



SUMMER 2023 NEWSLETTER



Fields of Gold by Kayla Serina

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A Message from the Program Coordinator

Each summer always goes by in the blink of an eye, and this year was no different. As I walk around the meadows, it is so quiet I can hear the bees buzzing around the beautiful blooms of goldenrod. Summer may be over, but with new seasons come new opportunities.

We definitely had some unique experiences this summer- we witnessed baby terrapins hatching out of their eggs (a first!), watched a large American eel slither through clam cages, held purple urchins, met a few recovering cold stun sea turtle patients and explored some new places. Wherever we go, adventure always seems to find us!

You may have also noticed us out on the trails, along the boardwalk or in the parking lots on Shep Jones Lane. As we prepare for an expansion of over 70 acres, our volunteers have been assisting on visitor counts. These "foot traffic surveys" are important in making informed land management decisions in order to maintain a healthy balance between plants, animals and people. Achieving this balance is critical especially as we continue to work on restoring pristine native habitat.

This summer, we had a total of 52 students attend our projects which is an increase from last year. It's always nice to see new faces and feel a welcoming presence among our other volunteers. I always enjoy hearing conversation and the silliness around the campfire, in the garden, or on the water. As always, thank you to our students who continue to build community and create a positive impact. We are continuously learning and discovering new things, which is one of the best parts of being in nature!

I hope you all have a wonderful school year, overcome new challenges, and create lasting memories!

Enjoy the sunshine,

Kayla



Volunteers holding terrapin hatchlings to be released into the marsh at West Meadow

“If You Owned a Garden” By Erinn Luo

if you owned a garden,
would the peonies be bright and
lavishing? would earthworms bury
themselves in the soil,
carving their tunnels until the nutrients ran through
the veins? would it flourish into your pride? would it
become everything you dreamed it would be?
or would the weeds creep in, trying to corrupt the
cycle? would the potato bugs nibble and chew on the
leaves
of your prized carnations?
would the caretaking become too much?
lightning may come and sting, the rain may
wash away all the sunshine and butterflies that
adorn your garden, but the birds will sing their
tune,
a tune of a green forest after
a fire, a tune of a new shirt
after bleach,
a tune of new flowers after dogs trampling on
them. sow and reap,
there were bugs in every successful system.

About the Author:

Erinn is a Nature Initiative participant who has been interested in writing for 4 years now. Her favorite creative pieces to write are flash fictions and poems are her second favorite!

“Sarsaparilla” By Benjamin Mears



*Benjamin is a Nature Initiative participant who has been studying plants for about a year.
His favorite is the American Chestnut!*

Alumni Corner

Congratulations to our 2023 Graduates!!



Nadia Matthew (left)
Stony Brook University
Major: Biomedical Engineering



Leana Bergen (right)
Marist College
Major: Human Biology
Minor: Psychology



Gianna Oliveri (left)
Saint Joseph's College
Major: Mathematics
Cosmetology License



Aidan Matthew *(left)*

City College of New York (CUNY)

Major: Civil Engineering with a concentration in coastal or structural engineering

Hayley LaValle *(right)*

Sacred Heart University

Major: Social Work



Will McMullan *(left)*

SUNY Binghamton University

Major: Business Administration with a concentration in quantitative finance

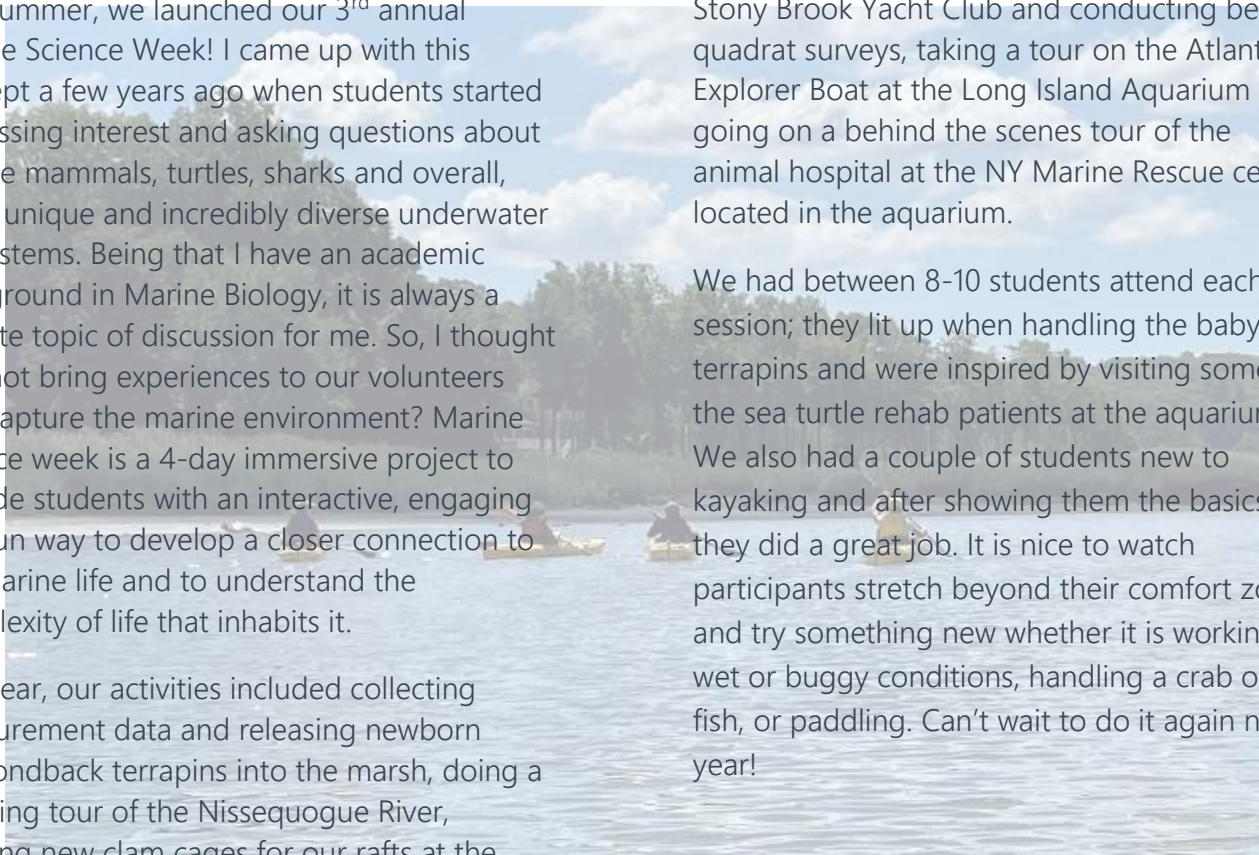
Project Spotlight: Marine Science Week

This summer, we launched our 3rd annual Marine Science Week! I came up with this concept a few years ago when students started expressing interest and asking questions about marine mammals, turtles, sharks and overall, these unique and incredibly diverse underwater ecosystems. Being that I have an academic background in Marine Biology, it is always a favorite topic of discussion for me. So, I thought why not bring experiences to our volunteers that capture the marine environment? Marine Science week is a 4-day immersive project to provide students with an interactive, engaging and fun way to develop a closer connection to the marine life and to understand the complexity of life that inhabits it.

This year, our activities included collecting measurement data and releasing newborn diamondback terrapins into the marsh, doing a kayaking tour of the Nissequogue River, building new clam cages for our rafts at the

Stony Brook Yacht Club and conducting benthic quadrat surveys, taking a tour on the Atlantis Explorer Boat at the Long Island Aquarium and going on a behind the scenes tour of the animal hospital at the NY Marine Rescue center located in the aquarium.

We had between 8-10 students attend each session; they lit up when handling the baby terrapins and were inspired by visiting some of the sea turtle rehab patients at the aquarium. We also had a couple of students new to kayaking and after showing them the basics they did a great job. It is nice to watch participants stretch beyond their comfort zones and try something new whether it is working in wet or buggy conditions, handling a crab or fish, or paddling. Can't wait to do it again next year!



Boat Build 2022-2023

1776 Whaleboat Project

16-foot oars

Volunteers dedicated 8 months to this large-scale building project throughout the course of the school year.

Congratulations to a job well done!



My Favorite Moment By Kayla Serina

One of my favorite moments this summer was on the terrapin project at West Meadow. In the second to last week of August, we headed to the beach on what seemed to be a cooler morning and we weren't expecting to see much. We helped the Friends of Flax Pond uncover some of the first nests laid in the beginning of the season to monitor the status of hatching activity.

Due to the way the nests are protected, we need to start checking a week or two prior to the expected hatching time in order for the turtles to emerge from the nest properly. On the last dig with 20 minutes left in our program, we carefully uncovered a nest with eggs that were moving! One by one, each egg revealed a cracked line that broke open. We watched as the turtles saw the world for the first time. It was magical for all of us, and I loved seeing everyone's faces light up as they watched this for the first time. It was an adventure to be remembered!

P.S. This nest was laid by a terrapin who was tagged in 2013!

Click on the icon below to watch the terrapin hatching video!



*Photo taken by Bert Conover, Friends of Flax Pond
Volunteer/Veterinarian*

Upcoming Projects:

- Youngs Island Beach Cleanup: 9/30 from 9:30 AM-3:00 PM @ Brookhaven Kayak Launch
- A Day in the Life of the Nissequogue: 10/6 from 4:00 PM-6:00 PM @ Paul T Given Park
- Eelgrass Restoration Workshop: 10/7 from 10:00 AM-12:00 PM @ Avalon Barn
- Arcadia Fall Cleanup: 10/20 from 4:00 PM-6:00 PM @ Avalon Barn
- Three Village Arboretum Daffodil Planting: 10/21 from 10:00 AM-12:00 PM @ The Bates House (Frank Melville)
- Monthly Foot Traffic Survey: 10/22 from 9:00 AM-1:00 PM @ Avalon Barn
- Halloween Coastal Cleanup: 10/28 from 10:00 AM-12:00 PM @ West Meadow Beach



Frog Frenzy!

By Kayla Serina

This has been a very exciting year at the upper pond at Avalon! Since the pond has been renovated, it's been attracting more wildlife especially frogs! I was told by many visitors and staff that there were the highest number of frogs they've ever seen in the pond. One of our Seedlings counted around 70 frogs in one morning! So, I headed to the pond to see what it was all about.


When I arrived, I saw a few smaller frogs sitting on the stones in the waterfall and then went to the pond. I didn't see much on a first glance other than duckweed, but as I squatted down and took a closer look, they were everywhere! I counted about 30 in one small section of plant matter on the surface, as they just had revealed a tiny portion of their heads. Sometimes upon further inspection you can only see their eyes, with the tops of their heads being covered with duckweed. All of the frogs I saw that afternoon were green frogs (*Lithobates clamitans*). You could get pretty close if you snuck up on them without scaring them off. It served as its own attraction as park goers stopped and squatted down to view all the frogs.

I wondered why this was such a big summer for green frogs in this particular area. I started to hypothesize- maybe because the pond serves as a good territory with the right balance of floating vegetation, maybe because the pond is overall larger and deeper with enough shallow areas and rocks for the frogs to sit on, or maybe the absence of predators.

Whatever the answer is, the conditions seemed like a perfect fit for them and there were green frogs of all sizes enjoying the pond. Hopefully you'll have a chance to get to the upper pond on a sunny day before the first freeze! It's definitely worth a visit to check it out!


Facts About the Green Frog

Lithobates clamitans




Male or Female?

♂ **Males:** the disc-shaped tympanum (eardrum) is larger in diameter than the eye
 ♀ **Females:** the tympanum is the same size or smaller in diameter than the eye




Communication

Larger males will make calls that are lower in frequency to indicate body condition to females. Male territories




Reproduction

External fertilization, occurs in shallow water. One female can lay 1,000-7,000 eggs at a time! The eggs floating at the surface can merge with those of other females creating dense mats. Eggs hatch within 3-5 days



Diet

Green frogs are opportunistic feeders and will eat a variety of arthropods, mollusks, other amphibians & reptiles, moths, snails, small fish and crayfish- they are not picky and will go for larger prey!



Hibernation

Most frogs will go into a period of brumation, a type of hibernation where all activity will shut down in the winter months. They may burrow themselves into the mud at the bottom of a pond to prevent freezing. Frogs circulate glucose throughout their major organs to prevent ice crystals from forming inside organ tissue.

Lifespan: 5-6 years in the wild, up to 10 years in captivity

Habitat: lakes, streams, ponds, wetlands, ephemeral ponds

2 subspecies based on range: Northern green frog and bronze frog (southern)

IUCN Conservation Status: Least Concern





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