated in the design and build of a mini-bioreactor which after observation and monitoring will provide an answer to the question: Does composting increase or decrease the volume and mass of organic waste?



Student with mini bioreactor that he made

SOFO's Purple Martin Colony Update

SOFO's purple Martin colony in Vineyard Field had a successful nesting season as John Shemilt, SOFO's purple martin colony steward, reported. The first nests were started in mid-May, (the total number of nests made in 2022 was 29), and the first eggs were laid around May 30. Of the total 149 eggs laid 125 of them hatched. Of these 125 hatched, 106 of the young birds fledged.

We look forward to the colony returning this year.

SOFO's Bluebird Nest Box Trail Update

Joe Giunta is SOFO's bluebird steward and, since 2005, head of our bluebird nest box trails project. He stated that the 2022 bluebird season was highly successful with the second-highest number of bluebird fledglings since he headed the recovery project—137 fledglings.

Continued on next page

Since 2005, a grand total of 1,476 bluebirds have fledged. It marks the success of the project and results from the care that Joe has put into monitoring the health of these trails.

Right now, Joe needs SOFO and the communities help! A number of the old nest boxes need to be replaced.

So, on Sunday, January 29 from 11AM to 1PM SOFO is hosting a special citizen science project workshop to build at least 25 new blue-bird boxes to replace those that have fallen into disrepair. We're inviting the community to join us. This is a great opportunity for teens to gain community service hours. All pre-cut wood, screws, and tools will be provided. Plus, there will be pizza.

All you need to do is bring a healthy drink and call SOFO at 631-537-9735 to let us know you're coming! This workshop is for adults, teens, and children ages 10 and older.

the
Nature
clubhouse

A Family that Birds Together.....

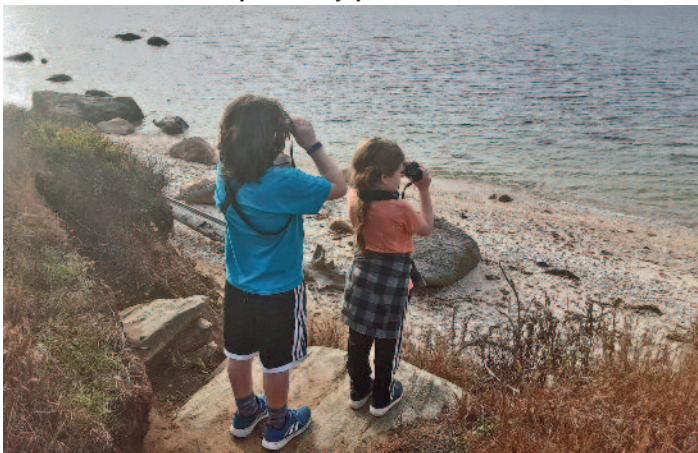
by Margarette Doyle

We weren't always a family who birded together. In fact, apart from a passing interest when out walking we did not "bird" at all.

My husband Dermot probably knew the most about birding. He had spent his childhood playing and walking in the farm fields and bogs close to his home in rural Ireland.

I was a suburban Dublin child. My father would take us on walks in parks and sometimes to the mountains to walk the forested hills when he could.

So, our children Adrie and Saoirse were used to parents who dragged them out to walk the beaches and hike the trails around East Hampton where we live. They both enjoyed nature and so did we.



Adrie, age 10, and Saoirse, age 7, birding

As parents we wanted our kids to get less screen time and more outdoor time, so a membership to SOFO was a natural progression.

SOFO opened a new world to us of sharks, salamanders, snakes and so much more.

Then a few years ago, a friend gifted us all binoculars before we took a trip to Cape May, New Jersey, to take part in a horseshoe crab count. Upon receiving the gift, he told us "The more you see, the more you will see".

And indeed, he was right. We came back from that trip with memories of white ibis nesting, red knots gorging on horseshoe crab eggs



Red Knots and other shorebirds at Cape May, New Jersey and thousands of migrating birds feasting before they continued onward to their nesting grounds.

Seeing more than we had ever seen before, we wanted this to continue. That's when we joined SOFO's Young Birders Club. Through Frank's guidance and knowledge, we discovered new places to explore and new birds to discover.

It is a year-round pastime. Spring migration. Summer shorebirds. Fall migration and winter ducks.



Osprey eating a fish in our backyard in Springs

It is an any time-of-day pastime. Morning songbirds and nighttime owls.

It is an ageless pastime. When we started birding Saoirse was 6 and Adrie 9.

Birding as a family has turned us into Feeder Watchers in the winter and Nest Watchers in the spring.

Birding as a family is just our starting point to explore nature and the outdoors.

As a result, we notice frogs, newts, nests and bugs while out birding. We have discovered ruins of old homesteads, wonderful waterfalls and marvelous mudflats.

Birding as a family is not just about the birds. It is about getting outside in nature and exploring all it has to offer—together.

It turns out, the more you see, the more you do indeed see.



Black capped chickadees in nest ball in our backyard in Springs

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.

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