



The Napatree Investigator



NAPATREE INVESTIGATOR NEWSLETTER

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Winter 2009

WELCOME to the Napatree Investigator!

What was the most unusual thing you saw at the beach last summer? If you walked Napatree Point with Watch Hill naturalists Julia, Steve, Hugh, and Janice and the rest of the Investigators, did you see an Asian crab? A piping plover? A sand shark?

We had a blast guiding kids like you around Napatree Point as part of our twice-weekly Napatree Investigators program. Every Tuesday and Thursday, two sections of Investigators learned about Napatree's unique environment. From seaweeds to seine nets, we explored, learned, and splashed in the great outdoors!

Now that you've been away from us for a while, we thought you might like to recall some of our adventures. And if you couldn't join us last season, here's some of what you missed!

Julia (Royster), Steve (Brown), Hugh (Markey) and Janice (Sassi)



TAG! Horseshoe Crabs are IT!

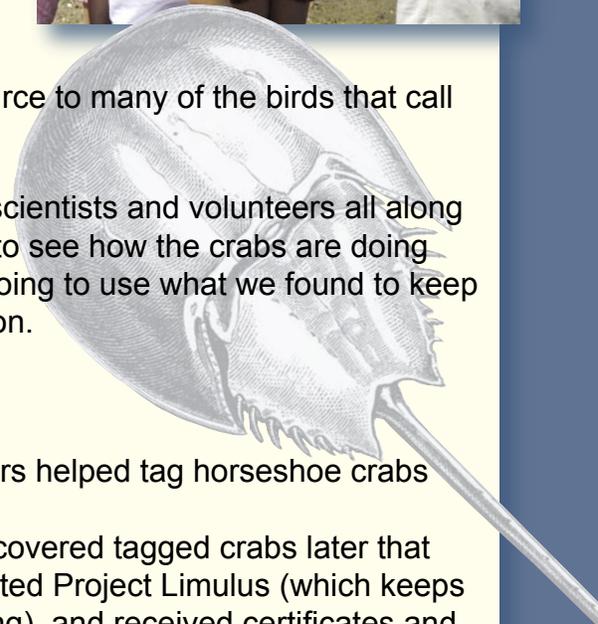
Last season, Watch Hill Conservancy naturalists and volunteers attached tags (small disks) to the carapaces of over 1027 horseshoe crabs! Each tag had a number, so we could record information about each individual crab. Why all the fuss over a critter like that? First, scientists use the blood from horseshoe crabs (yes, they have blood!) to test new drugs for people. Second, fishermen use horseshoe crabs for bait in their fish traps. Finally, the eggs the horseshoes lay provide an important protein source to many of the birds that call Napatree home.



We teamed up with scientists and volunteers all along the Northeast coastline to see how the crabs are doing these days, and we're going to use what we found to keep an eye on their population.

Did you know?

- Napatree Investigators helped tag horseshoe crabs last year.
- Two Investigators recovered tagged crabs later that season. They contacted Project Limulus (which keeps records on the tagging), and received certificates and pins as a thank-you!



Pipefish, Lady Crabs, and Comb Jellies

Last summer, the Napatree Investigators often took the lead in choosing what we would explore in a particular session. Sometimes the best way to learn and have fun is just to wander around and take a long look at what surrounds you! That's how we found things like the pipefish, a skinny relative of the seahorse that lives in the shallows of Napatree Point. Like the seahorse, the males are the ones who carry the babies in a pouch!

Then there was the very pinchy lady crab! We found this crustacean on the ocean side of the point and we made some important discoveries about it. We learned that it has paddles at the ends of its last pair of legs that help it swim. It lives in the shallow surf, and gets knocked around by the waves quite a bit. When that happens, the lady crab quickly re-buries itself in the sand. We also learned that she has quite a temper! Lady crabs are very good at defending themselves with their small but pointy front claws. Naturalist Steve suffered a few pinches as he held up the crab for the Investigators to see!

There seemed to be plenty of comb jellies around last summer. Comb jellies are about four inches long, and we could only pick them up when we cupped our hands and scooped water up with them, since they're so fragile.

Did you know?

- Unlike sea nettles or lion's manes, comb jellies do not sting.
- If you disturb a school of comb jellies at night, their bodies will glow pale green!

The Great Investigator Scavenger Hunt

One of the Investigators' favorite adventures was our scavenger hunt! It was a combination of a timed hunt with a review of what we had learned about in the the past season. Some of the things we looked for were pretty easy to find: a smooth piece of glass, a feather, a flat stone, or a fish. Other objects made us really look around, like a hermit crab in an oyster drill shell, a sand worm, iso-pods, or amphipods. We had to use sharp eyes and our knowledge of the coastal environment to know just where to look.

Maybe the best part of the hunt was the end. All the Investigators put together all sorts of sticks, feathers, seaweed, and lots of other objects we found on the beach to create a sea monster! Lots of people walking the beach came by to see what we were making. Each time we had two teams, both did so well that they ended in a tie!

That's it for this issue of The Investigator! Look for another edition this spring, when we'll be talking about what's coming up for Summer 2010!



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The Watch Hill Conservancy and the Watch Hill Fire District operate summer educational programs at the Napatree Point Conservation Area in Watch Hill. The Napatree Investigator is a publication of the Watch Hill Conservancy.

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