



The Henry L. Ferguson Museum

Newsletter Vol. 39, No. 1 • Spring 2024

(631) 788-7239 • P.O. Box 554 Fishers Island, N.Y. 06390 • info@fergusonmuseum.org • fergusonmuseum.org

From the President

I heard my first woodpecker this morning, a sure sign that spring is right around the corner. As I think about spring and the summer ahead, I am excited about my own personal migration back to Fishers Island, the things to do and the people I will see.

For me, a sure sign that summer has begun is the Museum opening party, which this year will be on Saturday, June 29. I hope to see you there. Museum Director Pierce Rafferty has put together a special high-altitude exhibit for us all to enjoy. This year's annual exhibition, which will be staged on both the first and second floors, is entitled "Bird's Eye View: Fishers Island from Above." Utilizing both contemporary and historical imagery from a mixture of professional and amateur sources, "Bird's Eye View" presents astonishingly fresh views of Fishers Island as seen from on high from one end of the island to another. The annual exhibit again is generously sponsored by Altus Partners. Some of the photographs on the second floor will be framed and available for sale. A smaller exhibit in the Natural History Gallery features a selection of Charlie Ferguson's original bird etchings.

In addition to enjoying exhibitions inside the Museum, I hope that you will spend time this summer out in nature. Enjoy peaceful Middle Farms Pond from our new handicap accessible trail ramp at the eastern trailhead of Treasure Pond Trail, or hike along the wonderfully varied Brickyard Trail. Visit active Land Trust restoration projects within Chocomount Cove Sanctuary, or along the side of Bell Hill Avenue

at the H. Lee Ferguson, Jr. Wildlife Sanctuary. There are a plethora of habitats to explore on 13 different Land Trust Trails with two new trails in the planning stage. Another project in the works is the creation of interpretive signage along Island Pond Trail.

As always, we will be hosting an exciting line up of speakers on Sundays at 4 p.m. during the season. Various guest speakers will cover the fascinating lives and ecological importance of mustelids, menhaden, jellyfish, fireflies, apex predators, and Quetzals. In two different lectures, Pierce will chronicle the history of the Mansion House, and the English Springer Spaniel field trials, this being their 100th anniversary! In addition to our weekly speaker series, we will again offer a weekly children's program on Wednesdays at 2 p.m., and our one-week intensive nature discovery program for children ("FIND") in August. Board member Terry McNamara offers nature walks every Thursday morning during the summer season and special trail walks designed for families will also be added to the schedule this year. For more details on all these programs, see pages 18-20 of this newsletter.

This spring we conducted a survey to gain a greater understanding of how Islanders view the Museum and what their primary interest are. This information will help us to tailor our communications and programs to respond to our community. We will publish a summary of the results later in the season. If you have further thoughts or ideas, please don't hesitate to reach out!

— Elizabeth McCance, President



Aerial of 245th Coast Artillery camp, Fort H.G. Wright, July 14, 1934
Courtesy of Daily News.



Former National Guard camp area south of Parade Ground, Dec. 18, 2023.
Drone photography by Neil Knowles.

The Henry L. Ferguson Museum 2024 Annual Exhibitions



Stony Beach, Dec. 18, 2023. Drone photography by Neil Knowles.

Bird's Eye View: Fishers Island from Above



"Heronese," circa 1950.



"Egrets," circa 1950.

Selected Bird Etchings by Charlie Ferguson *Special Exhibition Natural History Gallery*

Join us for the opening reception on Saturday, June 29th, 5 to 7 p.m. All are welcome!

Exhibitions sponsored by:  **Altus Partners**[®]
The Power of Objectivity

Land Trust Report

by Bob Miller

Winter left a considerable imprint on some of the Land Trust sanctuaries. Rough seas inundated the shore of Beach Pond during winter storms, tossing logs over and inland of the path. The footbridge at the intersection of Beach Pond and Island Pond was thrown off its foundations and came to rest, quite level, upstream across the outlet stream from Middle Farms Pond. The little freshwater pond at the Betty Matthiessen Sanctuary overflowed its banks and flooded sections of the Island Pond Trail. Downed trees and limbs make traversing some of the woodland trails difficult.

As I write this, however, strong hints of spring are beginning to appear: myrtle warblers have arrived, patched with cheerful yellow; redwing blackbirds, who perhaps never left for the winter, flit between limbs; a few jonquils are in bloom; and a great horned owlet has already hatched in a vestigial osprey nest by the Water Works. With the spring, too, our stewardship activities resume; new projects include maintenance of the trails and the footbridge, which will be fully operational in a few weeks.

An exciting, major new project will hopefully lead to a new coastal walking path and a different kind of sanctuary on the West end of the Island. On December 14, the Commissioners of the Waste Management District approved a proposed license to the Museum of property along the shore of Fishers Island extending from the Ordnance building north of the Community Center towards Race Point. The area includes several of the smaller gun emplacements and other structures dating from the early 1900s, which the Museum hopes to make more accessible for their historical interest. The Museum is excited to begin planning a coastal path and will keep the public informed of details and progress.

Noteworthy stewardship projects this year include the ongoing rehabilitation of the H. Lee Ferguson Jr. Wildlife Sanctuary adjacent to the Museum building, which has been in progress for some years (see the following article). Another project, the removal of invasive vegetation and encouragement of native species at the Chocomount Cove Sanctuary, will continue when the appropriate permits for working in protected wetlands are obtained from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. This project includes improved user amenities such as parking and stairs/handrails for beach access. For similar reasons, the installation of trails in the newly acquired Chocomount Hill Sanctuary has been delayed but should begin by summer.

There are a number of other actual and potential changes to the trail system. A trail at Four Corners was closed pending access approvals from landowners, and two spurs of the Clay Pit trail have been re-routed. We are awaiting a report from a consultant on the management of Middle Farms to determine whether the trails represent the best balance between public use and conservation. Further, building on the results of the 2023 New York Natural Heritage Program survey, the report on Middle Farms will recommend management practices to improve habitat for wildlife and biodiversity. We should have this report in hand shortly, and an updated Trail Guide will be printed later this year to reflect these changes. Meanwhile, an up-to-date electronic version is available on the Museum's website. This can be accessed directly or by scanning the QR Codes at trailhead signs for each of the active trails.

An update to the 1986 Guide to the Island Pond Trail at the Betty Matthiessen Wildlife Sanctuary is in the works. This guide will include new interpretive signs stationed along the trail as well as printed copies and an electronic version hosted on the Museum's website.

To facilitate access to the trail system from the rec path, sturdy and handsome new bike racks will be installed near the trail head for the L. F. Boker Doyle Sanctuary--for convenient access to the Brickyard and the Clay Pit trails--and also near Bull Rock for access to the Chocomount Cove and Chocomount trails.

While we have the benefit of a very active Land Trust Committee and excellent assistance from volunteers, we must look to outside consultants and contractors to continue and expand our programs and stewardship activities. Your continued support is critical, and your questions and suggestions are most welcome.



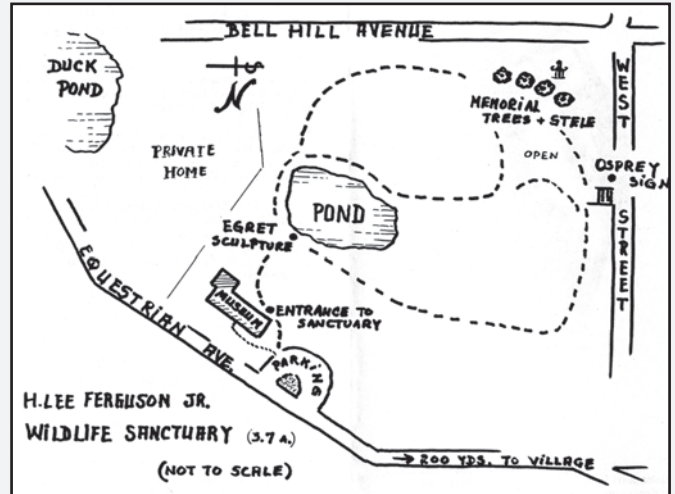
Footbridge in Middle Farms grasslands upended by March 2024 storm. Photo by Bob Miller.

The First Land Conservation on Fishers Island

The origin of the Museum's land conservation efforts can be traced to a meeting on August 2, 1965. On that summer day, Museum President H. Lee Ferguson, Jr., known as "Lee," proposed to the Board that vacant land be obtained as a sanctuary under the auspices of the Museum. The minutes of that meeting reveal that the Board embraced this new "progressive course."

Lee Ferguson, son of H.L. Ferguson and older brother of Charles B. Ferguson, died shortly thereafter, on Oct. 14, 1965. The Board subsequently researched properties on both the East and West ends of Fishers Island, looking for possible sites for a bird sanctuary that would serve as a memorial for Lee. They decided upon a 3.7-acre West end site—the current Sanctuary behind today's Museum. A group of Lee's friends donated the money to purchase the land from the Fishers Island Utility Company for the sum of \$500, and Bishop Hobson conducted a dedication ceremony for the new H. Lee Ferguson, Jr. Wildlife Sanctuary on August 19, 1967, inaugurating a living memorial to the

man who—more than half a century ago—envisioned the need for wildlife sanctuaries on Fishers Island. Notably, it is the first of 80 land parcels on Fishers Island, comprising approximately 375 acres, that are currently held by the Museum's Land Trust to be conserved "in perpetuity."



Restoring Biodiversity at H. Lee Ferguson, Jr. Wildlife Sanctuary

by Jack Schneider

Undisturbed natural communities are dynamic, interdependent relationships between plant and animal species that tend towards long-term stability and productivity. Once broken, the restoration of these intricate associations requires planning, work, patience, luck, money, and, above all, leadership fueled by persistent passion. This is one such restoration story.

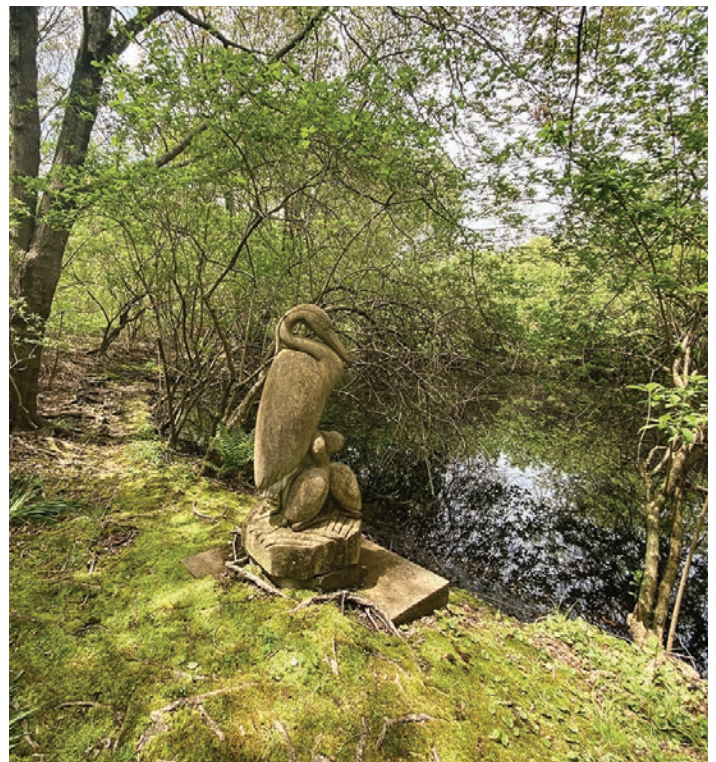
The Lee Ferguson Sanctuary's location adjacent to the Museum, combined with its (mostly!) gentle terrain makes it accessible to diverse visitation, affording users a convenient opportunity to experience nature and a variety of plants and animals within easy walking distance of Town. The dark, shady, moss-lined paths tunneling through the archways of flowering hydrangea conjure Arthur Rackham's fantastical illustrations. The Sanctuary possesses attributes important to wildlife: a variety of habitats, formidable trees, a dense understory, a freshwater pond, and food—in part provided at the Museum feeding station on the rear deck.

But the Sanctuary has severe shortcomings, too. The grounds have been shaped by and are recovering from past clearing and landscaping activities. Such land use history favors opportunistic, aggressive, non-native plants that overrun the native plant community, compromise the natural food web, and present what many consider to be an eyesore. This condition of dominant invasive species concerned the Museum's board members, who wanted to reverse this successional trend.

Facilitated by board member Megan Raymond, this restora-

tion process began in 2017 with the purchase of a diverse mix of native species that were planted in the "old field" along Bell Hill Ave. Initially, these new plantings faced stiff resistance from non-native species that had become entrenched through pervasive root networks, abundant seed production, and a prolonged growing season. The new native plantings were becoming buried by blackberry, hydrangea, etc.

In 2019, board member Terry McNamara and his wife



Heron sculpture by Sanctuary Pond. Photo by Pierce Rafferty.



Stakes marking locations of native plantings. Photo by Jack Schneider.

Harriet, along with the Museum’s student Youth Corps that year (Molly and Jack Heeny and Ben Edwards), began the recovery effort. (Note that beginning this summer the Youth Corps will be known as the “Trail Dogs.”) They cut, pulled, and mowed the invasive species, establishing mulched weed exclusion zones around each of the desired plants. New plants that failed to thrive in a particular spot were moved to another area. As a result, the desired species rebounded, growing vigorously in height, width, and numbers. But these initial control efforts would have to be sustained to prevent backsliding.

Terry saw the need to establish a more robust native wetland plant community. His plan included not only purchases of trees like red maple and river birch to provide shade and habitat diversity, but also the establishment of an irrigated nursery and propagation program to provide a lower-cost source of plants. The students in Adam Murray’s Construction class at Fishers Island School designed and built six raised beds in the



HLFM Youth Corps members by fallen birch in Sanctuary.

new nursery area along Bell Hill Ave.

This nursery offers additional conservation value. It provides a place to propagate seeds harvested from plants indigenous to the Island, thus sustaining a unique and vulnerable genome. A case in point is woolgrass, a freshwater bulrush, which grows in a coastal plain pond that is vulnerable to sea level rise. The Land Trust harvested, germinated, and transplanted woolgrass seeds to a new refuge around Sanctuary Pond.

The addition of woolgrass is part of the process of enriching the Sanctuary Pond’s wildlife habitat. The 1/10th-acre pond is eutrophic (nutrient-rich) and covered by pondweed in summer. Shaded by the panicle hydrangea overstory, the shoreline was dominated by shade and water-loving herbaceous invasive plants—but over the past two years, the restoration team cut back much of the hydrangea on the north side of the Pond, opening the northern banks to the sun. Terry, Harriet, Molly, Jack, and Thayer Bialek have removed the undesirable plants and replaced them with native species attractive to pollinators, like cardinal flower.

The goal of Terry’s approach is “to balance the needs of all the users, human and otherwise, with the vegetative content and layout. For example, blackberries are being replaced by blueberries and sweet pepperbush. Poison ivy is removed from areas where people frequently walk. Areas of paniculata seedlings and ivy are removed and replanted with different native ferns.”

In addition to maintaining the team’s recent successes, Terry has plans for ongoing improvements to benefit wildlife and people. Restoration requires inordinate effort, and they could always use more hands. Contact the Museum if you would like to participate: info@fergusonmuseum.org. Join the journey!



Filling nursery beds along Bell Hill Ave. Photo by Jeff Edwards.

Nature Notes: Diamonds in the Pond

by Terry McNamara

The diamondback terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin*) that calls Fishers Island home is a rarely seen turtle treasured for its role in maintaining the health of its surrounding ecosystem. In the wild, terrapins are quick to flee and difficult to observe. Since 2018, live specimens have been photographed on Fishers Island on the bike path near Island Pond in early summer—probably attempting to nest.

Although sightings are rare, on a calm day an astute observer may sometimes see them basking on the surface of Island Pond to warm themselves and osmoregulate (balance internal salinity) or hunting in the channel leading to Beach Pond.

Unique appearance and habits: The concentric rings on the terrapin's carapace (hard upper shell) resemble the facets of a cut diamond, giving this precious creature its name. Another distinction of the diamondback terrapin is that it has webbed feet, rather than the flippers common among other turtles in the marine environment. Its skin is light and marked with dark patches unique to each individual. The white upper jaw gives it a “smile” that further enhances its charismatic appearance.

Diamondback terrapins are sexually dimorphic: they show a systematic difference in form between individuals of different sexes. A mature female's carapace measures 10 inches, twice that of a mature male.

They are strong swimmers. After a brief period on the surface, they can remain submerged for three or more hours. Diamondbacks leave the water only to lay their eggs; locally, in June, diamondback females dig a nest in sandy substrate above the high tide line.

The diamondback terrapin is the only turtle in the United States that lives in brackish water. Research into their unique ability to live in fresh, brackish, and saltwater environments has brought to light some interesting behaviors. For example, to obtain fresh water, the terrapin will float on the salty surface with its head extended and mouth open to catch raindrops. They are also able to drink fresh water from the newly-fallen rain while it rests unmixed on the surface of a saline body of water.

Terrapins are ectothermic (cold-blooded), like all turtles, and they brumate (the reptilian equivalent of hibernation) through the winter. In late fall, when water temperatures drop below 59°F, a terrapin takes its last breath of the year and slips beneath the surface to bury itself in muddy substrate. The turtle will reemerge in the spring, when the temperatures around it return to 55°F, to forage and mate.

Strong jaws enable the carnivorous diamondback to feed upon aquatic snails, crabs, and small bivalves such as oysters, mussels, and clams. The turtles are one of the apex predators of brackish marshes and ponds, also eating carrion, fish, worms, and insects. Like the common snapping turtle in freshwater ponds, terrapins' activities are key to maintaining the overall health of the brackish ponds they inhabit.



Diamondback terrapin. Photo courtesy of USFWS.

Turtle soup: Diamondback terrapins, regarded as beautiful, are highly sought-after pets. The turtles are also, unfortunately, considered a delicacy food item for humans. As a result, terrapins were hunted almost to extinction in the 1900s.

While terrapins were a traditional food for Native Americans and colonial settlers, the popularity of turtle soup in the late 1800s to early 1900s caused their population to plummet. A combination of scarcity, the Prohibition era (sweet wine was a major turtle soup ingredient), and dire financial conditions reduced the demand for turtle soup, and terrapins were able to recover somewhat.

Future outlook: Despite increased public awareness of these wonderful creatures, their future remains uncertain. Multiple threats imperil terrapins. Raccoons eat nesting females and are a major predator of diamondback eggs. Bycatch—incidental capture—in crab traps and especially in “ghost traps” (abandoned or lost traps) takes a large toll on local populations. The pet trade, automobile strikes on nesting females, and boat strikes also diminish terrapin numbers; a dead female with a propeller injury was found on South Beach.

More recently, scientists have raised hatchlings from eggs harvested from females killed by vehicles when attempting to reach nesting areas. Such hatchlings are often incubated and raised over the winter to give them a head start. Participation in these rescue and restoration projects has popularized the terrapin and brought attention to their tenuous situation.

Although every state but Louisiana prohibits commercial fishing for diamondback terrapins, a new threat to U.S. turtles is an ever-growing Asian market. The Diamondback Terrapin Working Group (dtwg.org) is coordinating an effort to streamline the current state-by-state approach and to ensure the continued conservation of this unique turtle.

Remember to stay aware of not only diamondback terrapins, but also all our local snapping, box, painted, and spotted turtles as they move about in spring and early summer seeking suitable nesting areas! Avoid harming these sensitive species, and help them across the road if necessary. If you have questions, please call the Museum during open hours.

More Nature Notes: Ospreys and Eagles

by Rob Bierregaard

Benjamin Franklin once famously wrote that the Turkey would be a more respectable choice “as the representative of our country” than the Bald Eagle, a bird he described as being “of bad moral character.” Without digressing into the details of the quote’s origins, it makes a great lead-in to the fraught relationship between two iconic birds of prey: the Eagle and the Osprey.

However regal their stature, Bald Eagles have a few behaviors one could hardly call “majestic.” Eagles eat carrion, and they love to steal hard-earned fish from male Ospreys returning to their nests to feed their young. They have even been reported strafing Double-crested Cormorant colonies, setting the cormorants into a such a panic that they regurgitate their food. After the cormorants scatter, the eagles return to the scene of the crime to eat the fish that the panicked cormorants coughed up. *Yum.*

Bald Eagles and Ospreys do not “play well together.” Besides the kleptoparasitism—a fancy term for stealing food from another species—Bald Eagles will prey on young Ospreys in their nests; a nest full of young Ospreys might be described as an hors d’oeuvre platter for passing Bald Eagles. If the Osprey parents are near the nest, they may be able to defend their young, but if both are off hunting, their young are left defenseless—and Bald Eagles are not above killing adult Ospreys on occasion.

In the good old days (pre-1950), before we dumped DDT onto the salt marshes of Long Island and southern New England, Bald Eagles and Ospreys were common residents in the area who, over many millennia, had come to an ecological détente. Bald Eagles were widespread, while Ospreys, which numbered about 1,000 pairs between New York City and Boston, were mostly concentrated in three large colonies: one at the mouth of the Connecticut River, another on Gardiner’s Island, and a third in the Narragansett Bay.

These dense clusters—300 pairs on Gardiner’s Island, an area just over five square miles—relied on huge shoals of Atlantic menhaden, the silvery filter-feeding fish that migrated each spring from the Chesapeake Bay into Long Island Sound and Narragansett Bay.

The colonial nesting that we witness in Ospreys is extremely rare in birds of prey, most of which are territorial and don’t tolerate nesting pairs of their own species in their home ranges. Because (and this is especially true for those in coastal regions) the Osprey’s prey are spread out over large areas—male Ospreys may hunt as far as 20 miles from their nests—it’s simply not possible to defend feeding territories. So these birds may nest in colonies to obtain information from their neighbors. Male Ospreys preparing for a foraging trip will watch other males coming into the colony with fish. If they see a male with a fish like a menhaden, which travels in large schools,



Bald Eagle on Osprey Cam Nest, October 2022.

they’ll head in the direction from which the successful menhaden catcher came. If, by contrast, they see an Osprey coming in with a species that doesn’t school, such as a flounder, they’ll ignore that bit of information.

Paul Spitzer, who spent decades studying the southern New England and Long Island Ospreys from the nadir of their population decline in the mid 1960s, suggested another explanation for colonial nesting: Spitzer speculated that Ospreys were concentrated in colonies in part as a defense against Bald Eagles. No Bald Eagle could get anywhere close to the clusters of Osprey nests within these colonies; with 30 or 40 nests all within sight of each other, there were always a few male Ospreys hanging around after delivering food. As soon as one spotted an incoming eagle, the alarm calls began, and a squadron of angry Ospreys assembled to drive the intruder away.

Along came dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (DDT). For two decades—the 50s and 60s—while the insecticide reduced the number of mosquitoes, we inadvertently diminished the numbers of several sensitive species of birds of prey. DDT worked its way up the food chain, multiplying in concentration, until it reached such levels that Ospreys and Bald Eagles, as well as many other raptor species, were unable to produce enough young to compensate for normal adult mortality. Population numbers plummeted. The 1,000 breeding pairs of Ospreys between New York City and Boston crashed to only 100 pairs. Bald Eagles practically disappeared from the landscape, and Peregrine Falcons no longer bred east of the Mississippi.

The population crashes of these apex predators was the canary in the proverbial coal mine. Eventually, scientists figured out that DDT was the culprit, and its use was banned in the U.S.

More quickly than many expected, DDT levels declined to the point where raptors were able to breed successfully, and their numbers began to increase. Ospreys took about a decade to rebound. In some areas, their recovery was given a boost by the introduction of young into areas where the species was no longer breeding.

Because they breed at younger ages than Bald Eagles, Osprey numbers increased faster than those of Eagles, and the species expanded its range. Man-made nesting structures—either nesting platforms designed for Ospreys or those the birds coopted such as cell towers, light poles, and even chimneys—

helped the population grow rapidly, exceeding pre-DDT levels not long after the turn of the century.

So, Ospreys in southern New England and on Long Island found themselves in an environment replete with nesting platforms—and lacking in Bald Eagles. Ospreys spread across the region, no longer concentrated in the three original colonies, moving north through Connecticut and both westward in northern Massachusetts and eastward, onto Cape Cod. The population on Martha's Vineyard grew from two pairs in 1969 to over 110 pairs in 2023. As many as 500 pairs now nest on Cape Cod.

As Osprey populations have grown and expanded, Bald Eagles, too, have been increasing across much of their range and are becoming a presence in the Osprey-dominated landscape. Besides preying on young and occasionally adult Ospreys, Bald Eagles have been recorded usurping Osprey nests.

Because they are not strictly tied to a diet of fish, Bald Eagles don't have to migrate to the Caribbean and South America, as most North American Ospreys do during the northern winter. Instead, Bald Eagles rely on carrion and prey on waterfowl during the winter. Because of this, they can start nesting as most Ospreys are just beginning their long trek back to their breeding grounds.

During the winter, Osprey nest platforms are great perches for Bald Eagles, so it's not unusual to see wintering eagles resting on Osprey platforms—even providing a great show on Fishers Island's Osprey Cam nest in October 2022.

Being considerably larger than Ospreys, Bald Eagles need a substantially larger nest; as a rule, most Osprey platforms are too small to support a Bald Eagle nest, but where Ospreys have gone “old school” and nested in dead trees, the situation is ideal for Bald Eagles to usurp an Osprey nest. On Martha's Vineyard, Bald Eagles have tried to commandeer Osprey tree nests at least four times over the past five or six years. In no instance were the eagles successful in seizing an established Osprey tree nest. We're not sure why the eagles were unsuccessful in three of their tries, but we have a pretty good idea after Gus Ben David, the unofficial Osprey “godfather” of Martha's Vineyard—who has shepherded the island's Osprey population from two pairs in 1969 to over 110 in the 2020s—witnessed a spectacular battle over a contested nest.

The nest in dispute was in a dead tree in a vast savannah-like expanse along the Vineyard's south shore. Ospreys, who had used the nest for two years, had amassed a substantial nest. In the winter of 2022, while the Ospreys were down south somewhere, a pair of Bald Eagles took over the nest, upscaled



Eagle fleeing with fish stolen from Osprey.
Photo by Andy Morffew, Creative Commons

it to Bald Eagle dimensions, and laid eggs. In late March, the Ospreys returned to find their nest occupied.

Gus got a call from the local caretaker and went out to watch the action. In the protracted battle, the Ospreys repeatedly flew high above the nest and dove at the female eagle in the nest. As the Ospreys drew near, the eagle would flip onto her back and present her talons to the swooping Ospreys. The relentless attack, however, proved too much for the eagles, who abandoned the nest. Gus suspected that the eagles' eggs were broken in the melee.

Later that spring, I visited the site of the battle, where I saw the female Osprey incubating her own eggs, looking strangely small in the now huge nest.

What does the future hold for these two species? Bald Eagles are unlikely to nest near concentrations of Ospreys, but where there are large trees and only scattered Ospreys, we can expect to see Bald

Eagles gaining a foothold in new areas. As this happens, we can expect more aggression and conflict between the two species. The Eagles' encroachment will likely put pressure on isolated Osprey pairs, while those nesting in proximity to other Ospreys are not likely to suffer. In time, the two species will approach a new equilibrium. Osprey numbers may go down slightly, but they are too well established across the landscape to suffer any existential threat from increasing Bald Eagle numbers.

One new wrinkle in the story may come from a relatively new and microscopic player: highly pathogenic avian influenza, or HPAI. Transmitted primarily by waterfowl, this virulent disease has infected over 82 million birds, including huge numbers in the poultry industry, since it was first detected in 2016. Because Bald Eagles prey heavily on waterfowl, they are susceptible to infection. The dramatic decline in their numbers in the Great Lakes region is likely the result of HPAI infection. Ospreys, with their fish-only diet, seem little affected by the disease.

How this may play out in southern New England is hard to predict. It may well slow the increase in Bald Eagle numbers in the region, and thus reduce pressure on pioneering Osprey pairs nesting far from others, but it shouldn't be much of a mover to the Osprey Nation.

Whatever happens, with so many eyes and nest cams now focused on Ospreys, we're sure to have a front row seat as these two mighty birds of prey sort out their relationship.

Ornithologist Rob Bierregaard first became involved with the HLFM in 2013 when he was invited to the Island to tag a male Osprey with a transmitter. He returned in 2014 to tag another. Since then he has written articles and given virtual and live talks for the Museum on natural history subjects.

Helping Our Beech Groves Fight Beech Leaf Disease

by Jack Schneider

Twice last summer, at the end of May and again in early August, Museum volunteers and staff treated our three American beech groves, applying a phosphorous-based solution that has been shown to help trees fight beech leaf disease. The group treated a total of 232 trees with diameters greater than 1" along with numerous small saplings. This was the first application since the disease was found on the Island in 2021; the treatment will be repeated this summer.

A New York State Department of Environmental Conservation research scientist collected baseline data on the percent leafy canopy coverage for a select sample of trees in the three groves. These measurements will be repeated annually, and the accumulated data will be used to measure treatment efficacy. Other studies have shown positive results after five years of treatment.

Kate Stevens and Board member Terry McNamara led

the effort, assisted by Harriet McNamara, Molly and Jack Heene, Walker Reid, and Carter Larson. Special thanks to Courtney Allan and FIDCO for transporting water and equipment to the treatment site using their off-road irrigation vehicle.

According to staff from the New York DEC, this is the only forest-scale treatment being conducted in the State (at least as of last summer), and they have been most supportive of our efforts.



Jack Schneider treating beech tree with PolyPhosphite-30 fertilizer. Photo by Kate Stevens.

Further Investigation of the Island's Flora and Fauna

by Elizabeth McCance

Last summer, we saw the wrap-up of the two-year survey of the Land Trust's ecological communities and select taxa by the team of scientists from the New York Natural Heritage Program. Their work yielded volumes of information, including not only a wall-to-wall mapping of all the ecological communities on the Land Trust, but also important population information about rare species including many plants as well as spotted turtles and many rare beetles, moths, and dragonflies. This information has been instrumental in informing our management planning and is available on the Museum's website for anyone interested in learning more.

We are thrilled to once again welcome the team from NYNHP to further our study of Fishers Island's nature. One of the fascinating findings of the prior inventory was that Fishers Island with 65 rare plant taxa recorded has the highest concentration of rare plants of any site in New York State. However, not all of these rare plants were found in the two-year inventory. This summer, one focus of the NYNHP team will be to search for rare plants that have not been seen in years, including seven rare species not yet found on Land Trust property. An additional 30 species were historically found on Fishers Island but have not been documented in at least 40 years. The scientists will focus on probable locations of these species to see how many rare plant species may persist on the island.

The second component of this summer's study will focus on the mammals of Fishers Island. In this case, the team of scientists will design a camera-trap study to monitor our mid-sized mammals. The study will target the populations of Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), American Mink (*Mustela vison*), and Virginia

Opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*) since these species are major predators of turtle nests, nesting female turtles, shorebird nests, and other wildlife. As the camera traps will also detect other mammals, such as Eastern Coyote (*Canis latrans*), North American River Otter (*Lontra canadensis*) and American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*), the study will help to determine if Fishers Island is serving an important role in the recolonization of Long Island by these species. The exact objectives of this study are still being worked out by the Land Trust Committee and the NY Natural Heritage Program but will surely result in interesting documentation of our mammals and their movements.



American Mink, Fishers Island. Photo by Todd McCormack.



Piping Plover eggs, Club Beach. Photo by Lily Starbuck.



The Board of Trustees would like to extend its heartfelt thanks to all who gave during 2023. We are grateful to each and every one of you!

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 Charles Yokum
*Please excuse any inadvertent
 misspellings or omissions.*
 * Deceased

A Sampling of Donations to the Museum's Collection in 2023

Please note that although space constraints prohibit a complete list, we greatly appreciate all of your donations.

Jim Baker. F.I. ephemera, including F.I. Country Club membership books, by-laws of F.I. Sportsmen's Club; gate stickers for 1974 & 1977; misc. vintage photos, 1920s-80s; & F.I. Rod & Gun club pin.

John Nicholas Brown Center for Advanced Study, Brown University. Scale model of "Windshield," J.N. Brown residence on F.I. Wood with plexiglass vitrine, 34 by 53 by 33 inches, created for exhibition c.2001; original metal "Windshield" sign, mounted on wood, 11 by 24 inches, c.1938.

Joan Ferguson Ellis. A copy of her memoir entitled, "Permission."

Ann Posey Ferguson. Vintage postcards and two photographs of the elevated 3rd tee at HHC golf course, c.1952.

Friends of Faith. Painting, "Old Farmhouse, Fisher's Island" by Charles H. Richert, c.1912. Purchased with funds donated in honor of Faith Coolidge.

Hilary Hotchkiss. Salad plate with Mononotto Inn logo, circa 1930s.

Grace Fisher-Owens. U.S. Army soldier's uniform, c.WW1.

William Revett. Seven military passes from WW2 allowing access to and residence on F.I. for various Revett family members; six Selective Service cards, 1941-45; eight WW2 War Ration books in two holders.



WW2 military ID for one-year-old F.I. resident Janice L. Revett.

Paul Skinner. Brass fire hose nozzle from wreck of the Steam Yacht *Thelma Phoebe*, a rumrunner, on Chocomount Beach, F.I., April 1923.

Jim Wall. Extensive collection of letters written between Mr. and Mrs. George H. Bartlett, primarily 1870s to 1890s; additional correspondence from their daughter, Winifred Bartlett Clark to friends and relatives (various decades). Includes important F.I. historical details.

A Sample of Acquisitions:

Envelope & letter sent from Munnatawket Hotel featuring hotel logo, 1914.

35mm duplicate slides of Richard Neutra-designed "Windshield" residence on F.I. and owner's family.

Photo album documenting military life and activities at Fort H.G. Wright and other locations, 1939 & 1940.

Press photo of Christopher Roosevelt, head of Oceanic Society, 1982.

Trade card with local steamboat schedules, 1880.

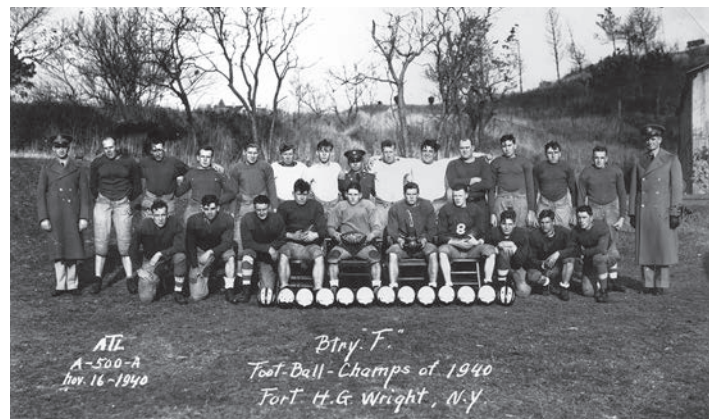
"Sweetheart" pillow cover. Long Island Sound Harbor Defense, Fort H.G. Wright, World War II.



Scale model of "Windshield," c.2001.



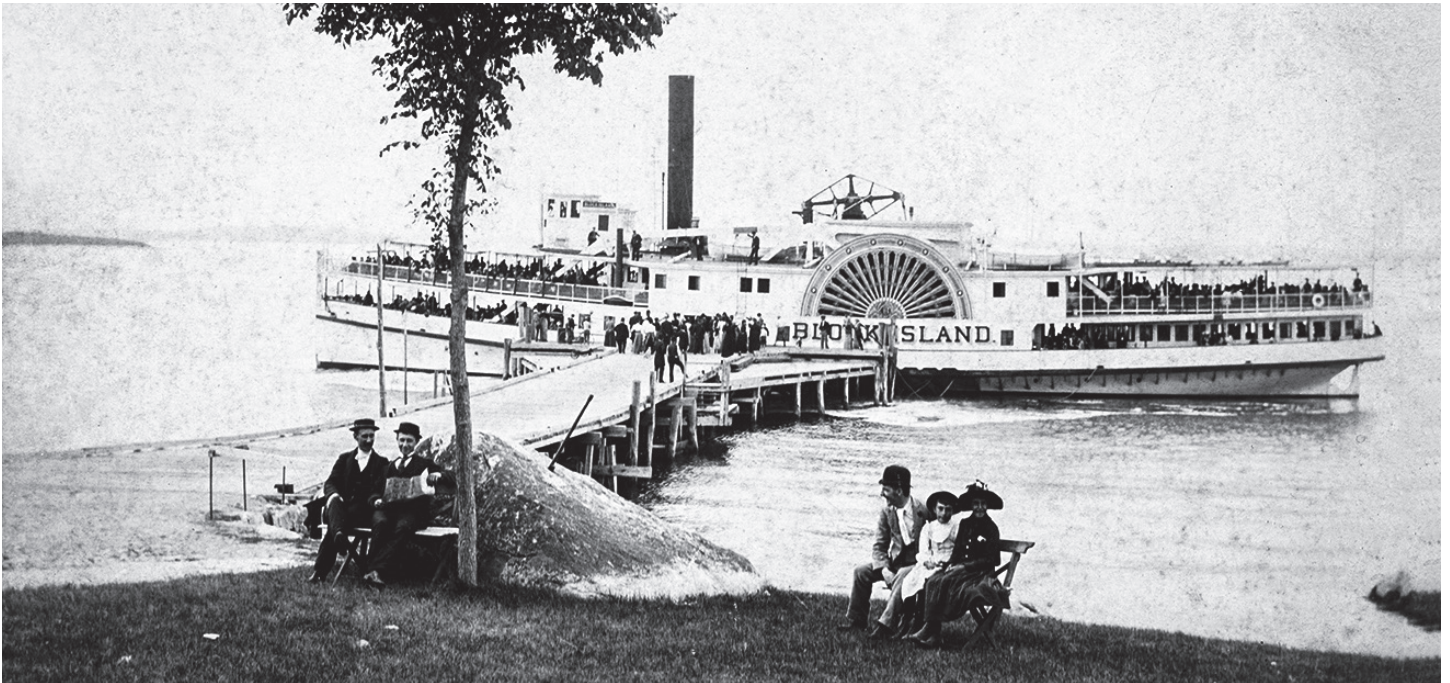
Oil painting of "Old Farmhouse, Fisher's Island," by C.H. Richert, c.1912.



"Foot Ball Champs of 1940." Photo by A.T. LeGere.



Navy fence blocking access to elevated 3rd tee at HHC golf course, c.1952.



Excursion ferry SS *Block Island* at Lyles Beach dock, c.1885.

Island History

The Lyles Beach Hotel: The Center of Fishers Island's Brief Flirtation with Tourism

by *Pierce Rafferty*

Since the first settlement of Fishers Island by John Winthrop in the 1640s, Fishers Island has undergone two main phases of development. For more than 220 years, under Winthrop family ownership, it functioned predominantly as a working stock farm and dairy with supplemental brickmaking and hay export. In 1863, retired merchant Robert Ralston Fox purchased the entire island from the last of the Winthrop owners. Surprising those who expected more varied economic development, he continued the Island's traditional use as a private stock farm and dairy. Following Fox's unexpected death in 1871, the Fox estate entertained a variety of proposals from outside developers. When these plans failed to materialize, the estate initiated its own plan to create a seaside community on the west end of Fishers Island. Land lot sales to the pub-

lic commenced in December 1876. These sales—notably, the first since initial settlement in the 17th century—initiated the second phase of Fishers Island's development: its transformation into a seaside resort.

In the late 1870s and 1880s, a new community quickly took shape on Fishers Island. New businesses included the Mansion House, formerly the Fox family residence, which opened as an upscale boutique hotel in the summer of 1877. Small steamers of the Pequot and Ocean Transit line running out of New London brought patrons back and forth to this new destination during the summer season, docking at a location near today's Yacht Club. Nearby, a rough and tumble boarding house named the Bay View House opened circa 1879, fronting West Harbor on or near the site of today's Reid Barn. Retired whalers working as carpenters lived there alongside other lodgers. The Bay View, capacity 20, burned to the ground in May 1884.

In July 1882, a new hotel, backed by Norwich business interests, opened on Fishers Island's north shore just west of today's "Three Sisters" Cottages. Operating as the "Lyles Beach Hotel" or simply "Lyles Beach," it was named for James H. Lyles, the trustee of the Fox Estate who was then handling all land sales on Fishers Island. The Lyles Beach catered primarily to "day excursionists," better known today as "day trippers." Beginning in 1882, excursionists came to our shores in throngs during the summer season (late June to mid-September) carried by some of the biggest passenger ferries in our region, including the SS *Ella*, the SS *Block Island*, and the SS *Julia*. These large paddlewheel steamers landed at the new



Bay View House, West Harbor, c.1880.



Lyles Beach Hotel and beachgoers, c.1890.

Lyles Beach dock, completed by the T.A. Scott Co. of New London in May 1882 and measuring 180 feet in length. Over the course of a sunny Saturday one might see as many as 750 or even 1,000 passengers disembarking at Lyles Beach from several steamers.

Who were these day trippers? In addition to individuals and small groups (single families, groups of friends), newspaper accounts reveal that many Lyles Beach patrons came in larger, organized groups, especially social, fraternal, religious, political, and business associations; sports clubs of every stripe; as well as those organized around school and military reunions, political conventions, and work forces from specific factories.

Lyles Beach promised a fun-filled day with clam bakes and Rhode Island-style shore dinners (serving capacity was 1,000 people), drinking, and dancing. Advertisements highlighted the full range of inducements and attractions, including a merry-go-round, an arcade with photograph and shooting galleries, a well-appointed billiard room, a “bowling room” with three large alleys and a small one for children, a spacious dance hall, a brass and string orchestra, and a roller-skating rink.

Sports activities included tub and catboat races, single and double scull races, baseball games, and a rifle range “better than the military’s.” Yachts and sailboats with experienced captains always stood at the ready, along with small boats for fishing and rowing. (Notably, the first incarnation of the Fishers Island Yacht Club participated in at least one cat-rigged boat race with mainland yacht clubs starting from Lyles Beach in 1886). Those seeking local adventure on firmer ground could take horse-drawn omnibus trips to all parts of the island.

The Hotel dining room could accommodate 600 people, but there were only about 40 guest rooms. In any case, few patrons of Lyles Beach stayed overnight. As darkness fell, the vast

majority boarded a return steamer bound for the shore towns of Connecticut and Rhode Island—primarily New London, Norwich, Groton, and Watch Hill.

As already noted, drinking was a primary activity and attraction, made all the more popular because sections of southeastern Connecticut were then “dry.” An 1895 temperance book included the detail that “[Lyles Beach] was the only public resort hereabout where one could get all the beer he wanted on a Sunday, hence it was well patronized. Fishers Island was in New York State, and rather out of the reach of search warrant officers.” (Quote from “The Way Out: A Solution of the Temperance Crisis,” by Hugh Montgomery.)

Alcohol played a leading role in a horrific story about an interracial brawl that occurred at Lyles Beach on August 2, 1888. This event generated bold headlines in newspapers up and down the east coast. The *Boston Globe* covered the story on August 3rd under the banner headline “RAZORS AGAINST CLUBS – Furious Fight Between Bricklayers and Negro Waiters at the Steamer Landing at Lyle’s Beach.” The body of that story stated:

“The steamer *Block Island* this evening brings particulars of a savage fight this afternoon between four Norwich colored men and a dozen white men. The colored men are employed as waiters at the Lyle’s Beach Hotel, while the whites are employed at the brickyard across the bay. One of the brickyard gang, who was under the influence of liquor, picked a row with one of the waiters. The latter resented the drunken man’s insult and bystanders interfered. This was about noon. When the steamer *Block Island*, on her return trip, made fast at the dock at 4:30 to take on a Grand Army excursion from this city [Norwich], the trouble broke out again. There were fully 500 Norwich people congregated on the dock, among whom was the brickyard gang, all more or less intoxicated.

“While the people were waiting for the gang plank to be put out the four colored waiters came on the dock. The same white man who began the trouble took up the thread of the battle. He caught the waiter and began to punish him. The other three waiters fell upon the brickyard gang, and the dozen or more companions of the latter took a hand. Hundreds of men, women and children became panic stricken and sought safety. Several frightened youths jumped off the dock, but suffered no injury.

“Fierce and fast waged the battle on the pier. The negroes drew razors and the whites plied their heavy clubs. One white man was cut across the forehead in a wicked manner. Pat Ryan was slashed from shoulder to hip, his abdomen being almost laid open.”

The *Globe's* account also detailed the lesser injuries of the other brickyard workers, adding that two of the “colored” men were arrested at the dock in Norwich when the SS *Block Island* landed. Three of the four “negroes” were ultimately charged with assault in the second degree and sent to a county jail on Long Island to await the actions of the grand jury. No account of their sentencing has been found. The white brickyard workers faced no known consequences for their actions.

By 1886, the Lyles Beach ran into fiscal problems and went into receivership. Cornelius McNamara and S.E. Marx of Norwich, two of the main creditors, purchased the Lyles Beach in 1887 for \$8,751. Marx and McNamara didn't proceed to transform the hotel into a more exclusive venue as some rumors suggested they would. Other new, powerful businesspeople on Fishers Island, however, were interested in remaking the entire resort on Fishers Island, hoping to radi-



Detail, Lyles Beach trade card, c.1885

cally derail the pro-excursionist policies of Lyles Beach.

Familiar with Fishers Island from visitations beginning in the mid-1880s, two prominent banking brothers, Edmund M. and Walton Ferguson, liked what they saw. In June of 1889, the Fergusons made an outright purchase from the Fox estate of 9/10ths of Fishers Island. They bought the whole of the Island, excepting 101 parcels that had been sold at the west end between 1876 and 1889.

The Ferguson brothers' plan for development was ambitious: transform Fishers Island from a day excursion destination into a resort that catered to an exclusive clientele on a seasonal basis. Their development plan involved major changes to the Island's hotels—but stumbling blocks lay in their path. One major impediment was the Lyles Beach Hotel itself. The institution wasn't part of their 1889 purchase from the Fox estate, as it was privately owned. The Fergusons had no chance of creating an elite resort if day trippers were still crowding our shores by the steamer load at Lyles Beach.

After wooing the owners, the brothers succeeded in purchasing the hotel in 1891 for \$10,000. They quickly shut it down for a complete makeover. The former Lyles Beach reopened in 1892 as the more refined Munnatawket Hotel. Because all major docks and landings lay under their control, the Fergusons were able to ban all excursion steamers from landing on Fishers Island.

Lest there be any doubt about the intentions or origins of the new anti-excursionist policy, the following proclamation was issued in an E.M. & W. Ferguson promotional brochure circa 1893: “The denizens upon the Island are protected from an influx of the excursion element by the fact that all landings are owned by the Messrs. Ferguson. In order further to protect the Island against all possible annoyances the proprietors have purchased from the State of New York a strip of land running entirely around the Island from the shore outward.”

Thus ended the brief tourist period on Fishers Island, one largely contained to Lyles Beach and lasting only for one short decade: 1882 to 1891. In the ensuing century and a third, “day trippers” from the mainland have lacked a welcoming beachhead or destination on Fishers Island. There is, of course, the Pequot Inn, founded in 1902 as the Canonicus House, but its central purpose has never been to serve as a magnet to the outside world. In our history, Lyles Beach, which hyperbolically billed itself as the “Coney Island of the East,” stands alone in that regard, entirely comfortable in its short-lived role as a full-throated and whole-hearted *attraction*. With its shuttering, Fishers Island's message to all day-visitors seeking fun on our shores—and to the outside world in general—became crystal clear: *No place to land. No place to go. That's all, folks!*

Excursions.

.....

**LYLES BEACH
FISHER'S ISLAND.**

GRAND OPENING DAY.

The NEW HOTEL at LYLES BEACH will be
opened for the season on

SATURDAY, JULY 1, 1882.

This new house is of the largest of its class, and
has ample accommodation for ONE THOUSAND
PEOPLE. Its location is unsurpassed on the
Atlantic coast. The company will spare no pains
or expense to make this house first-class in all
particulars. The verandas are broad and spa-
cious, covering nearly an acre of ground.

SHORE DINNERS
WITH

Genuine Rhode Island Clam Bakes a Specialty.

THE STEAMER ELLA

Will make TWO EXCURSIONS to LYLES BEACH
on OPENING DAY,

Advertisement for Opening Day at Lyles Beach, 1882.

Island Pond

by Jack Schneider

Island Pond, and the attached Beach Pond, are classified together ecologically as a “Coastal Salt Pond.” However, this was not always so.

Historically, this 52-acre pond complex, the second largest in New York State, was separated from the salty ocean water of Block Island Sound by a continuous half-mile long barrier.

In the mid-1920s, Island Pond functioned as a backup reservoir for the water supply system built at that time as part of the Olmsted Plan. But this role ended suddenly a little more than a decade later when the Hurricane of 1938 smashed into the south shore of Fishers Island. The storm’s immense surge overwashed the barrier beach and flooded Island Pond and adjacent Beach Pond with salt water, instantly turning them both brackish.

The Fishers Island Farms, Inc. soon set out to bring Island Pond back into the mid-island reservoir system that connected at the Water Works at Barlow Pond. Their long-term plan was to intermittently (and repeatedly) pump salt water out of Island Pond so that groundwater from rainfall would eventually restore it as a fresh water source. By September 1940, Island Pond had almost regained its freshwater status when a new hurricane reintroduced saltwater into the Pond. The restoration effort was subsequently abandoned. Another major hurricane in September 1944 was likely responsible for the initial cut through the barrier beach and the wider cut that connected Island and Beach ponds.

Following saltwater intrusion, the freshwater plant and animal community was destroyed. The resident fishes changed from freshwater species like large-mouth bass, pumpkinseed, bullheads, and shiners, to brackish-adapted or tolerant species like mummichogs, pipefish, sticklebacks, silversides, and white perch. Invertebrates—Eastern mud snails, soft-shell clams, and oysters—became established.

Steve Malinowski, who knows the Pond well, is the source of the information that follows. Steve and his wife Sarah co-

own the Fishers Island Oyster Farm, which cultures oysters in Island Pond (the faint lines visible across Island Pond in the aerial image above are buoys that support strings of nets where oysters are growing). Steve has studied the Pond from above and below the surface for years and worked with Carey Matthiessen, who founded the original oyster farm in 1962.

A hand-drafted bathymetric survey conducted by Matthiessen years ago shows the pond to be six to eight feet deep with the exception of two, 20-foot-deep holes. One of the holes is located near the bench in the western area of the Rec Path, while the second hole lies near the barrier beach. Both holes hold little, if any, oxygen and, as a result, a layer of decomposing organic matter that looks and feels like black mayonnaise (but smells much worse!) sits atop the mineral sediment at the bottom of the holes.

The Pond water is two-tiered, with depth measured from the surface to the bottom. Imagine a salad dressing in which vinegar floats on vegetable oil—the transition zone between the two types of Pond water is nearly as abrupt. The top level is four to five feet deep with a salinity of 20 parts per thousand—about two-thirds the saltiness of ocean water—and is well-oxygenated. The water in the lower tier is saltier, 28 parts per thousand, and lacks any oxygen. Hence, oyster nets can’t be dropped below three and a half feet because the oysters won’t survive without healthy, well-oxygenated water.

The salinity and volume of the Pond are kept in near equilibrium by seawater coming in intermittently (primarily during moon tides and storm events) and freshwater draining out slowly, fed by run-off from the surrounding land and by at least one groundwater spring. Since there is minimal flow in or out, much like an enclosed lake, there is little mixing of salt and fresh waters, which causes the two-tiered stratification during the summer.

During earlier years, the eastward drift of sand from the adjacent eroding bluff (in front of the Harvey house) and from Isabella Beach would plug the cut, damming the water in the Pond. When this happened, the Pond level would increase by about a foot over the winter. When spring came, workers would remove the accumulated drift sand and the trapped water would gush out, quickly widening the one-foot trench to a ten-foot trench overnight. This happened year after year until a permanent cut was dug circa 1990s through an area that was naturally reinforced by rocks and boulders. (See photo. The cut is clearly visible at lower right.)

The evolution of Island Pond is far from over. Rising sea levels, augmented by more frequent and stronger storms, and changing ocean currents, will likely alter the structure of the protective barrier beach and open the Pond to the Ocean.



Aerial of Island and Beach ponds, April 2001. Courtesy of NYS Office for Technology.

Conserving Seagrass

Human activities in the nearshore waters of F.I.

by *Hannah Vagts*

In collaboration with the community, the Fishers Island Seagrass Management (FISM) Coalition founded the Save Our Seagrass Movement. This initiative is built on the belief that when community members are empowered with information about seagrass, they will act to protect this vital resource. Fishers Island, now home to 98% of all the eelgrass on the New York side of Long Island Sound, is crucial in sustaining fisheries, preserving water quality, and creating a resilient shoreline for our coastal community.

Despite its significance to Fishers Island, alarming estimates show a 15% loss of eelgrass coverage in just five years. The FISM Coalition has made it their urgent mission to Save Our Seagrass by focusing on the two most impactful aspects affecting eelgrass survival: fertilizer runoff and boating damage. We use education, science, and solutions to address these critical issues.

Education: The FISM Coalition spoke with over 1,000 Fishers Island community members in 2023 about the importance of our eelgrass meadows. Our representatives engaged residents and visitors with the importance eelgrass holds for Long Island Sound and the significant threats to its survival. During our first-ever Eelgrass Boat Tour in August, we connected with the community through hands-on learning. During this exciting tour, participants learned the difference between seaweed and seagrass, discovered what wasting disease looks like in unhealthy eelgrass blades, and explored methods of identifying eelgrass beds. Our guest speaker, Dr. Jamie Vaudrey, answered our group's pressing questions about the most impactful methods of reducing our impact on eelgrass. Her answer included reducing or eliminating fertilizer use to decrease nitrogen pollution, upgrading septic or cesspool systems to incorporate an advanced nitrogen filtration system (Suffolk County residents qualify for a grant), and engaging in seagrass-safe boating when in seagrass areas.

Science: We have partnered with the University of Rhode Island's Watershed Watch for years to monitor water quality metrics relevant to human and marine health. We monitored two locations: the swim dock of Hay Harbor and Dock Beach in West Harbor. We particularly pay attention to nitrogen levels, algal blooms, and fecal bacteria. This monitoring style provided accurate information about the sampling location but did not allow us to extrapolate data for the other parts of the harbor due to the limited number of sampling locations. For this upcoming monitoring season, we secured a new partnership with the Unified Water Study to join a Long Island Sound-wide initiative to monitor the health and safety of our waters. This new protocol will have us take multiple water samples throughout West Harbor to provide valuable insight into the quality and safety of our waters for Fishers Islanders.

We collaborated with the Fishers Island Conservancy Senti-



Eelgrass in Barley Field Cove, 2023. Photo by Hannah Vagts.

nels for our MPA Watch program to gather thousands of data points. These data are collected to inform the FISM Coalition about how the Fishers Island community uses the eelgrass beds around the island. Knowing how our community uses eelgrass areas tells us how we can best assist Fishers Islanders in becoming more seagrass conscious and preserving these vital areas for generations. This information has helped us form solutions tailored to help the community!

Solutions: We know our Fishers Island community fundamentally cares about the health and sustainability of our island, but busy schedules are not always conducive to engaging in environmentally friendly practices. That is why we apply science to finding solutions to make our recommendations more accessible! This year, we are focusing on piloting methods to make our eelgrass, whether by boat or land, easy to locate. This involves creating comprehensive maps of Fishers Island's eelgrass that can be integrated into nautical charts and other materials. We are also working to develop seagrass-safe marker buoys to help boaters locate the edge of heavily trafficked meadows.

The FISM Coalition is deeply grateful for the community's support and enthusiasm for our seagrass conservation efforts. We are excited to be on the frontier of seagrass conservation, where accessibility, efficacy, and innovation meet. Please learn more about us and Fishers Island's incredible seagrass at fiseagrass.org and contact our project coordinator, Hannah Vagts, at fiseagrass@fergusonmuseum.org with any questions!

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of The Henry L. Ferguson Museum is the collection, preservation, and exhibition of items of Pre-History, History, and Natural History of Fishers Island and, through its Land Trust, the preservation in perpetuity of undeveloped property in its natural state. It is organized for the education and enjoyment of the Island's community and visitors and for the protection of habitat for the Island's flora and fauna.

Museum Speakers and Programs 2024

Programming announcements are sent to our e-news mailing list the week before the scheduled program.

You can sign up for our e-news list at the footer of our website fergusonmuseum.org. Check the fishersisland.net and the Museum website calendars, or our e-news announcements for details on whether talks are in person and/or virtual.

Museum Opening Reception: Saturday, June 29, 2024. 5 to 7 p.m.

The Deep Impacts of Composting. Have you ever wondered what the big fuss is about composting, or how compost actually impacts our ecosystem? Join lifelong composter, Jayne Merner of Earth Care Farm, Charlestown, R.I., as she paints a picture of the lasting effects compost has on our world. Come learn how compost can help with erosion and other coastal resiliency challenges. Co-hosted with Fishers Island Waste Management. **Sunday, June 30, 2024.** Time: 4 p.m. Place: Museum, 2nd Floor.



Backyard Birding Adventure. Curious about the birds in your backyard? Learn how to use binoculars and identify some of our local birds. Then we'll make a treat to bring home and feed our feathered friends. A Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center (DPNC) family program for ages five and up. **Wednesday, July 10, 2024.** Time: 2 to 3 p.m. In person at Museum. Limited to 15 children. Advance registration recommended. Suggested donation: \$10.

Using Keystone Plants to Bring Pollinators to Your Yard. Last summer gardening professionals Suzanne Thompson and Petie Reid spoke at the HLFM about controlling knotweed and other invasive plants. This summer they are back by popular demand to help us plan, plant and expand native gardens that support the birds, bees, and other pollinators that we all depend upon. Come learn about the Keystone Plants that are vital to restoring and retaining our natural ecosystems and about how to create pleasing plantings that both you and your pollinators will enjoy. **Thursday, July 11, 2024.** Time: 4 p.m. Place: Museum, 2nd Floor.



Chasing Shadows. Award winning science writer and author Ret Talbot will read from his book *Chasing Shadows – Unraveling the Mysteries of the Great White Shark*. Co-written with shark biologist Greg Skomal, the book frames the return of the white shark to coastal New England waters as a conservation success story. Talbot will address the complex relationship between humans and sharks dating back thousands of years, today's challenging public safety issues, and what may be on the horizon. He will be joined by scientific illustrator Karen Talbot, who created the illustrations and maps in the book; she will be happy to add an original illustration of a white shark on the title page of any books purchased at the event. **Sunday, July 14, 2024.** Time: 4 p.m. Place: Museum, 2nd Floor. *Book signing and reception to follow.*



Nature's Recyclers. What happens to nature's trash? Learn about vultures, insects and other decomposers and the important role they play in our environment. Search through leaf litter to see if you can find one of nature's recyclers. A DPNC family program for ages five and up. **Wednesday, July 17, 2024.** Time: 2 to 3 p.m. In person at Museum. Limited to 15 children. Advance registration recommended. Suggested donation: \$10.

Mustelids. This illustrated talk by Kim Hargrave, education director of the DPNC, examines the fascinating world of Mustelidae, a diverse family of carnivorous mammals that include mink, otters, fisher cats, weasels and wolverines. **Sunday, July 21, 2024.** Time: 4:00 p.m. Place: Museum, 2nd Floor.

Owl Prowl. Come dissect an owl pellet and meet a DPNC resident owl. Learn about the life cycles and amazing adaptations of these remarkable birds. A DPNC family program for ages five and up. **Wednesday, July 24, 2024.** Time: 2 to 3 p.m. In person at Museum. Limited to 15 children. Advance registration recommended. Suggested donation: \$10.

Quetzals. Renowned ornithologist and author Alan Poole will present an illustrated talk based on his new book, “Quetzals: Icons of the Cloud Forest,” that celebrates a dazzling cloud forest bird native to the cloud forests of Mexico, and



Central and South America. Poole is an Associate of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the former editor of *Birds of North America*. **Sunday, July 28, 2024.** Time: 4 p.m. Place: Museum, 2nd Floor. *Book signing and reception to follow.*

Save the Animals. Many animals are facing the threat of extinction, but you can help! Meet live animals and learn how you can help their species with some simple tips. A DPNC family program for ages five and up. **Wednesday, July 31, 2024.** Time: 2 to 3 p.m. In person at Museum. Limited to 15 children. Advance registration recommended. Suggested donation: \$10.

The House that History Flowed Through. Museum Director Pierce Rafferty’s illustrated talk chronicles how the history of Fishers Island from the Colonial era to date can be traced through the evolution of a single island structure: the Mansion House. **Sunday, August 4, 2024.** Time: 4 p.m. Place: Museum, 2nd Floor. *Reception to follow.*



Wildflowers. Flowers come in an incredible array of shapes, sizes, and colors. Students will have a chance to dissect a flower and learn the roles pollination plays in plant reproduction. Create a beautiful craft! A DPNC family program for ages five and up. **Wednesday, August 7, 2024.** Time: 2 to 3 p.m. In person at Museum. Limited to 15 children. Advance registration recommended. Suggested donation: \$10.

Jellyfish Near Fishers Island and Beyond. Dr. Mary Beth Decker, a marine scientist and educator at Yale University, will introduce us to jellyfish biology and the ecological roles that jellyfish play in our coastal and open-ocean ecosystems. As a research scientist, Mary Beth studies how oceanography and climate change affect marine predators, such as jellyfish and seabirds, and their prey in coastal and oceanic ecosystems. **Sunday, August 11, 2024.** Time: 4 p.m. Place: Museum, 2nd Floor.



Creepers and Leapers. Live frogs, toads, turtles, and snakes provide a hands-on introduction to the interesting adaptations of our native amphibians and reptiles. A DPNC family program for ages five and up. **Wednesday, August 14, 2024.** Time: 2 to 3 p.m. In person at Museum. Limited to 15 children. Advance registration recommended. Suggested donation: \$10.

Plastic in the Water, Plastic on the Land: Fighting Pollution on Fishers Island and Beyond. Plastic pollution is a bad neighbor. Despite concerted efforts on Fishers Island, there is always more washing ashore. Plastic waste is on track to triple by 2060. What are the impacts of these plastics, and what can we do to stop them? Dr. Megan J. Wolff, policy director at Beyond Plastics, will speak about what efforts individuals can make to reduce their consumption and exposure to plastics. Even better, she will discuss the exciting legislation pending in New York State to dramatically reduce plastic pollution. **Sunday, August 18, 2024.** Time: 4 p.m. Place: Museum, 2nd Floor. Co-hosted with Fishers Island Conservancy. *Reception to follow.*



Animal Rehabilitation Stories. Discover the interesting and important work wildlife rehabilitators do to help injured animals! We will talk about what it means to be a rehabilitator, what you can do at home to protect wildlife and meet some of the Nature Center’s non-releasable animal residents. A DPNC family program for ages five and up. **Wednesday, August 21, 2024.** Time: 2 to 3 p.m. In person at Museum. Limited to 15 children. Advance registration recommended. Suggested donation: \$10.

Season of the Osprey. Connecticut filmmaker Jacob Steinberg brings his celebrated PBS Nature Special “Season of the Osprey” to the FI Theater for a night of entertainment and conservation education. This unique film, narrated by Paul Giamatti, captures the struggles, failures and triumphs of an osprey family over the course of a summer on the Connecticut River. Following the screening there will be a Q and A and discussion with the filmmaker. No admission charge. Voluntary contributions will go to the Ken Edwards Wildlife Conservation Fund of the HLFM. **August 24, 2024.** Time: 4 p.m. Place: FI Movie Theater.



Menhaden. Filmmaker Jacob Steinberg will present an illustrated talk on his current work in progress: a film illustrating the critical importance of menhaden to our fisheries and our development as a nation. **Sunday, August 25, 2024.** Time: 4 p.m. Place: Museum, 2nd Floor. *Reception to follow.*



Rock Cycle Ruckus. Rocks are amazing! Learn about the cycle they go through as they turn from sedimentary to metamorphic to igneous and back again by playing games and seeing lots of awesome rock samples! A DPNC family program for ages five and up. **Wednesday, August 28, 2024.** Time: 2 to 3 p.m. In person at Museum. Limited to 15 children. Advance registration recommended. Suggested donation: \$10.

The Wondrous World of Fireflies. Fireflies are surely among our greatest ambassadors for Earth's natural magic. Dr.

Sara Lewis, biologist and professor emerita at Tufts, will help unravel their many mysteries. Join us to discover where they get their bright lights, explore their remarkable lifestyles, learn about human activities that put fireflies at risk, and find out what you can do to help protect

these dazzling creatures. **Sunday, Sept. 8, 2024.** Time: 4 p.m. Place: Museum, 2nd Floor.



Fishers Island Nature Discovery Program

The FIND program will be held in the morning during the week of August 12th to 16th for children ages 5-10. The schedule and signup will be sent out by e-news and posted on fishnet and the Museum's website. This year's program, run by educators from the DPNC, will have daily animal themes.



The History of English Springer Spaniel Field Trials on F.I. Museum Director Pierce Rafferty will give an illustrated talk commemorating the 100th anniversary of the first national English Springer Spaniel Field Trial that was held on F.I. in October 1924. **Sunday, October 13, 2024.** Time: 4 p.m. Place: Museum, 2nd Floor.

Nature Walks

Nature walks will be led by board member Terry McNamara on Thursday mornings in July and August. Meet at the Museum at 10:30 a.m.

Museum Hours

June 30 to Labor Day. Tuesday through Friday: 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.; 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday: 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Sunday: 11 a.m. to 12 noon. Closed Mondays.

Off Season Hours: To be posted. For special appointments, please call Museum Director Pierce Rafferty at the Museum (631) 788-7239, or email info@fergusonmuseum.org.



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"Mates." Etching by Charles B. Ferguson. Printed 1968.