EDITION #15

JUNE-SEPT 2026

AVALON NATURE INITIATIVE

Teens rooted in community action

Young Naturalists Newsletter



PAST AND FUTURE, BY ELLA HENRY

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Summer seemed to fly by in the blink of an eye! As always, it was a busy and exciting season, filled with new opportunities and hands-on experiences. From tagging horseshoe crabs by moonlight and protecting terrapin nests in the early morning hours to getting our hands muddy while measuring shellfish, there was never a shortage of adventures.

This year, we also participated in the inaugural Port Jefferson Oyster Jamboree, where our dedicated volunteer shell collectors helped recycle just under 900 pounds of oyster shell! After a year of curing, these shells will be put to good use in oyster reef construction and other local restoration projects.

Continuing our work with oysters and coastal health, Avalon partnered with Save the Sound in May to begin biweekly water quality monitoring in Stony Brook Harbor. For the past six months, our team has been heading out by boat at sunrise to collect samples from eight monitoring stations. Working alongside scientific advisors and regulatory agencies, Save the Sound uses this data to help assess and track the environmental health of bays and harbors throughout the Long Island Sound.

Whether working on the water, along the shoreline, or in the field, none of this would be possible without our dedicated volunteers. We are incredibly grateful for their time, hard work, and enthusiasm, as well as the continued support and understanding of their families.

Thank you for another wonderful season!

Enjoy the sunshine,
Kayla

ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Ella Henry

Ella has been a dedicated member of Avalon's Nature Initiative program for the past three years and is the featured artist on this issue's cover. A recent graduate, Ella is now pursuing her studies in Marine Biology. Her cover artwork features two vaquita porpoises, created using the digital illustration program Procreate. Inspired by the opportunity to raise awareness about these beautiful yet critically endangered animals, Ella hopes her artwork will help bring attention to their plight.

Thank you, Ella, for sharing your talent and creating such a beautiful and meaningful piece!

SELJALANDSFOSS, ICELAND

By Jonah Boerboom



This August, Jonah returned to Iceland for the second time, where he captured this stunning photograph of an iconic waterfall along the island's South Coast. Jonah has been a dedicated Nature Initiative volunteer for the past two years and spent this summer conducting his own research on growing oysters alongside native seaweed species here on Long Island.

Thank you, Jonah, for sharing this beautiful glimpse of Iceland and for your continued curiosity and dedication to marine science!

SEA STAR

By Deia Colosi



Deia has been a member of Avalon's Nature Initiative program for the past four years and is currently a senior at Port Jefferson High School. Her beautiful oil painting was inspired by the time she spent at the beach this summer and a curious observation: despite seeing so many different things along the shore, she had never encountered a sea star there. This inspired her to bring the often-overlooked marine creature to life through her artwork.

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

ALUMNI CORNER

Congratulations to our 2026 Graduates!



Ella Henry
Suffolk County Community
Honors College/Stony Brook University
Major: Marine Biology

Andrew VanBladel
Suffolk County Community College
Major: Undeclared, considering major in Marine Biology





Indigo Dalton
University of South Carolina
Major: Marine Science

Julien Maurer
Amherst College
Major: Undeclared, considering double major in Mathematics & Music



PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: GLEANING PROGRAM

This year, we introduced a new summer program at Birdsfoot Farm, Avalon Nature Preserve's regenerative farm, which focuses on responsible land stewardship and restoring soil health through cover cropping, integrated livestock, rotational grazing, and no-till farming practices.

Over the past several years, Birdsfoot Farm has offered a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program to the public. Crops are carefully planned and grown to meet seasonal orders while minimizing food waste and excess harvest. This summer, we introduced an opportunity for Nature Initiative volunteers to help harvest remaining produce and donate it to community members in need.

Four Nature Initiative volunteers were selected to participate in the program, which met on Wednesday mornings. During each session, students harvested fresh spinach, lettuce mix, and arugula, with kale added to the rotation when available. They learned proper harvesting techniques and took part in every step of the process, from washing and drying the greens to weighing and packaging the finished produce.

Together, the students successfully harvested and donated 153 pounds of fresh greens to Caroline Church in Setauket. Along the way, they gained a better understanding of the journey produce takes from the field to the farmstand and the importance of reducing food waste while supporting the local community.

On quieter harvest days, volunteers also planted sunflower beds and had the opportunity to design their own cut-flower bouquets. This program provided a hands-on introduction to sustainable farming, food production, and community giving. We are excited to have created this opportunity for young volunteers and hope to continue growing the program in the years ahead!

GLEANING PROGRAM













A total of 153 pounds of fresh greens donated!
A wonderful accomplishment by our hardworking volunteers.

BUILDING A POND YACHT

Since 2017, Avalon's Nature Initiative program has partnered with LISEC at the Bayles Boat Shop, home to a student boatbuilding program. Continuing our commitment to providing young volunteers with unique, hands-on learning opportunities, we introduced a new summer collaboration with the boat shop. Seven Nature Initiative volunteers were selected to participate in an eight-week workshop, where each student built their own lobster pond yacht model boat.

Ralph Antignano, President of the Bayles Boat Shop, located the original boat plans to serve as the foundation for the program's curriculum. Ralph and three additional boat shop members generously volunteered their time as instructors, guiding students through each stage of the building process. The group met Wednesday afternoons at the boat shop, where participants gained practical experience with a variety of tools and techniques.

Throughout the workshop, students learned to safely operate sanders and use a chisel and mallet, while observing instructors demonstrate equipment such as a grinder and drill press. They also had the opportunity to prime and paint their boats, adding their own finishing touches. On the final day, students attached eye hooks and secured monofilament fishing line to the bow of each boat before heading to the beach along Port Jefferson Harbor to put their finished creations to the test!

This engaging STEM workshop offered more than just an introduction to boatbuilding. It gave students the opportunity to develop practical skills, explore craftsmanship, and experience the satisfaction of creating something with their own hands. Best of all, each participant went home with a handcrafted model boat of their own.

A special thank-you to Ralph and the entire Bayles Boat Shop team for sharing their knowledge, time, and enthusiasm with our volunteers. We are grateful for another wonderful partnership and an exciting summer of learning!

BUILDING A POND YACHT













POND YACHT (CONT'D.)













SAVE THE SOUND UNIFIED WATER STUDY

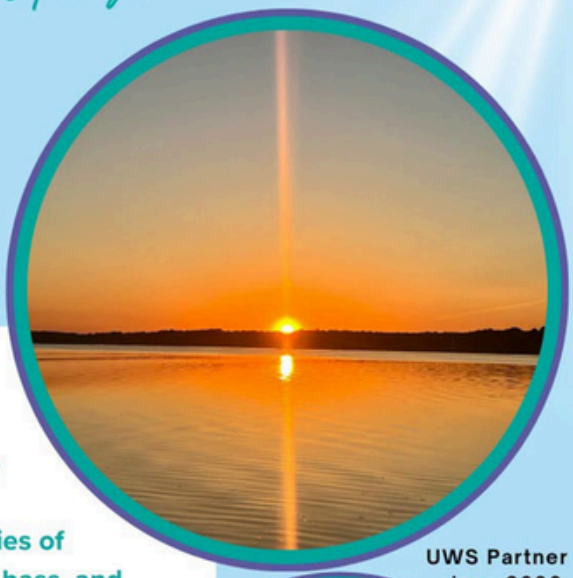
2026 UNIFIED WATER STUDY

Save the Sound

Partner Spotlight

AVALON NATURE PRESERVE

Monitoring Locations:
Stony Brook Harbor
(8 stations)



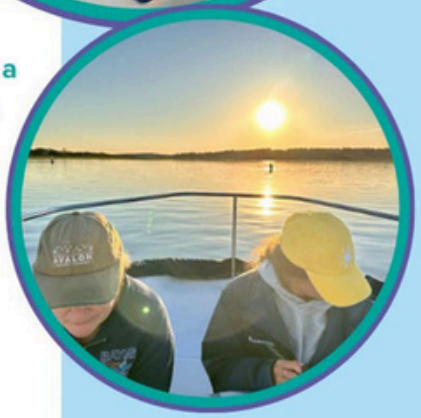
UWS Partner since 2026



"Stony Brook Harbor is a unique tidal estuary on the north shore of Long Island. An abundance of wildlife can be seen, such as diamondback terrapins, horseshoe crabs, osprey, multiple species of herons and egrets, cormorants, striped bass, and more. There is also a dredge spoil island spanning roughly half a mile in the middle of the main channel, which is an important nesting area for many species of shorebirds. Lastly, it is a watershed with plenty of recreational boating, kayaking, paddleboarding, and fishing."

Kayla Serina
Avalon Nature Preserve



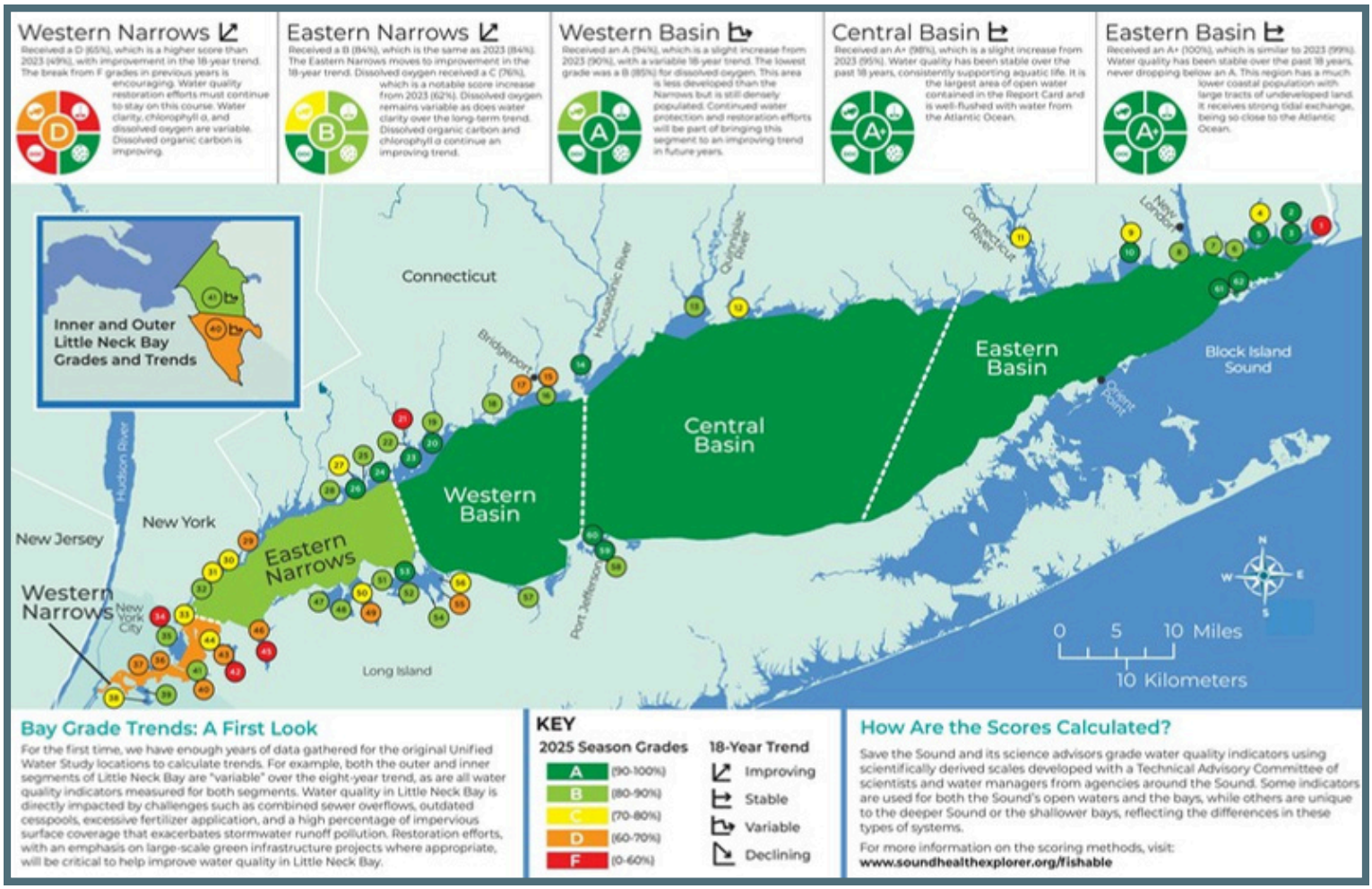


"There was not a lot of preexisting water quality data on this particular area, which surprised us. With all the ecosystem services the harbor provides, the data we are gathering may help to ensure it is in ideal condition. Based on a recent study in Stony Brook Harbor, we know there is nutrient loading, so this is a factor we want to examine more closely. In general, the more figures and data trends we have for bays and harbors, the better we can try to protect the areas of greatest need. This serves as a good way to inform and educate the public so they too can become stewards of their local watersheds."

Kayla Serina
Avalon Nature Preserve

SAVE THE SOUND UNIFIED WATER STUDY

2025 LIS REPORT CARD



Stony Brook Harbor's water quality data will be released on next year's report card.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO












WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

(cont'd.)



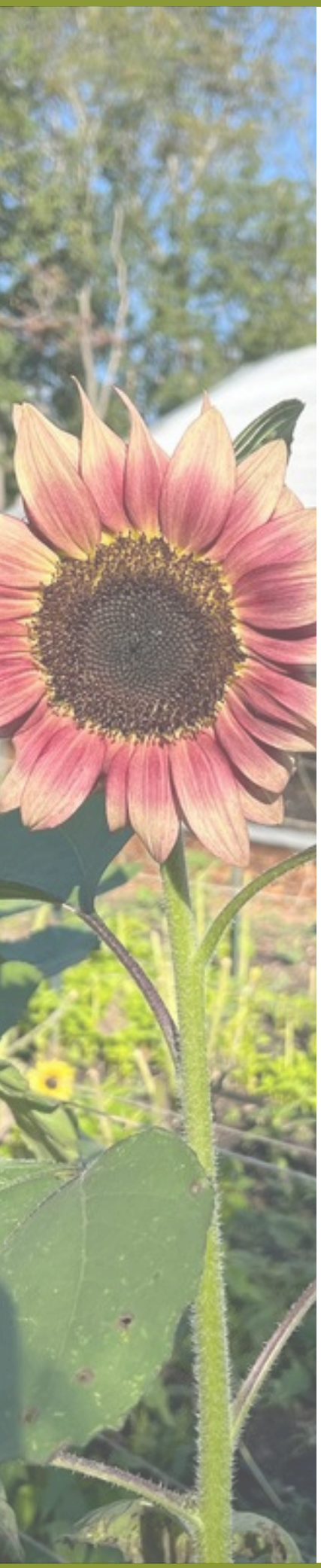












UPCOMING PROJECTS

Fall Garden Cleanup

- November 28th
- 10:00 AM-12:00 PM
- Kings Park Library

Seal Walk

- December 6th
- 11:30 AM-1:30 PM
- Cupsogue Beach County Park

Cold Stun Sea Turtle Walk

- December 13th
- 1:30 PM-3:30 PM
- West Meadow Beach

End of Year Campfire/Night Hike

- December 19th
- 6:00 PM-8:00 PM
- Avalon Barn

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

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