



AUTUMN/WINTER 2022 NEWSLETTER



Aurora Moon by Deia Colosi – inspired by Aurora Borealis featuring a tree silhouette

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A Message from the Program Coordinator

As the traffic of shopping carts, sounds of loud voices, and swishing of puffy jackets fills the stores with last minute holiday shoppers, it is quiet here at the preserve. I hear the honks of Canada geese around four o'clock every evening as they fly southbound. The fields whistle as the wind blows the reeds. Squirrels rustle through the leaves and the deer appear in the hedgerows as they walk across the trails to feed in the fields.

It is that time where we slow down, but I never cease to be amazed by how much we accomplished. We held over 100 projects, offering long- and short-term opportunities and had between 30-45 students attending over the course of each season.

This year brought some new experiences such as doing an invasive species pull from kayaks on the pond at Frank Melville Park, completing the installation of our Kindness Garden sign, dying fabrics using marigolds, and cohosting our first Halloween themed coastal beach cleanup!



Our students always show up ready to put an effort in, working as a team, smiling and chatting about the most random topics (such as being silly and talking about making a "wild" Avalon with bears and alligators). Whether it's on the water, in the woods, getting muddy or covered in dirt, it is always a fun time. Parents- without your children, our program wouldn't be what it is today, so THANK YOU.

Also, we've been getting many compliments on our student content in the newsletters. Your creativity, art, photos, music, stories and articles have brought our newsletters to life. My goal for these is to showcase our student involvement in the Nature Initiative program and you've blown me away with your contributions!

Have a wonderful holiday season and a healthy and happy new year! I look forward to hearing the sounds of conversation and laughter again and we'll see you back out there in 2023!

Enjoy the sunshine,

Kayla

Nancy Grant, Friends of Flax Pond (left), Kayla Serina, Avalon Nature Preserve (middle), and Jimena Perez-Viscasillas, Long Island Sound Study/NY Sea Grant (right) at our Halloween themed Coastal Cleanup

Song of the Coqui

By Robin Gillespie



This past May, my family and I took a short vacation down to the rainforest in Puerto Rico. We stayed in a tiny cottage on the top of a hill in the middle of nowhere. At night, various frogs called 'Coqui' produced a chorus of unique sounds. I was extremely inspired by this sound one night and wanted to try and recreate it with synthesizers on my laptop. I did this by listening to the ambiance and then comparing it to a sound on my computer, then slowly chiseling away at the contour, timbre, and various other defining parameters.

This is the original sound that I recorded the next morning:



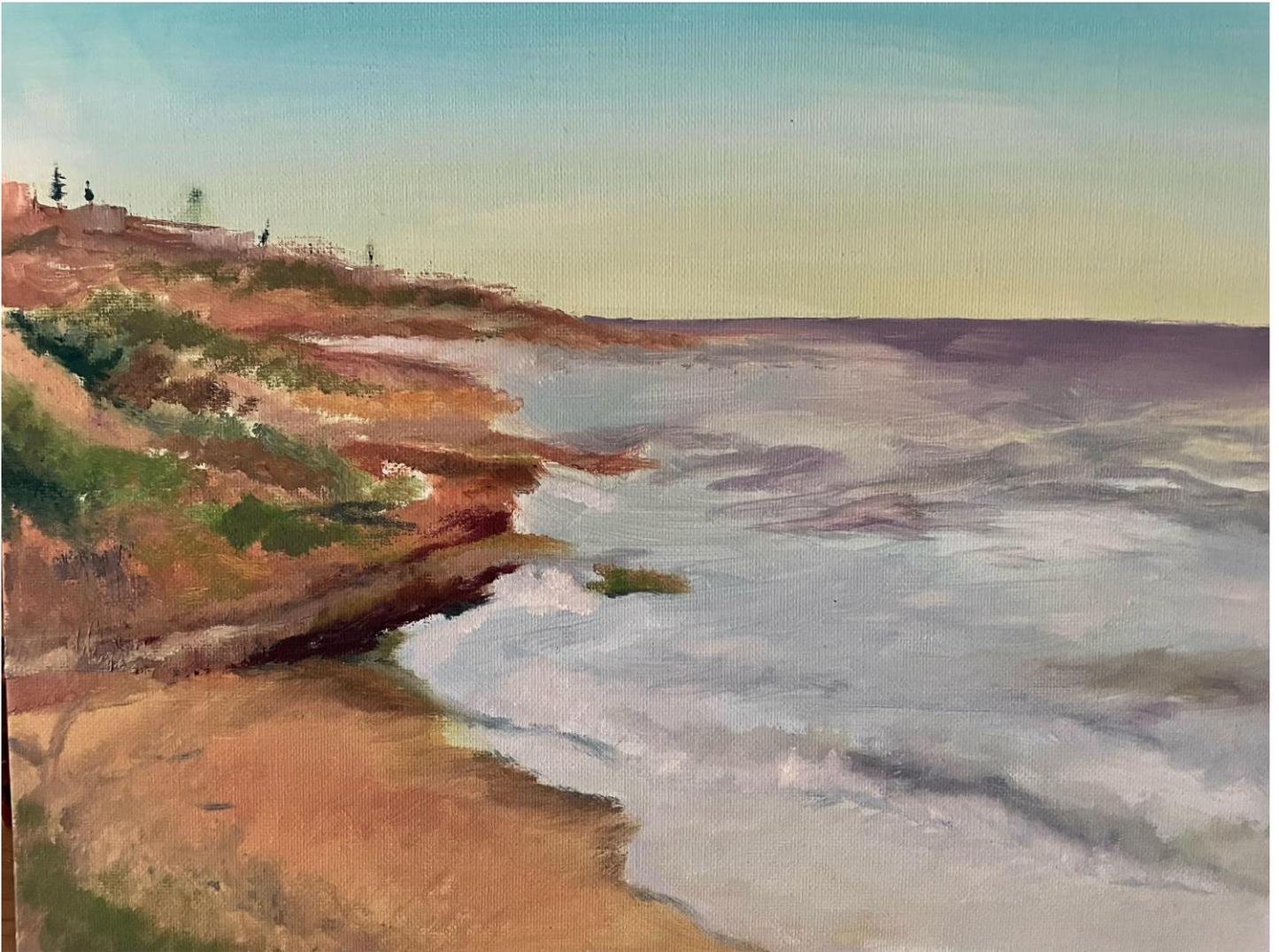
[Coqui and Owls](#)

This is the sound that I synthesized myself:

[Coqui Synthesized](#)



Back to the Shore
By Juliana Seedorf



Juliana is a Nature Initiative alumni and attends SUNY New Paltz where she is studying Psychology and Art

Alumni Spotlight

Ever wonder what happens after students graduate out of our programs? We connected with some of our alumni from Avalon's youth programs to see where they are now! Meet them below!



Samantha Post

Participated in the S.T.A.T.E. Program from 2011-2013 (Students Taking Action for Tomorrow's Environment – which has changed to Nature Initiative)

Samantha graduated from SUNY Plattsburgh with a Bachelor's Degree in Environmental Studies

Favorite experiences, stories, or Avalon memories:

I met many people through the S.T.A.T.E. program, including friends that I will have for life. One of our ongoing jokes comes from an event several years ago: we were having "STATE PB&J, when a volunteer called the ends of the bread "the Montauk". We all thought it was so funny that we started using this phrase. It still makes me laugh to this day!

Your typical day: Right now, I am working in animal care at the Living Shores Aquarium in New Hampshire (lorikeets mainly, along with Asian Small Clawed otters and various invertebrates/reptiles/amphibians once or twice a week).

How did our programs at Avalon inspire you?

Volunteering with S.T.A.T.E. and Sweetbriar Nature Center (my other regular volunteer gig at the time) inspired me to look into an environmental major.

Favorite hobby: Whether it's books, movies or a TV show, I LOVE science fiction and fantasy!

Advice you would give to a high school student:

Don't let anyone tell you that a professional field is dumb and/or above you. My parents weren't originally thrilled that I was looking into environmental majors, but they came around. I will probably never be a millionaire, but I'll be happy overall!

Career goals/future plans:

For now, I'm happy being an "Animal Care Professional" (it's hilarious how many different ways organizations can describe an animal keeper job). Eventually, I want to make my way up the ladder, and become a Lead/Senior Keeper. When I cannot physically do a keeper's job anymore, I will hopefully be able to get a curator job.



Emily Correia-Lambton

Completed the Environmental Stewardship Program in 2010 (now called Natural Connections) and participated in S.T.A.T.E. from 2011-2013 (now Nature Initiative).

Emily graduated from SUNY New Paltz with a Bachelor's degree in Adolescence Education (Earth Science) and she has a Master's degree from Mississippi State University (online program) in Environmental Geoscience.

Favorite experiences, stories, or Avalon memories:

One of the many fond Avalon memories I have is from the Natural Connections trip to New England. On a day we were planning to summit a mountain, we awoke to torrential rain, so we donned our waterproof gear and set off. The hike was challenging due to the slipperiness; I remember points where the trail more closely resembled a stream. The view at the summit was anticlimactic—the wind was howling and the fog was so thick that we couldn't see more than twenty feet in front of us. It was so cold that Doug Elliot did a set of push-ups; he insisted it was the best way to keep warm. As we descended, the rain ceased, the cloud base lifted, and we were greeted by a beautiful sunny day when we finally reached the trailhead. Afterward, we went to Ben & Jerry's and completely gorged ourselves on ice cream—it was truly a perfect day!

Advice you would give to a high school student: The best advice I can give is that you don't have to be good *at* something in order for it to be good *for* you—pursue whatever brings you joy. If you're not sure what that is yet, don't fret—figuring it out may take time, trial and error, or putting yourself out there. It might be uncomfortable or scary. While there's no "age limit" on trying new things, high school is a unique, fleeting period where your access to activities is abundant, so it's the perfect time to explore new things or spend time doing what you enjoy.

Career goals/future plans: My future plans are to travel when I can, take art classes in my free time, and continue spending time with the people I love.

Your typical day: I taught high school Earth science in upstate New York for four years and now work as an editor for a science communication and technology company.

Favorite hobby: Reading, aka staying up *way* past my bedtime.

How did our programs at Avalon inspire you?

Being involved at Avalon was one of the largest influences on the trajectory of my life. The summer I participated in Natural Connections was one with many "firsts" for me: first mountain summited, first night spent in a lean-to, first ultimate Frisbee game, and first feelings of empowerment and true belonging. In the decade since then, I have gone on countless hikes and camping trips throughout the northeast, been on weeks-long field excursions in Arizona and New Mexico, and backpacked on a section of the Appalachian Trail. Growing up, I had always loved nature, but the experiences I had with Avalon made me feel confident in both myself and my abilities outdoors.



Ben Prigg

Completed the Yellowstone Immersion Program in 2019 and participated in Nature Initiative from 2018-2020

Ben is currently a junior at Binghamton University.

Favorite experiences, stories, or Avalon memories: By the last day of the Yellowstone Immersion program, we hadn't seen any wolves, coyotes, or bears. That morning we got up particularly early to try and see some wildlife and set up near a river along the road. Amazingly, we got to watch a group of wolf pups play, chaperoned by two adults, right across the river from us. At the same time there were coyote pups howling on the hill behind us. It was a pretty incredible experience. Later that day we saw a black bear and a mama grizzly bear and her cub. That was certainly a day I'll never forget.

Major/Area of Study: B.S. in Environmental Science (Ecology track) and a geography minor in Environmental Resource Management.

How did our programs at Avalon inspire you?

The Nature Initiative made me realize I really enjoyed doing field work and working outdoors in general. It inspired a strong interest in working with nature and wildlife. The Yellowstone Immersion Program really cemented my passion for the outdoors and convinced me to study environmental science and go into an environmental/nature related career path. Both programs were very formative for me and helped me become the person I am today!

Favorite hobby: Hiking and camping! I'm one of the vice presidents of the Binghamton Outdoors Club.

Advice you would give to a high school student:

Don't panic or think you need to have any idea what you want to study, let alone do in life, right now. Pretty much all universities don't require you to declare a major until the end of your sophomore year. As you take your basic intro classes and get involved with clubs and such, you'll almost certainly get a better idea of what you want to do. And even if you don't, it's fine!

Career goals/future plans: I'm considering working for a federal agency like the NPS, BLM, or FWS and doing fieldwork. I may also go into environmental planning.

Project Highlight: Aquatic Invasive Species Removal at Frank Melville Park



Teen volunteers in kayaks tackle invasive aquatic plants at Frank Melville Memorial Park. Photo by Robert Reuter

Volunteers help rid Setauket pond of invasive plants

BY RITA J. EGAN
RITA@TBRNEWSMEDIA.COM

Local volunteers recently took on invaders of the natural kind at Frank Melville Memorial Park.

VILLAGE Park volunteers and staff members joined forces with Four Harbors Audubon Society members and teen volunteers from Avalon Park's Nature Initiative on Oct. 16. Their goal was to rid the FMMP pond of non-native and invasive aquatic plants.

Setauket-based environmentalist John Turner informed the FMMP board that water hyacinth and water lettuce in the pond were dangerous plants. It was the first time someone spotted them in the pond. Turner was leading the Nighthawk Watch at the park with members of the local Audubon society when the plants were observed.

The volunteers first went out on the pond via kayaks to pull, gather and bag the plants. FMMP trustee Luci Betti-Nash, who also is on the board of Four Harbors Audubon Society, was on hand for the cleanup. She said the team cleaned out the northern section of the pond and part of the southern portion. Betti-Nash said there are still more plants in the most southern portion of the pond. These, she said, will be taken care of at a later date. She added there is a possibility they may die off in the winter. If the winter is a mild one, the floating plants can potentially take root and survive.

"It's important to nip it in the bud, get them out as soon as you can," she said.

Within a month of the plants being discovered, Betti-Nash said, "they multiplied enormously."

She said the teen volunteers have helped with cleanups in the park in the past to pull out invasive species, including vines such as porcelain berry and mile-a-minute, that take over trees.

Generally, the kayaks used by the teens this

time around are not allowed on the pond, which Betti-Nash said made it more fun than past volunteer jobs.

"They really enjoyed it, and they did a great job," she said. "They worked really hard."

Turner said if the plants weren't pulled out of the water, they could cause issues over a few years.

"If they're not controlled and then eradicated within a fairly short period of time — probably within a year or two or three — the entire pond surface will be covered with these plants and create a whole series of adverse environmental conditions," he said.

Among the detrimental ecological effects would be wading birds, such as egrets, green herons and belted kingfishers, which depend on visually seeing fish, not being able to find food to survive and feed their young.

"People just aren't aware of the problem that these plants pose," Turner said.

He added the plants, that are native in South America, have caused problems in the southern United States. The decomposition process pulls oxygen out of the water and leads to an excess of nitrogen, which happens often in Long Island and coastal waters.

"It's of great concern, because it could adversely impact both turtles and, certainly, fish that would suffocate," Turner said.

Betti-Nash and Turner said they only have theories as to how the plants wound up in the pond and no definitive answers. Many people use them for decorative purposes in their personal koi ponds. However, the naturalists are not aware of anyone dumping the plants in the park's pond as sometimes happens when people get rid of aquarium products into freshwater ponds, which is not recommended. Seeds can also get stuck on birds and, when the animal lands, the grains can be introduced to an area, which is also a possibility.

Upcoming Projects:

- Seal Walk: 1/8 from 1:30-3:30 PM at Cupsogue Beach County Park
- Solar System Model: 1/15 from 10:00 AM-12:00 PM at the Avalon Barn
- Winter Seed Sowing: 1/20 from 4:00-6:00 PM at the Avalon Barn
- Bluebird Nest Boxes: 1/21 from 11:00 AM-1:30 PM at the Avalon Barn
- Seal Walk: 1/28 from 9:30-11:30 AM at Crane Neck Beach



Volunteers Nick Palmero (left) and Sean Skinner (right) stand in front of the newly installed Kindness Garden sign which they were instrumental in creating.

Building an 18th Century Whaleboat

By Kayla Serina

Did you know that Setauket and Port Jefferson Harbor played an integral role in the Culper Spy Ring during the American Revolutionary War? The “spy ring” was organized by Major Benjamin Tallmadge, consisting of a small group of trustworthy men and women from Setauket. Although it was not revealed until 1929, the spies successfully gathered intelligence on British forces occupying New York City and Long Island. They reported their discoveries to General George Washington, commander of the Continental Army. The Culper Spy Ring achieved more than any other American or British intelligence network during the course of the war.

Fast forward to modern times, we have been working on a unique project at the Bayles Boat Shop located in Port Jefferson Village. Mayor Margot Garant and village historian Chris Ryon approached the nonprofit who operates the boat shop (called “Long Island Seaport and Eco Center”) with a proposal to recreate a whaleboat from the American Revolution era. Len Carolan and the LISEC Board of Directors happily agreed to partner on the project. The goal for this project is to tell the story about Port Jefferson’s role (particularly the Roe family’s role) in the spy ring and to honor Port Jefferson’s maritime history.

This whaleboat will be 25 feet long, about 6 feet wide, and will weigh up to a ton. The project will take approximately two years to complete and funding will be secured by donations/grants. The building plans are by William A Baker, who was a naval architect specializing in historic reproduction ship and design of American Colonial era vessels. The plans were acquired from the MIT museum.

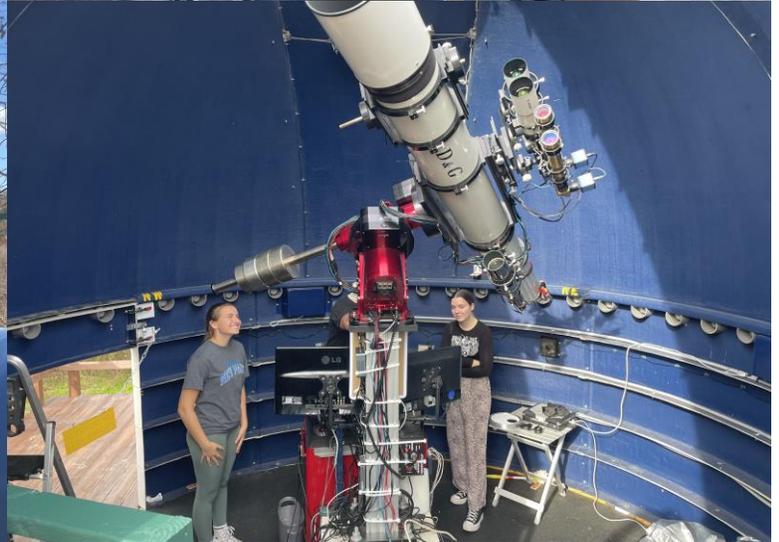
When we spoke about continuing Nature Initiative’s partnership with LISEC on doing a boat building program throughout the school year, Len brought up the idea of having the students craft the wooden oars. This is different than anything we’ve ever done before- in the past, we worked on builds from stitch and glue kits which use laser cut pieces of plywood. It was an exciting opportunity and this year we accepted 5 high school juniors to the program. Each student will learn how to use drawknives, spokeshaves and wood planing tools. All the large-scale cuts on the band saw will be performed by boat shop staff, creating a teaching moment for the student group to observe. Staying true to the times, we are using as little power tools as possible and no epoxy will be used on the boat. The students began working on this project in late October and we are expecting it to run until May 2023. They are doing an amazing job so far and I look forward to seeing their finished products!



5 high school juniors work with various tools on practice oars







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Our mailing address is:
200 Harbor Road
Stony Brook, NY 11790