



FALL 2026

SOFO

Naturalist

South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) Quarterly Newsletter • October November December 2026

In This Issue

Why Marine Conservation Matters.....	1
SOFO News.....	3
The Art of Microfishing.....	4
A Journey into the Past.....	5
Development News.....	7

SOFO's Calendar of Events with program descriptions and registration information can be found on the SOFO website:

<http://www.sofo.org/calendar>

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Humpback whale feeding on menhaden

—Ecolinks—

Why Marine Conservation Matters

By Sydney Mantione, SOFO Environmental Educator, Marine Conservation and Policy M.A.

Anyone who has taken a stroll along our local beaches has witnessed the natural beauty they have to offer. From collecting seashells to observing diverse marine life, Long Island is a wonderful place to spend time outdoors. Growing up surrounded by our coastal ecosystems and witnessing the interactions between humans and the environment inspired me to pursue my master's degree in Marine Conservation and Policy.

Conservation is the protection of Earth's natural resources, so they do not run out or get destroyed, ensuring their use for future generations.¹ Conservation—marine conservation in particular—is vital, especially since we live on an island. Protecting Earth's resources is not only beneficial for us people to enjoy but is essential for preserving biodiversity. Biodiversity is the variety of all life on Earth, which ensures that living organisms are more resilient to natural disasters, disease, and maintains overall ecosystem health. Without biodiversity, ecosystems collapse, which threatens our natural resources such as food, water, and land.

The fishing industry on Long Island is vital to our local economy, seafood supply, tourism, and provides upwards of 67,000 jobs.² Long Island's "ocean economy" encompasses a variety of jobs in coastal tourism, fishing, maritime transport, and offshore wind energy. Marine policy that balances the needs of humans (economic and physiological) and the preservation of nature is crucial. This is where conservation becomes extremely important. How much can we use without

Continued next page

running out, while still supporting a growing population's needs? This question is what many local and federal policy decisions should be based upon.

One recent example of a local marine conservation policy is The Horseshoe Crab Protection Act. In December 2025, New York State Governor Kathy Hochul signed this bill into law, which will phase out the harvest of horseshoe crabs in state waters, leading to a full ban in 2029. The Atlantic horseshoe crab population has been declining since the 1990s as they are harvested for two main uses: bait in the whelk fishery and biomedical testing.³ Their unique blue blood, which is made up of copper, is widely used to safety test vaccines, antibiotics, and medical devices. However, horseshoe crabs play an even more important role in the natural world. They are a key food source for migratory shorebirds, such as the ruddy turnstone and the red knot, which prey upon horseshoe crab eggs as they pass through our region during their spring migration. The red knot is a threatened species in the United States, which is why preserving their major food source is crucial for their survival.



Monitoring and tagging horseshoe crabs with Cornell Cooperative Extension's Horseshoe Crab Monitoring Network

If you visited local beaches this summer, you may have noticed fencing and signs indicating a restricted area. These temporary closures are vital conservation zones designed to give nesting shorebirds a safe space to raise their young. From March to August, vehicles

are not permitted on the beach to protect wildlife populations, such as the New York State-endangered piping plover.⁴ While it may feel like an inconvenience to some beachgoers, this small conservation act can make a critical difference to the survival of this species.



Piping plover nesting area sign, photo credit: Audubon Magazine

One of the most influential federal laws for conservation is the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973. The ESA establishes protections for species that are listed as endangered or threatened.

Another important federal law is the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) of 1972, which prohibits the taking, hunting, killing, or harassment of marine mammals in all U.S. waters. On a local scale, The New York Whale Awareness Act was signed into law this August in an effort to prevent vessel strikes. The act directs the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to establish educational guidelines and make recommendations that reduce interactions with marine mammals, such as whales.⁵ There have been many sightings of these marine mammals in our waters this summer, which brings the risk of boaters coming into contact with and potentially harming them.

Shark sightings have also been the talk of many news articles this summer. These marine predators play an important role in balancing the food web and can even indicate a healthy ocean. Many species of sharks are threatened or endangered due to human activities such as fishing, pollution, finning, and climate change. Climate change may result in shifting ranges of shark species, where they move to follow their food source or to regulate their body temperature. Overfishing and other human activities threaten shark populations because they are slow growing and have a late age of reproduction, meaning their population cannot keep up with their rate of removal from the ecosystem. In New York, the DEC imposes shark fishing regulations, such as determining prohibited species and enforcing fishing gear requirements. Conserving shark populations is important for maintaining the well-being of our ocean ecosystems.

As we know, Long Island is home to an assortment of marine life, from tiny shorebirds to massive marine mammals. I, for one, enjoy learning about and having the chance to observe these species in their natural habitat (which is right in our backyard!). Aside from being fun to look at, protecting endangered and threatened species is essential to maintaining the health of our ecosystems. Policies such as The Horseshoe Crab Protection Act, The New York Whale Awareness Act, and shark fishing regulations are important actions that are aimed at protecting our local environment.

The main point I aim to highlight here is that everything in the natural world is interconnected, and humans are not excluded. This means that we have a responsibility to be stewards of the environment. Nature operates like a machine where all moving parts are required and necessary for its functioning. The removal of one species may seem like a small change, but it has detrimental effects on the whole ecosystem. Without conservation, there would be no sustainable fishing industry, no ecotourism, and no biodiversity. It is important to consider how our actions today can influence tomorrow's generation, creating a balance between our own needs and the natural systems of our beautiful home.

Sources:

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3. Harlan, W. (2025, December 22). *New York Bans Commercial Horseshoe Crab Harvests*. Center for Biological Diversity. <https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/new-york-bans-commercial-horseshoe-crab-harvests-2025-12-22/>
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—SOFO News—

A Snapshot of Nature



Surveying the vernal pond

In June, SOFO conducted a BioBlitz in Vineyard Field, behind the museum. A BioBlitz is a scientific survey where scientists and volunteers work together to identify as many species of plants, animals, fungi, and other organisms as possible in a specific location.

These events combine citizen science with ecological monitoring to document local biodiversity. For our BioBlitz, we used iNaturalist to record and identify species.

During this survey, we observed a total of 152 species: 70 species of arachnids and insects, 38 species of plants, 24 species of birds, 6 species of amphibians, and 5 species of fungi, 4 species of crustaceans, 2 species of reptiles, 1 species of mammal, and 2 not yet identified.

For a complete list of bioblitz species, please visit the SOFO iNaturalist page at <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/vineyard-field-bioblitz>

Connecting Students to Nature



SOFO has received a grant from the Peconic Estuary Partnership (PEP) for the 2026-2027 school year. The grant will support museum visits, classroom program admission fees, and outdoor guided field trips for public school classes. During visits to SOFO, teachers and students learn from the museum's expert Environmental Educators about local ecosystems, animal characteristics, and freshwater and saltwater ecology. Students explore interactive exhibits, live native reptiles and amphibians, and hands-on marine invertebrates at the Marine Touch Tank, which offers child- and accessibility-friendly underwater views.

Outdoor field trips are led by expert guides and take students through local environments, including estuary shores, salt marshes, bay beaches, ocean beaches, maritime forests, and vernal ponds. Students learn to use scientific sampling equipment, collect data, and identify local plants and animals. For more information or to schedule a museum visit, educational program, or outdoor field trip, contact info@sofo.org or 631-537-9735.

Thank you to the Peconic Estuary Partnership for their support.

SOFO's Annual Holiday Donation Drive

This year, we are collecting food donations for **Hamptons Community Outreach (HCO)**. HCO helps families in need with food, clothing, and personal care items, as well as supporting children through education in their summer Hamptons Art Camp program.

Donations of non-perishable food items can be dropped off at SOFO from November 1 to December 15, or scan the QR code below to view **HCO's Amazon wish list** with food and other items.

—Footnotes on Nature—

The Art of Microfishing

By Aidan Perkins, Long Island Naturalist



Juvenile Schoolmaster Snapper on a micro hook

Microfishing is one of the most niche forms of fishing, growing out of the world of lifelist fishing, where anglers try to catch and document as many different fish species as possible. While lifelist anglers may target everything from sharks and tuna to tiny darters and minnows, finding and catching these small species is often the biggest challenge.

Here on Long Island, anglers have an incredible

variety of freshwater and saltwater opportunities, including the exciting tropical strays that arrive each year after being carried north by the Gulf Stream. Species such as groupers, butterflyfish, bigeyes, lionfish, flying gurnard, and African pompano are highly sought after by lifelist anglers, drawing people from all over to search Long Island's south shore inlets and marinas. Catching these tiny fish requires specialized gear, including extremely small tanago hooks and ultralight line, often around 1-pound test, along with tiny pieces of bait such as shrimp. The hardest part, however, is finding the fish.



Snowy grouper on small lure

Microfishing is almost entirely sight fishing, with anglers spending hours scanning docks, rocks, and other structures for small or unusual species before carefully presenting a bait to them. Some fish, like pufferfish and bigeyes, may bite quickly, while others, such as angelfish and damselfish, can be extremely difficult to hook. Once a fish is landed, anglers typically photograph it in a small clear photo tank before releasing it and adding the species to their lifelist.



Groupers: Snowy (left), Red (top), and Scamp

Over the past five years of lifelisting across Long Island, from Montauk to Rockaway Beach, I have caught and photographed around 130 species. Between local species and the tropical strays in our waters, there is almost no limit to how many species one could catch on Long Island. It is a niche but incredibly rewarding pastime that has given me a much deeper appreciation for the incredible diversity of life living in the waters around Long Island.



Flying Gurnard

—YES! Corner—

A Journey Back in Time

By Mare Dianora, YES! Director

This spring, YES! Program Stewards (the members who regularly participate, volunteer and are museum ambassadors) were given the opportunity to visit an island very near to us but so, so different - Block Island! This beautiful island has similar physical characteristics to our beautiful East End, filled with winding roads, dramatic coasts and 17 miles of beaches. Together, we took the ferry about 25 miles and came into New Harbor on the west side of the island. We had a tour bus and guide waiting to give our group an overview of the island and relate some of its history. Several highlights were the Mohegan Bluffs,

the “*North Light*” lighthouse and Old Harbor - where we were dropped off to explore.

Everyone was very hungry after the early morning meet up (there is only one 9:00 am ferry from Montauk) and the bus tour to explore the island. The first order of business was lunch. We had a large group but together we quickly found a restaurant with outdoor seating and a sea view. It was good to relax, chat about everything we were experiencing and plan our afternoon (there is also only one ferry back to Montauk at 5:00 pm.)

Everyone – both young and old – was excited to visit the *Block Island Historical Society* so we could put the information we were learning into a historical context. The location required a short walk through New Shoreham which was busy with tourists. The museum’s exhibits taught us about the Indigenous people who lived on the island before European settlement, early colonial life, island farming and fishing and maritime history. It was fun to see the actual clothing, quilts, furniture, tools, boat models, fishing equipment, maps, photographs and other objects from island life long ago.

No YES! Trip is complete without ice cream, so we stopped at the famous *Aldo’s Bakery* for ice cream, gelato, and sorbet. I told the kids that if they ever

have the privilege of staying overnight on a boat in the Great Salt Pond, they will be awakened by the Aldo’s bakery boat selling hot coffee and pastries. That is something you will never forget!

We had a bit of a walk back to Old Harbor to catch our ferry to Montauk. We all managed to make it back onto the boat and it was a very rough ride home as we crossed the open Atlantic. We were glad to be back and all felt as if we had been carried away to a different time and place. It seemed as though we had been gone a very long time!



YES! Group on Block Island



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- **Family Membership is now \$85**
- **FREE Admission to Museum Exhibits for parents and up to four children**
- **Digital subscription of our quarterly newsletter, the SOFO Naturalist, with the quarterly calendar of events**
- **10% DISCOUNT on all regularly priced gift shop items**

SOFO HAS
EXTENDED OUR
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DRIVE THROUGH
DECEMBER 31, 2026



Visit sofo.org or call 631 537 9735 to explore other
Membership Levels and Benefits

SOFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit tax-exempt organization.



SOFO Celebrates the Power of Our Natural World at 37th Annual Summer Gala on July 11, 2026



VIP Chef Cocktail Reception (Photo Credit Rob Rich)

The South Fork Natural History Museum and Nature Center celebrated its 37th Annual Summer Gala Benefit in Bridgehampton, welcoming hundreds of friends, supporters, conservation and business leaders and other notable guests for an extraordinary evening in support of SOFO's environmental education, conservation and outreach programs.

This year's Gala, themed "Celebrate the Power of Our Natural World: Protecting Our Planet's Living Waters & Lands," honored Fabien Cousteau, renowned aquanaut, ocean conservationist and environmental advocate; Bernadette Castro, distinguished civic leader and longtime environmental advocate; Louise and Stephen Pesce, devoted supporters of conservation and community initiatives; and Jean Shafiroff, acclaimed author, philanthropist and humanitarian whose longstanding commitment to philanthropy and charitable causes has made a meaningful impact on organizations and communities throughout New York and beyond.



SOFO Board President Andy Sabin with honorees Bernadette Castro, Fabien Cousteau, Jean Shafiroff, Louise and Stephen Pesce (Photo Credit Lisa Tamburini)



Dancing with Saxophonist Anra (Photo Credit Rob Rich)

The Gala was an outstanding success and a wonderful celebration of SOFO's mission, enhanced by all those who came together in support of our work and our commitment to protecting the natural world for future generations. The evening featured a VIP Chef's Tasting, dinner, a special presentation honoring our distinguished honorees, a spirited live auction led by Angela LaGreca, and dancing with DJ Antoine accompanied by Saxophonist Anra.

A very special thank-you goes to the exceptional chefs, restaurants, wineries and beverage partners whose generosity and talent made our VIP Chef's Tasting Cocktail Reception such a highlight of the evening, including Amagansett Wines & Spirits, Bell & Anchor, Channing Daughters Winery, East Hampton Grill, Events by Peter Ambrose, Golden Pear Cafe, Hampton Coffee Company, Kidd Squid Brewing Co., LALO Tequila, LDV at the Maidstone, Lobster Roll/LUNCH, Monopolowa Gin & Vodka, Page Sag Harbor, Sen, Shellworks, Shippy's, Springs Tavern & Grill, The Palm Restaurant, and Wölffer Estate Vineyard, along with all of our generous culinary and beverage participants.

SOFO also gratefully acknowledges our 2026 Gala sponsors: Hamptons Concours d'Elegance by Rand Luxury, Decco by Party Up Productions, Designs by Mark Masone, DG Creative Media, Dylan's Candy Bar, Evelyn Alexander Wildlife Rescue Center, Hampton Coffee Company, National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions, Russell Mittermeier, Carl Safina & The Safina Center, Something Different Party Rental, Summerhill Landscape, and Whitmores. We also thank our media sponsors Dan's Papers, Hamptons Magazine, The Express News Group, and James Lane Post for their valued support.



Bernadette Castro receiving a birthday cake (Photo Credit PMC / Michael Ostuni)

The extraordinary generosity of our sponsors, donors, guests, chefs, restaurants, partners, and friends makes SOFO's work possible. We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who helped make our 37th Annual Summer Gala such a successful, joyful and meaningful celebration of the natural world.

SOFO Calendar at a Glance Fall 2026

SOFO's Calendar of Events with program descriptions and registration information can be found on the SOFO website:

<http://www.sofo.org/calendar>

Programs are FREE to members. Programs at the museum: Non-members: \$10 child, \$15 adult, includes museum admission that day. Under three is free.

Off-site programs, non-members: \$5 per person, age 3 and up. Under three is free.

Visit Us at:

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—October—

Saturday, October 3

10:00 AM: SOFO's Annual Salamander Log Rolling,

Montauk: All Ages.

4:00 PM: Gardening with Insects: Pollinators, Predators, and Pests. Adults & Children Ages 8 and up

Thursday, October 8

1:00 – 3:00 PM: East End Outdoor Nature Education at Montauk State Park, Montauk Point: Family, All Ages

Saturday, October 10

10:00 AM – 1:00 PM: FREE, Friends of Long Pond Greenbelt Celebration, All Ages

Sunday, October 11

10:00 AM: Lead-backed Salamander Search at Sagg Swamp, Bridgehampton: All Ages

2:00 PM: Ocean Trivia Game, Ages 8 and up

Monday, October 12

1:00 PM: FREE, **Blue Carbon Workshop**—Coping with Climate Change by Restoring Marine Habitats Workshop with Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) Marine Program Habitat Scientist and Educator Kim Manzo: Adults & Children Ages 8 and up

Saturday, October 17

10:00 AM: FREE, Young Birders Club Meeting: Ages 8-18

11:00 AM: FREE, Bugwatching Buddies Club Meeting—Butterflyweed and Milkweed Planting: Ages 5-16.

3:00 PM: FREE, **East End Environment Talk**—A Big Year—Birding with Aidan Perkins, Long Island Naturalist: Adults & Children Ages 10 and up

Sunday, October 18

9:00 AM: Let's See What the Tide Brought In: All Ages

10:00 - 11:00 AM: FREE, YES! Presents—Open Play & Sensory Nature: Children Ages 2-4

2:00 PM: FREE, YES! Presents—Nature Drawing with Jackie Hoving: Adults & Children Ages 12 and up

Saturday, October 24

10:30 AM: FREE, Birding for Beginners: All Ages

Sunday, October 25

10:30 AM and 1:30 PM: Storytime & Craft: Migration & Winter Survival, **FREE with Museum Admission:** All Ages

Monday, October 26

6:30 - 7:30 PM: FREE, Full Hunter's Super Moon Hike. Co-sponsored by Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt and the South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO): All Ages

Wednesday, October 28

1:00 - 3:00 PM: East End Outdoor Nature Education at Montauk State Park, Montauk Point: Ages 10 and up

—November—

SOFO's Annual Holiday Donation Drive, 2026, recipient is Hampton Community Outreach: November 1 to December 15, drop off non-perishable food items at SOFO or go to <https://a.co/02kwdzYC> to view their Amazon wish list with food items

Sunday, November 1

11:00 AM – 12:00 PM: FREE, New York Marine Rescue Center Cold Stun Sea Turtle Training Level I Lecture: Adults & Children Ages 8 and up, under 18 must be accompanied by an adult

1:00 – 2:00 PM: FREE, New York Marine Rescue Center Cold Stun Sea Turtle Training Level II Field Training: Adults & Children Ages 8 and up, under 18 must be accompanied by an adult. Participants must attend Level I before attending Level II.

Saturday, November 7

10:00 AM – 1:00 PM: FREE, Nature & Birdwatching Cruise on Shinnecock Bay: Adults & Children Ages 8 and up

10:30 AM: FREE, Birding for Beginners: All Ages

6:00 PM: Meteor Watch Party: All Ages

Rain Date Sunday, November 8

Sunday, November 8

9:30 – 11:00 AM: FREE, Take a walk with the Montauk Library Bird Club along Montauk's Seal Haul Out Trail. Cosponsored by the Montauk Library and South Fork Natural History Museum. Adults & Children ages 10 and up

Thursday, November 12

1:00-3:00 PM: East End Outdoor Nature Education at Quogue Wildlife Refuge: Family, All Ages

Saturday, November 14

11:00 AM: FREE, Bugwatching Buddies Club Meeting—Leave the Leaves! Ages 5-16

Sunday, November 15

11:00 AM: Make a Seashell Turkey: All Ages

Saturday, November 21

10:00 AM: FREE, Young Birders Club Meeting: Ages 8-18

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM: Learn to Pin Insects: Adults & Teens 14 and up

Tuesday, November 24

5:00 – 6:00 PM: FREE, Full Frost Super Moon Hike. Co-sponsored by Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt & the South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO): All Ages

Wednesday, November 25

1:00 – 3:00 PM: East End Outdoor Nature Education at Quogue Wildlife Refuge: Ages 10 and up

Friday, November 27

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM: FREE, Black Friday Beach Cleanup, Hampton Bays: All Ages

Saturday, November 28

10:00 AM – 4:00 PM: SOFO's Annual Thanksgiving Open House: All Ages

Sunday, November 29

10:30 AM and 1:30 PM: Storytime—Terrific Turtles, **FREE with Museum Admission:** Family

—December—

Saturday, December 5

11:00 AM – 12:00 PM: FREE, Decorate a Holiday Tree for the Birds and Make Some Take-Home Bird Treats: All Ages

3:00 – 4:00 PM: FREE, East End Environment Talk—Marine Turtle Conservation with Maxine Montello, Director of the New York Marine Rescue Center: Adults & Children Ages 8 and up

Sunday, December 6

2:30 PM: Seal Walk at Cupsogue County Park, Westhampton: Adults & Children Ages 5 and up

Thursday, December 10

1:00 – 3:00 PM: East End Outdoor Nature Education at Dwarf Pine Plains Preserve, Quogue: Family, All Ages

Saturday, December 12

11:00 AM: FREE, Bugwatching Buddies Club Meeting—Bugs in Winter Walk at Sagg Swamp: Ages 5-16

Sunday, December 13

11:30 AM: Behind the Scenes Tour of the New York Marine Rescue Center, Riverhead: Adults & Children 8 and up. Tour Fee: \$8.00 members, \$10.00 non-members

Saturday, December 19

10:00 AM: FREE, Young Birders Club Meeting: Ages 8 - 18

Wednesday, December 23

1:00 – 3:00 PM: East End Outdoor Nature Education at Dwarf Pine Plains Preserve, Quogue: Ages 10 and up

5:00 – 6:00 PM: FREE, Full Cold Super Moon Hike. Co-sponsored by Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt & the South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO): All Ages

Explore Nature Outdoors Over the Holidays

FREE, 11:00AM-12:00PM

Monday, December 28: Nature Scavenger Hunt

Tuesday, December 29: Sleeping Spiders and Snug Bugs

Wednesday, December 30: Whose Tracks?

Sunday, December 27

10:30 AM and 1:30 PM: Storytime & Craft: Neighborhood Owls, **FREE with Museum Admission:** All Ages

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Visit us at:
377 Bridgehampton/Sag Harbor Turnpike
PO Box 455
Bridgehampton, NY 11932

Open Daily, 10am - 4pm
www.sofo.org • 631-537-9735

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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