



Young Naturalists Newsletter



BABY TERRAPIN
BY ELLA HENRY

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PROGRAM COORDINATOR

»»» *Kayla Serina*

Buggy nights with headlamps wading by moonlight, hot sunny beach days searching for turtles, rainy gardening days (and there were plenty of them!), getting muddy at low tide and discovering fish skeletons, paddling, roasting marshmallows and singing/dancing. Core summer memories and new friendships were made! Parents, I apologize that your children often came home from the yacht club with the pungent odor of low tide especially with wet and muddy clothes. We really immersed ourselves in nature and connected with the community and each other, which is what it's truly all about!

Even though almost every single Arcadia Day got rained out, it didn't stop our momentum with keeping the opportunities coming. We spent more time concentrating our efforts on terrapin monitoring this year and because of the extra assistance of our volunteers, 18 nests were protected and 208 hatchlings were released which is a record high! We even witnessed multiple clutches of eggs hatching in the nests!

Another unique experience we had was participating in a hands on water quality analysis activity with research technicians from the Gobler Lab at Stony Brook University. Students learned more about different types of field sampling techniques, the effects of algal growth and rising nutrient levels on the harbor, larval recruitment and spawning cycles of oysters. It will be interesting to see the results of this study parallel to our water quality and growth rate measurements of shellfish within the same watershed.

While we had many recurring volunteers, we welcomed over 20 new Nature Initiative students since April! You are the backbone of what makes this program a success and as always I can't thank you enough. I receive feedback from other organizations periodically and they continue to be impressed with how hard our volunteers work- you all give 110%! Wishing everyone an exciting and successful school year and I'll see you out there!

Enjoy the sunshine,

Kayla



Margot (L) and Anna (R) from the Gobler Lab, doing a sample collection demonstration for our volunteers

ABOUT THE ARTIST: BABY TERRAPIN

Ella Henry <<<



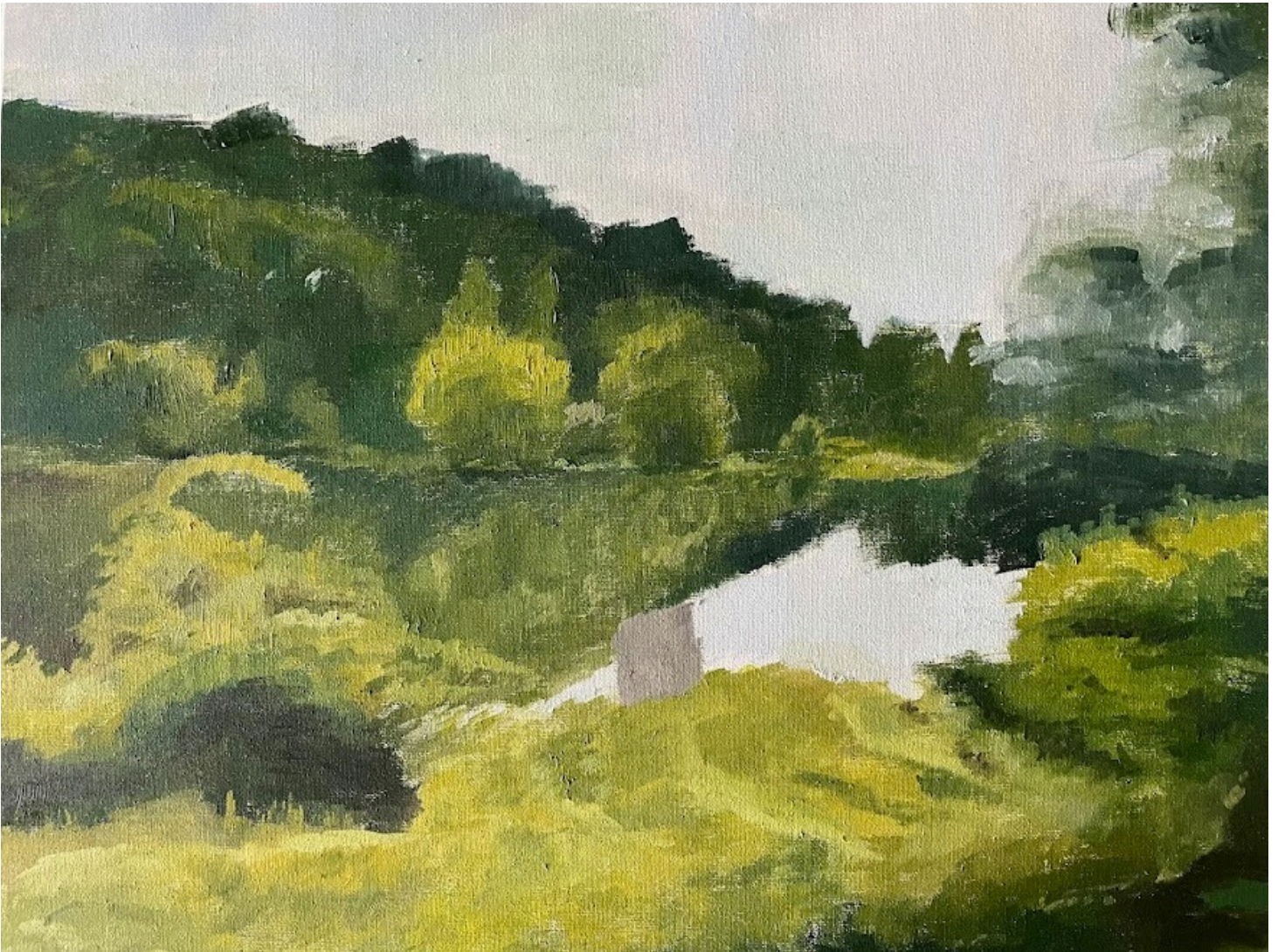
Ella is a Nature Initiative volunteer, ocean lover, and is the featured artist for our cover page! Ella has been interested in art throughout her entire life. She recalls that as a young child doodling made her happy. Ella appreciates all types of art but her favorites are animation and ceramics. Ella's inspiration for the baby terrapin drawing on the cover was a photo she took in the field of a hatchling at West Meadow Beach. Her piece captures the fragility and new journey of a day old terrapin, as we worked to release them in the marsh. You can find Ella outdoors exploring and she will carefully handle any crab, turtle or other marine life!

This is a beautiful drawing, thank you for your contribution Ella!

FRANK MELVILLE MEMORIAL PARK

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By Jonah Booerboom



Meet the Artist

Jonah is a Nature Initiative participant who has loved art for as long as he can remember. He enjoys painting landscapes such as this oil painting he did on canvas of Frank Melville Memorial Park in Setauket. Jonah started painting with oils about two years ago and it has become his favorite medium to use.

MORALS AND MOLLUSKS

By Medini Sistla



"Dark Lightning"
the injured goose

So here I was, on a Tuesday morning, standing on wet grass as my mother drove away leaving us in a harbor smelling of salt and fish, as the sun rose high and bloated into the sky. Well more specifically, The Stony Brook Yacht Club and yes, to people this scenario might sound familiar. Why? Well, my dearest gentle reader, this starts most Shellfish Monitoring events. You might need clarification about why I am talking about a fun but mundane day but oh, you are in for a surprise. My sister and I eventually met with the rest of our team for the day and walked toward a parking lot where researchers were waiting for us. They explained that they were monitoring the water quality for the growth of shellfish in the ecosystem and today we would get to learn how they used the tools involved. They asked for some volunteers, and my sister, my friend, and I all volunteered to collect water from the harbor. As I leaned over the water helping my sister dunk the carton in so we could get a good sample and then reel it back - all while avoiding falling in and getting munched on by fish, I had to admit that I was having fun. This surprised me as I usually avoided going anywhere near bodies of water with fish and *shudder* clams and other creepy sea creatures. After, they took us back and showed us how to find the salinity and how to filter the water to get the cleanest sample. This whole procedure took about 30 minutes so as they cleaned up and left, I wondered if the event was that short, and spoiler alert after the next few hours, I was going to wish it was. We walked to a pavilion where one of our supervisors went to get waders, something I wish I had stayed ignorant of. We chose our waders and as we put them on we saw a goose wandering around, limping as it approached us. Concerned, our (amazing) supervisor Kayla, called an animal rescue for help. In honor of this glorious animal my friends and I decided to bequeath it a name which was Dark Lightning named after my too-big waders. As we geared up some more with a net and some other tools, we all waddled toward the water like a family of very scientific walruses.

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The shore we waded into



Obtaining a water quality sample
with SBU researchers

Morals and Mollusks (cont'd.)

Dear reader, this is where I warn you that if you have a fear of creepy sea animals like sea squirts, clams, jumping shrimp, and a whole lot of dead fish, beware as that is exactly what I encountered. Have you ever seen somebody vacuum seal food? Well, that is what the waders felt like around my legs and waist. What proceeded was a lot of whining, screaming, and yelling from me, as we waded waist-deep into the water to get out of the traps that house our clams. The traps, however, were covered in sea squirts, which dear reader, I hope you never have the misfortune of seeing. However, after taking the crates out of the sea and measuring the clams inside the traps for info, I eventually settled into a rhythm. I realized that I was enjoying myself and it was not as scary as I thought it was going to be. Now, I didn't write this whole story just to complain, this story has an important lesson I learned that day. If you are too scared to do something, you might miss out on a world of things you have never seen before. For example, before this event, I had never gotten to touch a fish, but here I did. So in conclusion, if you are ever in a situation like this, take a deep breath and appreciate what you are getting from the experience and the quality time you are spending with the people around you. Don't let the fear overtake your enjoyment.



Meet the Author

Medini is a Nature Initiative volunteer who enjoys storytelling and creative writing. Medini's favorite area of interest in writing is fantasy and informal articles, although this one is a true story of her first hand experience with creepy sea creatures. Medini has also been passionate about photography from a young age.

SUMMER SETTING

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By Deia Colosi



Meet the Artist

Deia has been involved in Seedlings, Nature Initiative and the Natural Connections programs at Avalon. She is passionate about art and has been taking classes from a very young age. This particular piece is a chalk painting that Deia worked on for two days at Studio 268 in East Setauket. The inspiration for this painting was Setauket Harbor and Deia says this reminds her of the sunset of summer.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

➤➤➤ We reconnected with some of our alumni from Avalon's youth programs to see where they are now! Meet them below!



Dylan Matlin

Participated in Nature Initiative from 2017-2021 (formerly called S.T.A.T.E.)

Prior to Nature Initiative, Dylan did Miss Sue's Seedlings Program!

Dylan will be graduating from Stony Brook University in December 2024

➤➤➤ **Major/Area of Study:** Business Management with a Specialization in Marketing

➤➤➤ **Favorite hobby:** Biking – I love to road bike and mountain bike. The rush from mountain biking + the feeling of being outside = amazing.

➤➤➤ **How did our programs at Avalon inspire you?** Showed me the importance of nature in my life. I always love being outside whether that takes the form of kayaking, biking, or hiking I love it all! Nowadays, I believe a lot of people lose that connection to nature and do not realize how good it is for you mentally to breathe that fresh air and have the peace and quiet it provides.

➤➤➤ **Favorite experiences, stories or Avalon memories:** I will always remember the Avalon Night Hike in the snow! It was so beautiful and quiet in the woods at night. That hike still crosses my mind each winter. I wish it snowed like it used to!

➤➤➤ **Advice you would give to a high school student:** You don't need to know what you want to do with your life when you enter college. Tune out the noise from those robotic guidance counselors and figure out what interests you as you find yourself. There is so much pressure to know what you want to do for the rest of your life and that just creates unnecessary stress. My other piece of advice is INTERNSHIPS, INTERNSHIPS, INTERNSHIPS. Not only are they a way to make solid money as a student, but they help give you that real-world office experience and help you find what you like and don't like. My internships helped me find something I love that I want to do for a career. I even received multiple full-time offers before graduation from my internships!

➤➤➤ **Career goals/future plans:** I am moving to Miami, where I accepted a position at Royal Caribbean Group's corporate headquarters. I will be joining the E-Commerce Strategy team! I have always been passionate about cruising and can't wait to see myself grow at RCG.

THE DEVASTATION OF MILL POND

By Kayla Serina



After enjoying a pleasant weekend upstate hiking at Chittenago Falls State Park, my family and I returned home on Sunday early evening ahead of the weather to come. Little did I know parts of the island were going to see 10 inches of rain. Of course on that Monday I had an Arcadia Day planned. For those of you who aren't familiar, Arcadia is our organic vegetable garden at the barn and serves as a shared space for volunteers to come together and put their hands in the dirt and to learn to grow different things. I have had a proven track record of scheduling Arcadia events all summer on terrible weather days, even when there was no sight of clouds in the forecast so its become a bit of a running joke.

Anyway all joking aside, I arrived back to my home on the south shore. Several hours after going to sleep I was woken by a shudder of thunder followed by the whistling sound of wind and water bouncing off the roof. It calmed down a bit and I thought it must've just been a typical thunderstorm, and back to sleep I went. The next morning, I drove north and was definitely surprised by what I saw. Branches and downed trees, patches of asphalt carved from the roads, water rising to fill Shep Jones Lane like a miniature river. Having no idea what happened, I continued to the barn. As I parked my car, I looked at my phone after all the "dings" and alerts I had heard while on the road. And then I saw it- a video of some location on Harbor Road with water rushing through mirroring the gorge I hiked to a couple of days prior. I thought to myself, "that is wild, I wonder where that happened". I couldn't actually believe that it was the T. Bayles Minuse Mill Pond (otherwise known as the "duck pond") washing away before my eyes.

Over its history, the dam has broke on multiple occasions with the most recent one taking place over a century ago. It has been the first time anyone in the community has seen such a thing. Interestingly enough, the mill which was erected in 1751 survived the breach of surging water nearly untouched as basements and houses were washed away, flowing through the harbor. Dams were originally built for a variety of uses including ice harvesting, growing cranberries, generating hydropower to operate mills, forming artificial lakes and ponds, and more. In modern times, many of these dams no longer serve a purpose.

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Drone footage depicting the damage to Mill Pond on August 19th

The Devastation of Mill Pond (cont'd.)



I walked up to the boardwalk and across the way I saw hundreds of people just staring at this empty, muddy hole in complete awe just as I was. This pond has served as a focal point, a gathering space and was reminisced fondly by those who grew up in the community. The effects were devastating- carp were belly up, cormorants, herons, ducks and geese were quickly retreating from the area, and there was concern about the survivability of various turtle species. It was very disorienting and raised a lot of questions: "Is it safe for trained personnel to enter the quickly sinking mud to rescue the animals?", "What can people do to help?", "How long will it take to repair the roads that collapsed?"

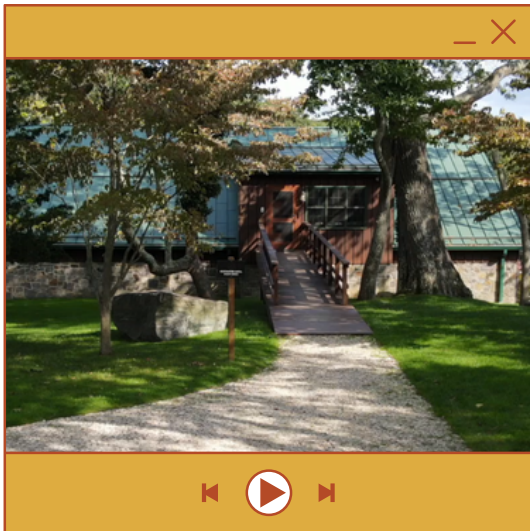
When you tune out the noise, the answers usually follow. Emergency crews were working for a week to remove downed trees entangled in power lines, first responders, volunteer firefighters, village and county police were responding to a long list of calls and securing the area, the highway department was on site assessing the damage and repairing surrounding roadways, public officials were keeping the community apprised of the situation, and several groups organized cleanups. Although the future of the pond is uncertain, the one thing that remains true is that it's amazing what people can do when they come together.

P.S. Several turtles were rescued by Strong Island Animal Rescue, including a 70 pound snapping turtle!



Turtle tracks (L) and Frank Florida from Strong Island Animal Rescue recovering a snapping turtle (below)





HIKING THE MEADOWS



Following the Mill Pond collapse, Avalon was temporarily closed for a couple of weeks. While our maintenance crew worked diligently to reroute the trails and get everything back on track, I had some drone fun while the preserve was unoccupied. Click on the video to the left to check out the footage of a virtual hike through the meadows of Avalon!

Click the play button to join
us on a virtual hike!



»» WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO



UPCOMING PROJECTS

- October 12th • Shellfish Seeding
9:00 AM-11:00 AM @ Stony Brook Yacht Club Beach
- October 14th • Rotary Garden Fall Cleanup
10:00 AM-12:00 PM @ Sand Street
- October 19th • Eelgrass Restoration Workshop
10:00 AM - 12:30 PM @ Avalon Barn
- October 20th • Fall Planting Day at Sweetbriar
11:00 AM - 1:30 PM @ Sweetbriar Nature Center
- October 26th • Halloween Beach Cleanup
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM @ West Meadow Beach

Please register on our website if you would like to attend!

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