PEP Talk

The Newsletter of the Peconic Estuary Program

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2010 Peconic Estuary Program

Marine Debris Education Outreach

Images courtesy of www.marinedebris.noaa.gov

Trash on our beaches? Marine debris is a problem that negatively impacts coastal communities all over the United States. Defined by the Environmental Protection Agency as any man-made object that is disposed or abandoned and enters a marine environment, debris can originate from a wide variety of sources including: boats, storm drains, river deposits, beachgoers, land-based sources and any other contributor that improperly disposes of refuse. Synthetic products such as balloons, food wrappers, beverage bottles, plastic bags, and fishing line pose major threats to boaters, habitats, and marine organisms. Floatable debris in our waterways is a known navigational hazard and at times cause fatal boating accidents.

Recent news headlines have identified marine debris as a major pollutant of our oceans, bays and estuaries.

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What's Inside?

PEP: Call to Action 2010 Conference

Please join us for the upcoming "PEP: Call to Action 2010 Conference" on Monday, September 20th, 2010 from 8am-6pm, at 230 Elm catering hall in Southampton Village. This Conference will bring together experts, local government officials, and interested community members to discuss some of the pressing issues facing the Peconic Estuary, and their potential solutions. The discussions will be focused around four major topics: the impacts of nitrogen in the bay, stormwater runoff in the watershed, eelgrass management, and habitat protection and restoration. Each topic will be covered by an interactive panel discussion, featuring experts and officials who will present and discuss a list of action items focusing on key initiatives that could be advanced to improve water quality and habitat value in the estuary.

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Peconic Bay Friendly Yard Makeover Contest

The Peconic Estuary Program is an advocate for bay-friendly yard practices and to promote such practices, we are sponsoring a Bay-Friendly Yard Make-Over Contest! Bay-friendly practices can include stormwater management practices and decreasing the need for irrigation and nutrient/pesticide applications in your landscape. A panel of experts will review the proposals and select one lucky contest winner to receive a bay-friendly yard makeover valued at $5,000, to be completed by a local landscaper. You do not need to be a technical expert to apply; you just need a desire to transform your yard into a more bay-friendly space.

To enter, send us a brief (no more than 1 page) proposal letting us know (1) why protecting the Peconic Estuary is important to you, (2) how a bay-friendly makeover would make your yard look better, and be easier on the environment, (3) what motivates you to want a bay-friendly yard makeover, and (4) what you hope to achieve through this process. Also please include your name, address, email, and phone number, and an optional photo (2 max.) of your yard as well. Some ideas you might want to include may be reducing excess pavement, adding rain gardens, re-directing gutters, installing rain barrels and dry wells, reducing irrigation needs, or removing unused areas of lawn and replacing them with low maintenance native habitat areas.

The review team will select the winners based on the following criteria: (1) overall reduction of stormwater runoff from property, (2) overall elimination/reduction of pesticide and fertilizer use, (3) commitment to establishing and maintaining a more bay-friendly yard, (4) commitment to acting as an advocate for the protection of the Peconic Estuary, and (5) other positive environmental benefits the project may provide (i.e. increasing native habitat for local wildlife). The panel's final decision will be announced at the upcoming PEP Call to Action Conference on September 20th, 2010, although winner does not have to be present to accept prize.

For more bay-friendly yard ideas check out Group for the East End and Peconic Baykeeper's "Bayscaping" brochure at http://www.eastendenvironment.org/read/brochures.aspx, or Montgomery County's rainscapes program – eligible techniques at: http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dectmpl.asp?url=/Content/dep/water/rainscapes.asp. Help protect our local environment while making improvements to your property! For more information or for access to the online entry form, check out our website at: www.PeconicEstuary.org, contact Jennifer Skilbred at (631)-765-6450 x212, jskilbred@eastendenvironment.org, or mail your application package to Jennifer Skilbred (PEP Bay-Friendly Yard Contest, Group for the East End, PO Box 1792, Southold, NY 11971).
~Jennifer Skilbred, Group for the East End/PEP

PEP Talk is published by the Peconic Estuary Program (PEP), a partnership of governments, environmental groups, businesses, industries, academic institutions, and citizens. The PEP's mission is to protect and restore the Peconic Estuary system. Learn more at www.peconicestuary.org. Edited by Emily A. Fogarty

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Group for the East End's Summer Field Ecology Program Introduces Children to the Wonders of the Peconic Estuary

For almost 20 years, Group for the East End has been providing young ecologists with a captivating summer experience, exploring our local environment. These four-day programs allow students to explore different ecosystems throughout Suffolk County. Each day the students meet Group educators at different locations throughout the East End (and almost exclusively within the Peconic watershed).

The Group's Summer Field Ecology programs spark interest in the outdoors and plant the seeds for a lifetime of stewardship and love of nature. Participants often come back year after year with younger siblings joining in as soon as they are eligible. The 8 – 15 year old students (separated into different one week time slots based on age) explore the Peconic Estuary, investigating salt marshes and bay life. Using seine nets, tanks, dip nets, bug boxes, scavenger hunts, team challenges, and educational field guides, students discover pipefish, blue crabs, puffer fish, bay scallops, terrapins, and osprey, just to name a few examples. These children learn how to identify living things, and learn to respect their place in the natural world as well. They learn about the geological processes behind our local terrain, and the physical properties of the bay water, sand, and soil as well. This learning happens while the students are enjoying an exciting adventure discovering different habitats and enjoying outdoor activities ranging from hiking to biking or kayaking.

Photo By: Jennifer Skilbred

This year at least three days of every week of the program is focusing on the Peconic Estuary. Students get a unique chance to see the Peconics from a variety of different habitats, while getting their hands dirty learning about the natural wonders they hold! Jennifer Skilbred PEP Education and Outreach Coordinator and GEE Environmental Advocate has been one of the Summer Field Ecology Program's educators for the past four years, and along with other Group education staffers continues to educate children and young adults through this unique program.

For more information, or to sign up for some of the few remaining spots in this summer's programs please visit GEE's website at: www.EastEndEnvironment.org, or call Steve Biasetti at (631) 765-6450 x205

~Jennifer Skilbred, Group for the East End/PEP

Calendar of Events

September 15, 2010 - Citizen's Advisory Committee Meeting (6:30PM - 9:30PM), Hampton Bays Community Center, Hampton Bays, NY.

September 20, 2010 - PEP: Call to Action 2010 Conference from 8am-6pm, at 230 Elm catering hall in Southampton Village.

Marine Debris Education Outreach from Page 1

Coined phrases such as “garbage patch,” and “degraded micro-plastics” are now being recognized throughout the marine community as a reference to the growing problem of marine debris in our waterways. Marine debris is not only aesthetically unappealing, but is also a danger for humans and many unsuspecting marine species who confuse the debris with natural food sources. Degraded plastics from polymer refuse have the potential to adsorb organic contaminants from the marine environment. These absorbed organic contaminates in plastic particles are then transmitted into unsuspecting fish that confuse the plastics for food. The organic contaminates are finally passed on to us at our dinner tables as we consume the fish.

Images courtesy of www.marinedebris.noaa.gov

Other common types of debris found on beaches and in the waters within the Peconic Estuary include drift wood, dock lines, disposable eating utensils, paper cups, packaging materials, aluminum cans and other discarded recyclable products. The negative impacts on the ecology of the estuary due to debris are only beginning to be understood.

The Peconic Estuary Program (PEP) has recognized this growing issue and decided to reach out to the local communities in order to educate citizens about marine debris and its impact on the Peconic Estuary System. The PEP and Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Suffolk County’s Marine Program will be hosting a series of beach clean-ups and educational sessions to outreach to residents and visitors about the impacts of marine debris found on the shores of the Peconic Estuary. The program is based on the National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration’s (NOAA) well-established national debris program. We will have an informational kiosk set up at several popular sites around the estuary (see schedule*) with educational material and hands-on learning tools for participants of all ages to learn about the types of marine debris and its impact on the estuary. This program focuses on collecting debris found at local beaches and educating participants on the impacts of the debris collected. These clean-up activities will provide a hands-on experience for volunteers willing to participate. Prior to the scheduled clean-ups, CCE staff will provide educational curriculum for volunteers on the impacts of various types of marine debris. Cornell Cooperative Marine Program staff will be on hand to answer questions and lead beach clean-ups. For more information please contact (631)727-7850 x353 or email ch425@cornell.edu. ~ Corey Humphrey, CCE

***Schedule**
Education sessions will start at 10 am.
Beach clean-ups start at 2 PM

Date	**Location**
July 24th	Meschutt
July 31th	Cedar Point
August 7th	South Jamesport Beach
August 14th	Indian Island
August 21st	Meschutt
August 28th	Cedar Point
Sept. 4th	Shinnecock County Marina
Sept. 11th	South Jamesport Beach
Sept. 18th	Flanders
Sept. 25th	Cedar Point
October 2nd	Indian Island

SPECIES from Page 6

The knobbed whelk is the state shell of New Jersey and Georgia. Conchs are relatively long-lived species (5-10 yrs). Following coupling and fertilization, female whelks lay a string of up to 160 coin-shaped egg capsules, sometimes called a "Mermaid's necklace", which is anchored in the sediment. Each of the egg capsules holds up to 100 eggs. These develop over a period of 3-13 months and hatch out as tiny conchs about 4 millimeters long. Following hatching, it is believed that conchs stay buried in the sediment for most of their first 1-2 years. Adults also commonly bury during the day and, like most snails, they are most active at night. They probably reach reproductive maturity by the time they are 4 inches long, at an age of ~3-5 years. Much remains to be learned about these species.

Whelks are important predators of shellfish, including bay scallops, hard clams and oysters that are also found throughout the Peconic Estuary. Knobbed whelks use their shell lip (the edge of the shell opening) to pry open clams and oysters, but it is not clear how channeled whelks feed (we are currently studying this). Since their vision is poor, conchs rely on a powerful sense of smell to locate their prey.

Conchs represent an important commercial fishery in New York and have become increasingly important to local baymen as catches of some other traditional species have declined in recent years. Channeled whelks make up most of the catch, as they will crawl into baited traps (conch pots); interestingly, knobbed whelks rarely do this. Conch meat is commonly marketed as 'scungili' and is used in salads, fritters and chowders. ~Dr. Matthew Sclafani, CCE and Dr. Steven Tettelbach, LIU

CALL TO ACTION 2010 CONFERENCE from Page 1

We hope to hear feedback from attendees and agree upon next steps in moving these action items forward.

In order to see success in the Peconic Estuary Program's efforts to protect and restore this great natural resource, we will need the support of a variety of groups, including local and regional governments, non-profits, businesses, and community members. Throughout the day's discussions we will be calling on everyone within the Peconic Estuary watershed to support essential steps towards restoration and protection of this precious resource we all enjoy.

We will also hear from Peconic Estuary longtime supporter, Assemblyman Fred Thiele, and will be honoring a few special community members who have dedicated much of their time to the protection and restoration of the Peconic Estuary at our lunch hour CAC awards. The Conference will also include the unveiling of our latest Peconic Estuary video, as well as the announcement of our yard makeover contest winners (see page 2 for details)!

The day will include a light breakfast and lunch as well as a short reception in the afternoon. Registration is free, but mandatory as seats are limited.

Please register before the end of the day on Wednesday September 1st to reserve a spot (late registration may be accepted but is not guaranteed) by contacting Jennifer Skilbred at (631) 765-6450 x212, jskilbred@eastendenvironment.org, or register on the PEP website at www.peconicestuary.org/CAC2010.html.

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Species Snapshot: Whelk

Photo by: Dr. Stephen Tettelbach
Whelk

Whelks, also known locally as conchs, are the largest marine snails found in estuaries and nearshore waters of Long Island. Two species occur locally: the channeled whelk, *Busycotypus canaliculatus*, and the knobbed whelk, *Busycon carica*. Both species occur from Cape Cod south to Florida and reach lengths of up to ~10 inches. They are abundant in our waters; in some areas one species may predominate while at other locations the two species may occur in equal numbers. Conchs live on muddy-sandy bottoms, usually below the low tide line, but empty shells are commonly seen on our beaches.

The channeled whelk has a shell with characteristic spiral furrows near the top while the rest of the shell is usually covered with a thick brownish periostracum or “skin” that easily peels off. The outside of the shell is usually tan in color while the glossy inside of the shell opening is usually brown-light yellow/orange. The shell of channeled whelks is fairly light weight and thin. Like knobbed whelks, they possess a brown, oval trap-door (or operculum) that closes the shell opening when the animal withdraws into its shell.

The knobbed whelk is so named for the short spines or knobs on the edges of the top of the shell; they do not have the shell furrows of the other species, nor do they usually have any evident periostracum. The shell is much heavier and thicker than that of a channeled whelk. The shell of smaller knobbed whelks is usually striped but larger individuals are white. The inside of the shell opening ranges from yellow-orange to brick red; this glossy shell material was one of the two main sources (along with hard clams) of wampum that was produced and used as money by native Americans on Long Island and in New England.

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