

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

Harbingers of Spring - *A Plant, A Bird, and Two Frogs*

by John L. Turner

At first, the changes from the cold of winter to the pleasantness of spring are not noticed. Air temperatures that are but a degree or two higher, on average, than the week before, an added minute or two increase in the amount of daily sunlight. And while these daily changes may be largely imperceptible to us, they are not lost on plant and animal species so finely tuned to environmental conditions. And reliably on Long Island we are witness to a predictable sequence of species whose appearance illustrate the melding of winter into spring.

Let's begin with a plant, one with a stinky name: Skunk Cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*), the scientific name basically meaning "a bad-smelling plant with compound fruit." A common perennial wildflower of mucky swamp habitats, skunk cabbage is the earliest plant to emerge on Long Island, its distinctive maroon hoods pushing up through the organic muck along streams in late winter, melting the ice and snow immediately around it. It can do so by generating heat the same way animals do - through respiration. The fuel which energizes the activity is starch stored in the plant's large rootstock. No surprise that due to skunk cabbage's "warm-blooded" ability, naturalists have noted: "Skunk cabbage behaves more like a skunk than it does a cabbage"! Apparently the heat generating ability shuts down if the air temperature drops below freezing.



Skunk Cabbage

The plant's hood, its spathe, shaped like "two cupped hands" according to Euell Gibbons, the famous wild food enthusiast, contains the flower cluster in its open sided cavity. The spathe is spongy, a sort of biological Styrofoam that keeps the cavity and the flower ball inside warmer. The warmth helps waft the unpleasant 'skunky' aroma into the air to attract the few insects active this time of year. The flower cluster is a round ball known as the spadix. You may know the spathe

and spadix arrangement from another wildflower native to Long Island that is closely related to skunk cabbage - the Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*). The pulpit in which Jack stands is the spathe and Jack himself is the spadix. The pollinated flowers of skunk cabbage develop hard seeds that are eaten by a number of bird and mammal species.

The sprouting tobacco-like leaves of skunk cabbage soon appear and after they finish growing create a lush thigh-high green cover to freshwater wetlands. In some wet low-lying places on Long Island you can see hundreds of skunk cabbage dominating the soggy ground. In the fall they quickly yellow and die back.

It is in these wet areas you might see (and hear) another harbinger of spring on Long Island, one not with leaves but with wings - the Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*). This species is common on Long Island, occurring throughout the island in marshes, swamps and along pond and lake edges. Aptly named because of its conspicuous scarlet red shoulder patches bordered in yellow, formally known as epaulettes, male red-winged blackbirds are a welcome and common sight as they return to Long Island in late winter through early Spring, arriving from overwintering areas in the southeastern United States, to establish nesting territories which they aggressively defend. Here, their loud "kon-ko-ree" calls ring out from the tops of arching cattail stalks and the branches of red maple, themselves budding in profusion with the small red flowers which give the tree its name. The blackbirds often puff out their showy patches as they sing. Females are streaky brown in color with a strong eye stripe looking a bit like an outsized sparrow or finch; some individuals show a thin red line on the location of the wing where a male bird has its patch.



Red-winged blackbird: Chris Paparo/@fishguyphotos

As spring arrives and water temperatures slowly rise two frogs emerge from their muddy winter beds: Spring Peepers (*Pseudacris crucifer*) and Wood Frogs (*Lithobates sylvaticus*). The Spring Peeper

Continued on next page

Continued from page 1

is a species of tree frog and possesses pads on its toes helping it climb vertical surfaces. The species name crucifer comes from the distinctive cross-shaped mark on its back. Its common name stems from their high pitched peeping that rings from just about any wet spot on Long Island during the month of April.



Spring peeper

Wood frogs sound more like quacking ducks during the mating season which occurs in mid-to-late March. Typically utilizing vernal pools, wood frogs breed in one explosive event and their round gelatinous egg masses floating on top of these pools is evidence of their mating success. As spring continues the tadpoles develop into tiny frogs. And the wood frog lives up to its name by leaving the pools to fully develop into an adult and spend its life frequenting the forest - until next spring when it will once again enter the temporary pools to create the next generation.

I hope that you make the acquaintance of these species!

Footnotes on Nature

Help a Turtle Cross the Road - *Watch for Turtle Crossing Signs*

by Karen Testa, Executive Director/President, Turtle Rescue of the Hamptons, Inc.

Named to 2023 Women of Distinction

by NY Assemblywoman Jodie Giglio

Every year more and more of our wildlife find themselves struggling to find food, shelter, and the proper habitat to bear their young. This is due to human overpopulation, habitat destruction and pollution.

For our native turtles, their natural instinct is to follow the same path they have used for years in order to choose that perfect nesting location for their offspring to successfully hatch. The habitat must be dry enough so that the nest doesn't flood, wet enough so the eggs do not dehydrate, and sunny enough so that the warmth of the sun properly incubates them. That means habitats often border our roadways, bringing our native turtles into dangerous situations; the most common besides dog attacks, pesticide poisoning, and entrapment, is car strikes.

As a result, it is our responsibility to do what is best to protect our dwindling population of native turtle species in New York. Deemed

a "species of special concern" by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) the Eastern box turtle has been the most common turtle crossing our roadways. Other species likely to cross our roads include our local aquatic turtles: the freshwater common snapping turtle (the New York State Reptile), the brackish-water diamondback terrapin (our DEC "threatened" species), the fresh water spotted turtle, and the Eastern painted turtle. All these species, though aquatic, nest on land. In New York State, we do not have a native ocean species.

The hard work being done by South Fork Natural History Museum and Turtle Rescue of the Hamptons to deal with the number of turtles injured or killed on our roads has been recognized by our local townships—Southampton, Riverhead, Southold, Babylon, Brookhaven – who have agreed to place turtle crossing signs in hotspot areas, analyzed over the past 12 years, using tally records kept by Turtle Rescue of the Hamptons.



With the increasing number of cars on our roadways in past years, we hope the installation of these Turtle Crossing signs creates a warning to drivers that they must share the road with our native turtles. Turtles are one of the most endangered organisms in the world, they have been around since the dinosaurs for 220 million years.



Box turtle release



Common snapping turtle returning to the pond

Please drive carefully, as their active season is April to October.

377 Bridgehampton/Sag Harbor Turnpike

P.O. Box 455

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www.sofa.org • email: info@sofo.org.

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

www.sofa.org/calendar

April, May, & June

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.

FREE

Annual Earth Day Celebration-Open House at SOFO

Saturday, April 27

10AM - 4PM

Outdoor Nature Activities and Crafts! Fun for All Ages!

10AM-11AM: Birding for Beginners Walk in Vineyard Field

10AM-1PM: Nature Activities and Crafts

10:30AM-11:30AM: Searching for Snakes Walk

10AM-12PM: Face Painting

2PM-3PM: Jungle Bob's Exotic Reptile Show

There is a fee for this program: \$10 adults, \$5 children, members and non-members. Registration required.

7PM-9PM: Family Nature Trivia Night, Light Refreshments – BYO beverage

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.

April

Saturday, April 6, 10-11AM: FREE, New York Marine Rescue Center Seal Advocacy Program Level I Lecture: AA

Saturday, April 6, 12-1:30PM: FREE, New York Marine Rescue Center Seal Advocacy Program Level II In-Field Training: A18+ unless accompanied by an adult.

Sunday, April 7, 1-3:30PM: FREE, Pop-up Pond Life Exhibit: F

Monday, April 8, 2:00PM: Solar Eclipse Viewing at SOFO, Bring Your Own Folding Chair or Blanket. Limited Eclipse Viewing Glasses will be available for a small fee, Co-Sponsored with Friends of Long Pond Greenbelt: AA

Friday, April 12, 9AM-4PM: Long Island Natural History Conference at Brookhaven National Laboratory: visit <https://seatuck.org/2023-li-natural-history-conference/> for details and to register.

Saturday, April 13, 9AM-4PM: Long Island Natural History Conference at Brookhaven National Laboratory: visit <https://seatuck.org/2023-li-natural-history-conference/> for details and to register.

Saturday, April 13, 9:30AM: FREE, Alewife Trail Walk (0.5 mile) with Peconic Baykeeper, Peter Topping: A/T/C5+

Saturday, April 13, 7PM: In Search of the American Woodcock: A/T/C10+

Sunday, April 14, 10:30AM: Long Island Water Quality: A/T/C10+

Wednesday, April 17, 1-3PM: SOFO's East End Outdoor Nature Education with Crystal at Munn's Point Preserve, Southampton: C3-7

Saturday, April 20, 10AM: FREE, Young Birders Club Meeting: Ages 8-18

Saturday, April 20, 10:30AM: Celebrate Arbor Day—Create Leaf Rubbings and Prints: A/T/C5+

Saturday, April 20, 1-3PM: SOFO's East End Outdoor Nature Education with Crystal at Munn's Point Preserve, Southampton: C3-7

Saturday, April 20, 7PM: In Search of the American Woodcock: A/T/C10+

Monday, April 22, 8:30AM: Birding with Joe Giunta in Central Park, NY: A/T/C10+

Spring School Break Programs

Outdoor Walks and Activities for Children and Families

10:30AM – 11:30AM

Free for members, non-members \$15 adults, \$10 children

Monday, April 22, 10:30-11:30AM: Searching for Sleeping Spiders and Other Insects

Wednesday, April 24, 10:30-11:30AM: Animal Tracks & Scat Search

Friday, April 26, 10:30-11:30AM: Birding for Beginners

Tuesday, April 23, 8PM: FREE, Full "Pink Moon" Hike with Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA

Saturday, April 27, 8AM, Birding with Joe Giunta—Spring Migration at Promised Land: A

Saturday, April 27, 10:30AM: FREE, Young Environmentalists Society (YES!) Meeting: Ages 10-16

Saturday, April 27, 10AM-4PM: FREE, SOFO's Annual Earth Day Celebration

Saturday, April 27, 10-11AM: FREE, Birding for Beginners: A/T/C10+

Saturday, April 27, 7-9PM: FREE, Family Nature Trivia Night: AA

Sunday, April 28, 9-11AM: FREE, Moderately-paced 4 Mile Walk Along the Bay to Ocean Trail South in Sagaponack with Dai Dayton: A/T/C10+

Sunday, April 28, 10:30AM: Storytime & Meet the Animals: Around One Log: C3-7

Sunday, April 28, 4PM: FREE, YES! Presents: A Lesson in Meteorology with Islandwide Weather: A/T/C8+

May

- Saturday, May 4, 10:30AM:** Searching for Lead-backed Salamanders: AA
Sunday, May 5, 1-3:30PM: FREE, Pop-up Pond Life Exhibit: F
Saturday, May 11, 10:30AM: Wild Long Island with The Fish Guy: AA
Saturday, May 11, 2PM: Deep Dive into the Magic of SCUBA: A/T/C8+
Sunday, May 12, 10:30AM: Make a Shell Windchime: C3-7
Wednesday, May 15, 1-3PM: SOFO's East End Outdoor Nature Education with Crystal at Sweezy Pond Preserve's Cranberry Bog, Riverhead: C3-7
Saturday, May 18, 10AM: FREE, Young Birders Club Meeting: Ages 8-18
Saturday, May 18, 10-11AM: FREE, Birding for Beginners: A/T/C10+
Saturday, May 18, 1PM: Celebrate Love a Tree Day—Go on a Tree ID Walk: A/T/C5+
Saturday, May 18, 1-3PM: SOFO's East End Outdoor Nature Education with Crystal at Sweezy Pond Preserve's Cranberry Bog, Riverhead: C3-7
Thursday, May 23, 8:30PM: FREE, Full "Flower Moon" Hike with Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA
Saturday, May 25, 8AM: Spring Migration - Birding at Hither Hills with Wayne Whitmore: A/T16+
Saturday, May 25, 9:00-10:30AM: FREE, Moderately-paced 4 Mile Nature Hike Along a Section of the Paumanok Path in Sag Harbor with Dai Dayton: A/T/C10+
Saturday, May 25, 9:30AM: Black Racer Snake Search with Andy Sabin: AA
Saturday, May 25, 10AM: Salamander Seining and Some Frogs Too, with Andy Sabin: AA
Saturday, May 25, 10:30AM: FREE, Young Environmentalists Society (YES!) Meeting: Ages 10-16
Sunday, May 26, 10:30AM: Storytime & Meet the Animals: Box Turtles: C3-7
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June

- Saturday, June 8, 10-11AM: FREE,** Birding for Beginners: A/T/C10+
Saturday, June 1, 8:30AM: FREE, Birds of the Meadow and Woods—Eric Salzman Memorial Bird Walk with Eastern Long Island Audubon Society (ELIAS): A/T
Saturday, June 1, 10AM-1PM: Nature and Bottom Trawling Cruise: A/T/C10+
Sunday, June 2, 1-3:30PM: FREE, Pop-up Pond Life Exhibit: F
Saturday, June 8, 10AM-12PM: FREE, Dragonfly Day at SOFO, co-sponsored with Friends of Long Pond Greenbelt: AA
Friday, June 14, 8AM: Birding with Joe Giunta—Breeding Warblers of Long Island: A
Saturday, June 15, 10AM: FREE, Young Birders Club Meeting: Ages 8-18
Saturday, June 15, 10:30AM: Celebrate Nature Photography Day: Photographing with a Smart Phone for Beginners: A/T
Saturday, June 15, 1-4:30PM: SOFO's Spring Jazz Celebration featuring Carl Safina and the Natural Causes band: A/T
Wednesday, June 19, 1PM: SOFO's East End Outdoor Nature Education with Crystal at Poxabogue Preserve, Bridgehampton: C3-7
Friday June 21, 9PM: FREE, Full "Strawberry Moon" Hike with Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt: AA
Saturday, June 22, 10AM: FREE, Dragonfly Day at Mashomack Preserve, Shelter Island. Co-sponsored by SOFO and The Nature Conservancy at Mashomack Preserve: AA
Saturday, June 22, 1-3PM: SOFO's East End Outdoor Nature Education with Crystal at Poxabogue Preserve, Bridgehampton: C3-7
Sunday, June 23, 10:30AM: Join in Observing World Ocean Day with an Experiment on Ocean Acidification: A/T/C8+
Thursday, June 27, 7PM: FREE, In Person @ SOFO and Zoom, What's Up in the Sky? Presented by NASA Solar System Ambassador & Hamptons Observatory's Senior Educator, William Francis Taylor: A/T/C10+
Saturday, June 29, 10:30AM: Meet the Martins—Purple Martin Life Cycle, Eggs & Hatching Chicks: AA
Saturday, June 29, 9AM-10AM: FREE, Moderately-paced 1.7 Mile Hike to Whiskey Hill, Bridgehampton with Dai Dayton: A/T/C10+
Saturday, June 29, 10:30AM: FREE, Young Environmentalists Society (YES!) Meeting: Ages 10-16
Sunday, June 30, 10:30AM: Storytime & Meet the Animals: Hermit Crabs: C3-7

SOFO Welcomes Docents



SOFO Docents Cindy Lenkiewicz and Dave Polek

SOFO would like to welcome our first volunteer docents, Cindy Lenkiewicz and Dave Polek. Cindy and Dave live in Southampton and are active members of the museum who enjoy various program offerings and participating in bird walks and counts. They approached the museum with an interest in promoting and supporting the museum, while also learning more about the environment and giving back to the local community. As avid birders, hikers, kayakers and nature lovers, Cindy and Dave fully appreciate the natural world and look forward to sharing their passion and encouraging others to do so. They will also be leading free bird walks for beginning birders, listed in the SOFO Calendar of Events on our website: <http://www.sofo.org>.

Museum docents are part-time volunteers, who greet visitors and guide children, adults, and families as they experience the museum's interactive exhibits and live native animals. If you are interested in joining SOFO's docent program, please email the museum at info@sofo.org.

SOFO's Salamander Tagging Research Project Begins in 2024



Eastern Tiger Salamander: Paul King III

The South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) is pleased to announce that it has received a \$30,000 grant from the Hollomon Price Foundation that will enable SOFO to conduct a three-year groundbreaking study tracking the movements of Eastern tiger salamanders around confirmed breeding pools within the Long Pond Greenbelt

Preserve. The study is designed to determine the area around breeding pools utilized by Eastern tiger salamanders, and to collect data that can be used to inform and guide state and local officials regarding future development projects within the Greenbelt. As no tracking data exists on this species in this area, it is critical that we develop and collect movement data because this species is endangered in New York State.

Jake Kushner, SOFO's Reptile and Amphibian Specialist has begun the field work for the tracking study. Stay tuned for further updates.



Jake Kushner with tracking equipment

SOFO and the Southampton Teachers Association Team Up to Create the Shark Shack



The SOFO Shark Research Program is excited to announce a new collaboration with the Southampton Teachers Association (STA). Southampton High School Teacher and SOFO Shark Research Program Chief Field Coordinator Greg Metzger received a grant from the STA that will provide funding for a pilot project called the Shark Shack. The Shark Shack will bring together Southampton High School students and teachers with SOFO educators and shark researchers to educate the public on how to interact with local ocean waters safely. The Shark Shack concept was modeled after similar programs currently running in Massachusetts and California.

The Shark Shack team will set up a 10' x 10' customized tent at such local events as basketball games, farmers' markets, and of course our local beaches starting in March 2024. Visit the Shark Shack section (coming soon on the SOFO Shark Research Program's page of the SOFO website) for the schedule of when and where the Shark Shack will be located.

Continued on next page

Shell Recycling Project



SOFO is happy to announce a partnership with the South Fork Sea Farmers Organization to collect oyster and clam shells for oyster reef restoration projects. A trailer for dropped-off shells will be available at the SOFO parking lot for the public to stop by and help us collect oyster and clam shells previously consumed at home or in restaurants. These shells will be recycled to build oyster reefs necessary for oyster spat recruitment and to mitigate storm surge impacts along our shorelines.

Submit Your Nature Photos

Wanted

The South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) is starting to compile pictures for our 2025 Wall Calendar and we would like to open picture submissions to middle school and high school students in Southampton and East Hampton townships.

Pictures can be from 2025 through the past five years of local nature scenery, plants, or animals of Eastern Long Island, in any season. For each picture selected, we will list the **student's name, school, location of picture, and a short description** in the appropriate month, as well as crediting the photographer on the back of the calendar.




Reward:

A generous donor is providing compensation of:

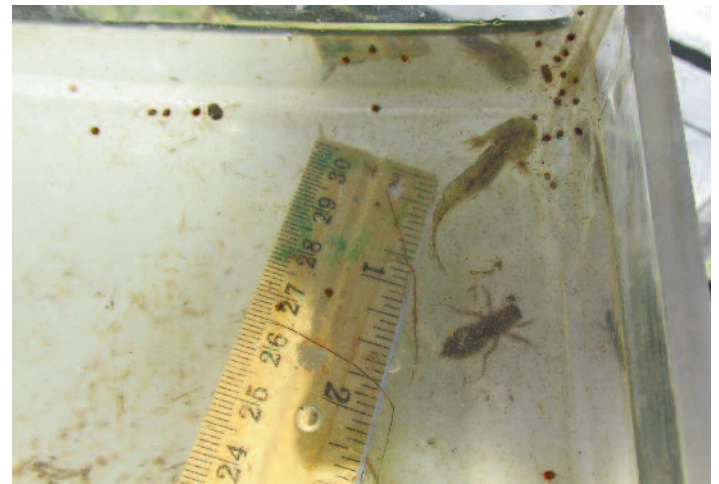
- \$100 for Front Cover picture
- \$50 for each month's main picture
- \$25 for small monthly filler pictures

Please send your submissions to cpesch@sofo.org with appropriate information by **June 17, 2024**; selected pictures will be announced to the photographers by July 22, 2024.

Highlights of the 2023 SOFO Pond Life Pop-up Exhibit



April 2, 2023: Spring rains have filled the pond. Salamander egg masses are visible: one mass is attached to a twig and a second is resting on the bottom.



May 7, 2023: A salamander larva, dragonfly nymph, water mites (red dots), water boatmen, and dust-like daphnia and copepods together make up the pond's food web.



*August 6, 2023: By late summer, the pond is almost dry. Salamanders have left the water, having metamorphosed into adults, and are living on land. Semipalmated sandpipers (*Calidris pusilla*) are foraging for invertebrates in the mud.*

PRESERVING OUR PLANET FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

*"Through education and exploration,
we continue to offer everyone hope
and purpose to save our earth."
– Andy Sabin*

SOFO'S 35TH ANNUAL
SUMMER GALA
JULY 13, 2024



SAVE THE DATE

*Benefiting SOFO Environmental & Educational
Programs And Initiatives*

JULY 13, 2024 5:30 – 10:00 pm

CELEBRATE THE POWER OF OUR NATURAL WORLD

HONORING

**Conservationists Anke & Jürgen Friedrich, Susan & David Rockefeller,
and National Geographic Society President Michael Ulica**

CHAIRS

Kim & Greg Lippmann and Erica Noble & Ray Iwanowski

5:30-6:30PM VIP COCKTAIL RECEPTION

**Special Tasting Menu By Acclaimed Chefs, Live Music & Wildlife
Ambassadors**

7:00–10:00PM BENEFIT PARTY

Honoree Presentation, Auction, Seated Dinner, Dancing & Special Guests

Special Thanks To Andy Sabin and The Andrew Sabin Family Foundation

• **VIP TABLES & TICKETS, GENERAL ADMISSION TICKETS, SPONSORSHIPS**
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377 Bridgehampton/Sag Harbor Turnpike P.O. Box 455, Bridgehampton, NY

**The South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit nature education
organization chartered by the New York State Department of Education**

SOFO'S SPRING JAZZ CELEBRATION

Featuring the Jazzy Sounds of:
CARL SAFINA
& THE NATURAL CAUSES BAND



Carl Safina- Drums

*Hors D'oeuvres & Refreshments
will be served.*

Call 631-537-9735 to reserve your space.

SATURDAY JUNE 15, 2024 | 1- 4:30 PM

RAIN DATE: JUNE 16, 2024

Performance at The South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO)
377 Bridgehampton Sag Harbor Turnpike, Bridgehampton NY

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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South Fork
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P.O. Box 455, Bridgehampton, NY 11932-0455
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email: info@sofo.org
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The *SOFO Naturalist* is
published quarterly
Address Service Requested



Dated Material

Printed on Recycled Paper with Soy Ink

<p>BULK RATE Non-Profit U.S. Postage Paid Permit #5 Bridgehampton, NY 11932</p>
