



# Young Naturalists Newsletter



MOUNT SINAI HARBOR AT SUNRISE BY JONAH BOERBOOM

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# »»» A MESSAGE FROM THE PROGRAM COORDINATOR

This season brings a change of pace - the days are shorter, the air is crisp and the trees are releasing their leaves to embrace the months ahead. Most of the vibrant blooms are replaced by dried out seed heads but the structure and texture in this season are just as beautiful. The birds are picking out seeds to nourish themselves before beginning their long migratory journeys and an occasional monarch butterfly flutters by. As we begin to transition to quieter days, our efforts are just as great!

We wrapped up the summer by releasing around 150 diamondback terrapin hatchlings, enjoying a kayaking tour of Stony Brook Harbor while observing many juvenile osprey soaring above us, releasing approximately 60,000 oysters and clams, prepared and cooked recipes over a campfire using produce from Arcadia, and participated in a couple harbor day festivals.

Clearly we had a fun summer, and I'm looking forward to the coming months. More laughs, shared moments, and immersing ourselves in nature. Our program would not be possible without the assistance of our student volunteers and of course their families so thank you for lending a hand and transporting your children to make this a wonderful experience!

*Enjoy the sunshine,  
Kayla*



## ABOUT THE ARTIST:



*Jonah Boerboom*

Jonah has been a Nature Initiative volunteer since 2024 and is the featured artist for our cover page. Inspired by the landscape of his local harbor, Jonah enjoys working with oil paints for their rich color blending and textural depth. When he's not painting, you can find him exploring the marine environment, with a special interest in shellfish and kelp restoration. Thank you, Jonah, for sharing this beautiful painting with us!



# CRAB SAW SKY

by Deia Colosi



Deia has been part of Avalon's programs since her elementary school days. This is her very first oil painting, created on canvas. When she visits the beach, Deia loves watching hermit crabs and patiently waiting for them to peek out of their shells - she finds them endlessly fascinating.

Thank you, Deia, for sharing this wonderful painting with us!



# TERRAPIN RESCUE

One of our largest scale projects during the summer months is the Terrapin Research program with the Friends of Flax Pond. For the past 20 years, Nancy and her team of volunteers have been monitoring nesting diamondback terrapins at this location. The program takes place in three parts: 1) monitoring nesting activity 2) protecting the nests 3) releasing hatchlings. Monitoring nesting activity takes place from mid June-end of July.

The only way to locate the nest is by actually observing the female laying her eggs. After she has finished nesting, she covers the area with sand and packs it down with her hind flippers, leaving the nest undiscovered. Once nesting season wraps up, we wait to check for hatching to occur. The incubation period for a terrapin is about 60 days, so we begin checking about 1 week prior to the expected hatching date.

Typically, once the nests are laid they are not moved or relocated unless there is a serious threat to the eggs. Nests are protected because foxes and raccoons are major predators and can easily pick up on the scent from the protein surrounding the developing turtle.

Upon checking one of the protected nests, we discovered that it was infested with maggots (fly larvae). Unfortunately, one turtle did not survive and the rest of the eggs were moved to a safe location to complete the hatching process. This can lead to a bacterial infection in the turtles which can make them sick, so they were isolated for a few days. When we went to release the hatchlings, we noticed one of the terrapins appeared to either have it's eyes shut or maybe not have any eyes at all. We knew this turtle would quickly end up being a snack for a hungry predator so Kayla transported it to Sweetbriar Nature Center.

This is where our rescue story comes in...



A typical terrapin nest

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# TERRAPIN RESCUE

(cont'd.)

The Director of Rehab at Sweetbriar was able to give the turtle a soak and cleaned its eyes really well. It did end up opening one eye, and it was concluded that it most likely won't be able to use the other one. It was also determined this hatchling had a respiratory infection and it was treated with a round of antibiotics.

Our little hatchling friend is now being kept at Turtle Rescue of the Hamptons, where it will be held until it grows larger. It will be reevaluated at that point to determine if it is releasable. Overall, we received a good health report from the animal care team and are excited for the little one's future!

If you ever find an injured, sick or orphaned wild animal, please contact the closest wildlife rehab. Depending on the animal there may be rehabs specializing in that area (i.e. turtles, raptors, etc.) Always follow the direction of a trained professional when it comes to transporting these animals, sometimes they will come to you if necessary.

You can find a list DEC licensed wildlife rehabilitators here: [DEC Wildlife Rehabbers](#)

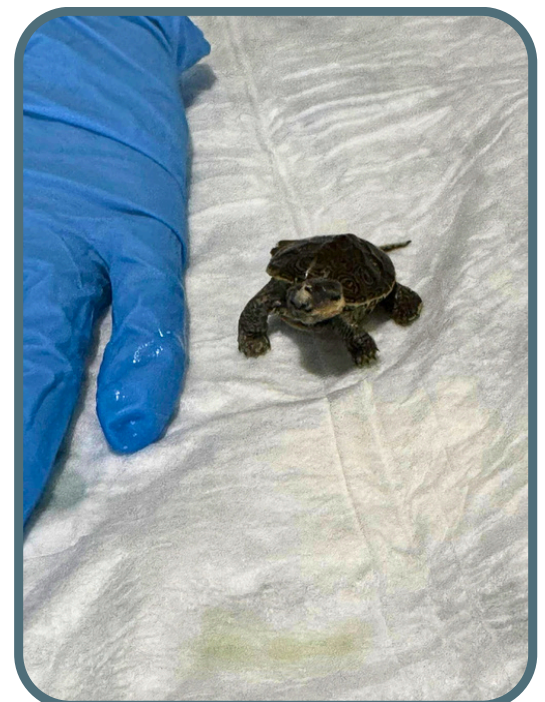
Thank you to [Sweetbriar Nature Center](#) & [Turtle Rescue of the Hamptons](#) for all the incredible work you do!



**Left:** terrapin hatchling in Kayla's car on the way to Sweetbriar



**Right:** photo taken by Turtle Rescue of the Hamptons





# PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: HALF SHELLS FOR HABITAT

Over the last decade, there has been buzz all over Long Island and NY about growing oysters. Historically, oysters were incredibly abundant in our harbors and bays. Since they've been depleted, many groups have been working tirelessly to seed them back into the waterways.

Why restore oysters? Oysters have numerous benefits that contribute to the overall health of an ecosystem. Have you heard the phrase, "one oyster filters 50 gallons of water a day?" This process is called filter feeding, which enables oysters to feed on algae, phytoplankton and other decaying organic matter while expelling clean water back into the environment. Oysters are known as "ecosystem engineers" since they assist in removing excess nutrients from the water.

While live oysters are the key to restoration efforts, oyster shell is just as valuable. When growing naturally in the wild, oysters usually fuse to each other building a reef like structure. Oyster reefs provide habitat for hundreds of species ranging from fish to crabs and snails, combat storm erosion, stabilize shorelines, and provide hard surfaces for oyster larvae to settle on.

As we face climate change, oysters can step in to mitigate some of those effects such as ocean acidification. The calcium carbonate in the shell raises the pH of the water. They can also serve as carbon sinks by storing carbon in their shells.

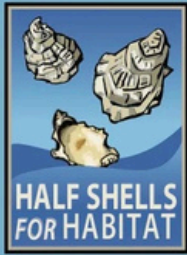
The question is: what are some other ways we can provide these benefits to our harbors/bays using oyster shell? Seatuck Environmental Association has found a solution by initiating and running an island wide project called Half Shells for Habitat. [Half Shells for Habitat](#) is an island-wide oyster shell recovery partnership and the Village of Port Jefferson is newly on board this year!

The simple process occurs in 3 steps: pickup discarded oyster shells from restaurants, pour shell into a temporary staging barrel, and transport the full barrel to the Manorville compost facility in Brookhaven to begin the curing process. According to DEC standards, the shell needs to be cured (dried) for one year before reintroducing back into our waters. The shell will then be used for habitat restoration and "living shoreline" projects.

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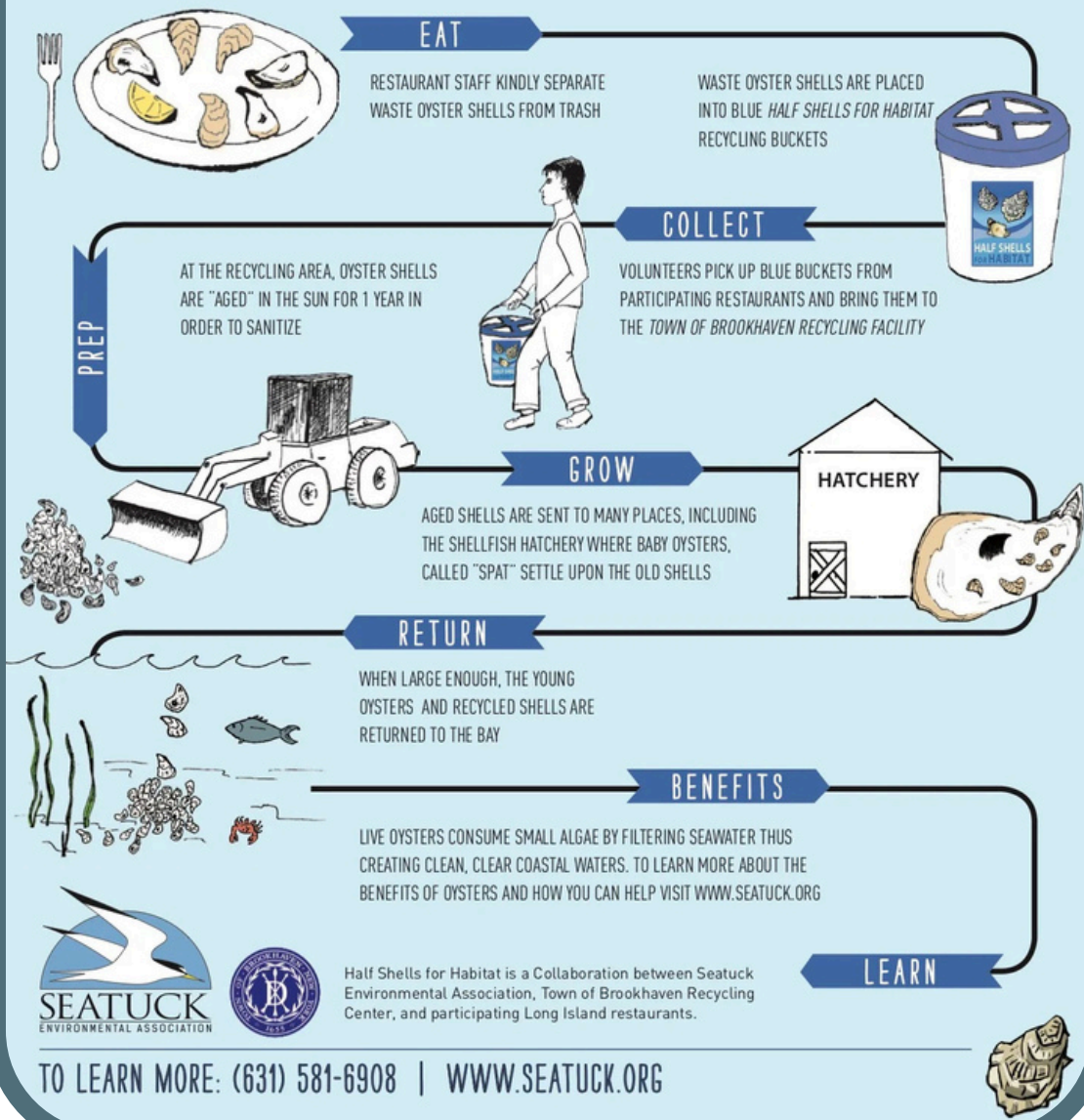


# PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: HALF SHELLS FOR HABITAT



## HALF SHELLS FOR HABITAT OYSTER SHELL RECOVERY PROGRAM

Waste Oyster shells can provide many benefits to our marine ecosystem; they are the perfect base for young oysters to settle on and a natural habitat for many small fish and crabs. As they dissolve, oyster shells protect animals against the effects of coastal acidification. Oyster shells also serve to stabilize our shoreline against destructive storms. But first we must return the shells to the bay!



Special thank you to Seatuck Environmental Association, Bayles Boat Shop, Castaways Steak & Seafood and Nature Initiative volunteers Ella and Aidan for making our first year of this project a success!



# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

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



## BRANDON WINGERT

Participated in Nature Initiative (formerly STATE)  
from 2017-2021

Brandon recently graduated from SUNY College of Environmental Science & Forestry (ESF)

**>>> Your typical day:** Since graduating from SUNY ESF, I am currently applying for jobs at the DEC. Currently waiting for word back for a job digitizing forms and documents. I'm working at Taco Bell in the meantime. I spend most days applying for jobs, it's important to keep applying even if it feels a bit hopeless sometimes. Getting your name in the system is important, it shows interest.

**>>> Major/Area of Study:** I majored in Wildlife Science, mainly working on statistical analysis of populations, and how to use that to manage them.

**>>> Favorite hobby:** HEMA (Historical European Martial Arts). It's basically fencing, but with longswords, spears, and other weapons you don't get to use in fencing.

**>>> How did our programs at Avalon inspire you?**  
The programs are what inspired me to work in environmental conservation. Before, I was a bit aimless, theoretically I was going to be a vet, but I wasn't too motivated about that, it was just something to answer with when asked about my future. These programs introduced me to conservation, and gave me an idea of what I actually wanted to do with my life; to work on remediating damaged ecosystems.

**>>> Favorite experiences, stories or Avalon memories:** The most memorable experience for me was the shellfish restoration project. It was my first internship, and it was much more hands-on than the typical projects I had done. Rather than just getting a slight taste of various conservation efforts, I got to actually work on a long term project. It was nice to feel like I was actually contributing something, and helping to restore the ecosystem. I'd say it's what led me to my current path. Also, I was a bit shy back then, the Nature Initiative was the first group type of thing I joined, so it really brought me out of my shell.

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# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

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## BRANDON WINGERT

(cont'd.)

➤➤➤ **Advice you would give to a high school student:** Pace yourself. Work hard, but rest well (get 8 hours of sleep!) and play a bit. Don't panic if you aren't sure where you are going, most people enter college unsure of their path. And careers aren't always linear, I've talked to graduate students who started out studying a completely different field when they were undergrads. Oh, and please, go to extra help/office hours/whatever your teachers/professors call them. Both in high school and college, I did that, and it was super great. You don't need to be struggling, maybe it's just a single question on the homework you aren't certain on, just poke your head in and ask. It makes the teachers happy, and it's a great chance for them to focus on helping you specifically, so they can explain topics in a way that you understand. Oh, and in college, it also lets you get to know the professor on an individual basis, which is super important for networking. You've got nothing to lose, and a lot to gain. Don't give up, and if you feel overwhelmed, just focus on one foot in front of the other, and try to ask for help, most teachers can be quite understanding.



Mountaintop views from the Adirondacks where Brandon took a field course this spring

➤➤➤ **Career goals/future plans:** I want to work in the DEC, hopefully on population management and/or environmental remediation. I will probably go to graduate school eventually, but I plan on getting a few years of work experience first. Hopefully I can do a lot of field work, and then retire to a desk job doing statistical analysis or management once I'm too old to run around in the field. I think I'd also like to get the next generation involved in conservation, and show them that rather than a hopeless scenario, it's merely a great challenge to overcome, something we can do. I've heard too many people say "Yeah, I'd love to help save the environment, but it's too late now." It's not, and I want people to see that.



# VIDEO HIGHLIGHT: SETAUKET HARBOR DAY



[Click here to watch a clip from Setauket Harbor Day!](#)



# WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO





# WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

(cont'd.)





# UPCOMING PROJECTS



## Pumpkin Carving Workshop



October 23<sup>rd</sup>



4:00 PM-5:30 PM



Avalon Barn



## Jack O' Lantern Walk (Helpers)



October 25<sup>th</sup>



4:00 PM-9:00 PM



Avalon Barn



## Shellfish Seeding



October 26<sup>th</sup>



9:00 AM-11:30 AM



Stony Brook Yacht Club Beach



## Halloween Beach Clean



November 1<sup>st</sup>



10:00 AM-12:00 PM



West Meadow Beach

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

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