



## **Rhode Island Statewide Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) Conference**

***Its Official!*** This Fall it was announced by Sarah Zurier of the RIHPHC that the yearly conference will be largely based in Watch Hill. Specifically, on Saturday, April 29, 2017, Watch Hill will be home base for the 32nd annual Conference. Planning for this showcase event is underway. Over 350 guests are expected for this day-long series of lectures, receptions, and tours. The workshops run 75 minutes and the tours vary from just over an hour to three hours. Some of the proposed tours will be on foot – think Napatree Point – while some will be conducted by bus outside of the District. The newly restored Lanphear Livery and Watch Hill Chapel will be primary venues with other historic sites participating. Conference organizers at the RIHPHC have tapped Edith Eglin, Sharon Ahern, Anne Johnson as a few of the local organizers. Last year’s conference, entitled *Building and Preserving South County*, was held in Wickford in North Kingstown. Historic preservation practitioners and advocates from around Rhode Island and the region attended. We expect that this first-time event for Watch Hill will showcase efforts to protect and preserve our historic treasures and the character of the area. It will also provide us with a host of ideas for the future. Anyone can attend the Conference and its always an interesting day and crowd. Keep your eye on the Conservancy’s and the RIHPHC websites for details this Spring.

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THE WATCH HILL CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER, 2016 VOL. 9 No. 1 WATCH HILL, R.I.



On an incredibly clear Thursday morning in late June I meet with Grant Simmons and Christian “Chris” Fox, a young intern with the Watch Hill Conservancy this summer, at the Watch Hill Yacht Club dock. I am tagging along with them for their weekly water quality monitoring expedition. We climb aboard a 15 foot Boston Whaler with a center console emblazoned with the WHYC burgee and off white decks. The engine starts quickly and purrs; the 8:00 am cannon barks; we stand watching the flag slowly rise against an azure sky. Grant and Chris then uncleat the lines and we leave the float, Grant gliding us out of the still calm harbor past a moored Watch Hill 15 and Misty, Fred Allardye’s J-40.

Slowly Grant powers up and we are skimming across the surface of the outer harbor southwestward to find the cut out to the Sound between Napatree and Sandy Point. Our destination for the first sampling is on the Sound side of Napatree at a pre-determined spot midway between the red bell buoy and Watch Hill Point, but close into the beach. Grant is now driving the whaler at 20 knots and I am holding on riding in the bow, being careful not to bruise my buttocks as we skim over small rollers and drop suddenly into the intervening wave troughs. He and Chris have donned their jackets, I have only my shirtsleeves. The sun will be warmer soon.

The current is rushing west, the sea calm. There is very little traffic – perhaps two runabouts with early morning fishing enthusiasts. One in front, close at hand, in the cut, has two older men aboard. One of the occupants moves back to the stern, lifts a

cooler lid. We joke that he is looking for his first beer. I am reminded of the sheer relaxing beauty of the place. The Hokule’a, a Polynesian catamaran with two masts, two long steering oars, furled tanbark sails and lots of young people on board passes us undertow. The crew seems glad to see us, apparently, we are a greeting party and they wave wildly. We think they must be en-route to Mystic for an event. I find out later Hokule’a is on a world-wide tour celebrating the culture and people of Hawaii and Polynesia. She is on a goodwill tour of the area including Long Island Sound, Block Island, and Martha Vineyard.



Grant and Chris find the sampling spot by eye-ball triangulation between landmarks on shore and on water. It is a mystery to me, but protocol requires sampling in the same location. Grant has been returning to this spot (and the others on our route) for more than a decade each week every summer. I think to myself that he could find this with a GPS in the fog, but on clear mornings like today, he and Chris just know where it is. We do nothing to cancel the illusion.

Once we arrive at the testing site, Chris drops the anchor and we float with a gentle roll. A jumble of equipment appears on the foredeck of the whaler as Chris empties the large Watershed Watch equipment bag. Soon Grant deploys a black and white painted Seechi disk mounted on a meters’ long flexible tape measure to visually gauge both water depth and clarity. He has also lowers a large water sampling bottle twice to get water samples from the

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close to the bottom and several feet from the surface. Once these are raised to the surface Chris takes over to obtain samples for dissolved oxygen testing. He has already taken surface samples for chlorophyll. Next week he will add to these samples, bottles filled with water for coliform bacteria testing. All samples immediately stored on board in a chilled cooler to keep the samples fresh for on-shore lab work. Both Grant and Chris follow procedures detailed by URI's Watershed Watch program, which has now been sponsoring volunteer water quality monitoring throughout Rhode Island for 29 years. Chris records all of the data on cards printed for the purpose. Date, time, air temperature, water temperature, sample depths, wind speed, cloud cover, and recent precipitation are all noted. The card will be sent to Watershed Watch for recording along with the sample lab results. Watershed Watch records online the testing results and provides charts of each critical data set over month and year. Hence for each of the sites sampled, one can easily find test results spanning the entire length of time samples have been taken. For Napatree and Little Narragansett Bay, the record goes back nearly a decade.

It is not long before we up-anchor and head back along Napatree Point and into the Bay Side for a testing site just off the Kitchen. Here Grant and Chris reenact their performance amid comments of concern about the growing macro-algae mat which seems to be spreading slowly eastward from the north side of Sandy Point. This mat, which is also of concern to David Prescott, Save The Bay's CoastKeeper, is composed of a mat of gooey decaying seaweed on the bottom covering a field of "black mayonnaise" sediment, which supports very little in the way of marine life. David confirms later that the mat is spreading in Little Narragansett Bay. We head next to Foster Cove for a repeat performance and more concern about bottom goo.

By 9:30 am we have returned to the Watch Hill Yacht Club with filled sample bottles and the expectation that next Thursday morning Grant and Chris will be back on the water to collect more. Chris takes the samples on to the little Watch Hill Library's basement for lab work. Here he mixes reactants with his dissolved oxygen samples to qualify how much oxygen is in the water. High concentrations of dissolved oxygen indicate healthy marine environments. He also syringes waters samples through disk shaped filters to collect chlorophyll samples. High volumes of chlorophyll indicate algae growth. High volumes of algae growth indicate higher levels of nitrogen in the water, which in turn is an indicator of nutrient loading. High nitrogen levels can deplete oxygen in the water threatening marine life.

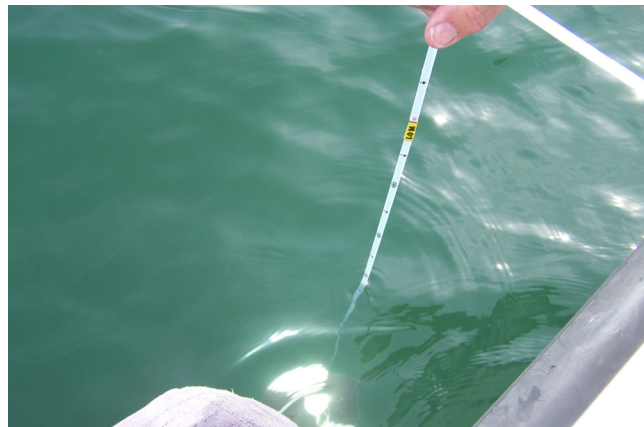
Reporting on water quality issues is not new in this newsletter. We reported on Little Narragansett Bay water quality in 2013 and in 2009. Last year Save The Bay published findings of its multi-year water quality testing program, which includes a site in Watch Hill Harbor. The report is a call to action to help reduce water pollution that affects all but Napatree's Ocean/Sound-side beach. Per Save The Bay, and the state environmental agencies of Connecticut and Rhode Island, Little Narragansett Bay

north of the Kitchen and Sandy Point, and Watch Hill Harbor and Foster Cove are "impaired;" that is polluted with nutrient loading, mid-high nitrogen levels, lower dissolved oxygen readings, and a growing field of black mayonnaise under a gooey blanket of bottom seaweed. There are times during the summer of elevated bacteria,

particularly after rainfall, which indicates that storm water runoff is carrying fecal pollutants into the river, the poorly flushed coves, and the bay. North of Avondale the situation gets worse. Save The Bay concludes that: "Little Narragansett Bay is shallow and partially enclosed making it very susceptible to human effects. Population growth, poorly planned development, recreational use, pollution from wastewater (cesspools and sewage treatment plants) and (storm water) runoff, and changing climate conditions have created serious water quality problems that must be addressed to ensure a healthy river and Bay." We would add, that the welfare of Watch Hill as a summer resort

and economic engine depends upon a clean and healthy environment. What can we do about this?

The low hanging fruit is in our neighborhoods and backyards by way of developing personal responsibility. Clean up after pets; don't discharge sewage into the water – use the pump out boats; fertilize less and mow less; don't feed the ducks, geese, and swans (you do not want to know how much waste they contribute); capture storm water runoff into rain barrels and gardens for filtration and a slow release later; grow a coastal buffer to act as a pollutant filter – long grasses will keep the geese off your lawn, too. These simple practices will go a long way to match the Conservancy's advocacy for cleaner coves, Harbor, and Bay. –RY



## Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

### **10. Is Napatree the only conservation easement the Conservancy has?**

No. The Conservancy has 10 other properties in the WHFD and is always looking for opportunities to protect appropriate parcels.

### **11. Is the person stationed at the beach entrance to Napatree Point a Conservancy employee?**

No. He is hired by the WHFD to enforce the Westerly Town Ordinances and by the Conservancy to greet visitors to Napatree.

### **12. Are the folks in the ATVs Conservancy employees?**

Yes. They are part of the Naturalist Program.

### **13. What is the Naturalist Program again?**

It is the signature program for the Conservancy. Please read the input from the crew in the rest of the Newsletter. Hopefully next year each and every one of you will be able to attend a Horseshoe tagging or other learning adventure. You can check out The State of Napatree reports online.

### **14. What are the Conservancy's plans for 2017?**

-The Conservancy is working hard to find a way to finish the previously mentioned Street Lighting Project along Bay Street.

-We are also working to move the Transportation Improvement funds through the process as rapidly as possible. Once the funds are transferred from the State to the Town it will be possible to turn the Streetscape Improvements into a long delayed reality. Also, despite the projected 2019 date, the Conservancy is working with the R.I. Dept. of Transportation to accomplish the work in 2018 if not sooner.

-The Conservancy will be one of the signature hosts for the R.I. Statewide Historic Conference this April, bringing hundreds of historians and others interested in historic preservation to Bay Street on Saturday, April 29, 2017.

-The Conservancy will be working with One Bay Street Center to start a series of events at the renovated Lanphear Livery. In particular, we will focus on informative lectures and discussions relevant to the area. We hope to host these in the large, open concept space dedicated to Chap Barnes and formally known as "The Chaplin B. Barnes Reading Room".

-The scientific work continues on Napatree all year long. Policy work on conservation issues also continues all year long, a necessity with the pressure put along the shoreline. This means monitoring and weighing in on local and state initiatives that may be for or against environmental protection.

–SA

## 2017 MEMBERSHIP FORM

The Watch Hill Conservancy is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Your membership supports the protection of the natural and cultural resources of Watch Hill, a variety of programs, and educational publications, including this newsletter.

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## Critter Corner: Slipper Shells

Napatree is covered in shells. Some are as big as your hand, and others are smaller than your fingernail. But there's one type that kids ask about more often than any other. They're those shells that are stacked on top of each other like a pig pile. What exactly are they? Why are they stacked up like that?

Those mysterious piles are called **Slipper Shells** or **Lady's Slippers**, and they're common along the Rhode Island coastline. They do look a bit like tan slippers, which gives them their name, and they are a form of shellfish like snails or quahogs. Slipper Shells can most often be found on the bay side of Napatree, where the waves are smaller.

Although Slippers have a tongue-like "foot" that they can use to move around with, they spend most of their lives stuck to some hard surface, such as a rock, or even another organism like a horseshoe crab. They feed on algae and microscopic plants called phytoplankton that drifts through the water or falls to the bottom.

If a Slipper can't find a hard surface easily, it will grab onto the nearest Slipper! That is why you will often find them stuck to one another. Males will be on the top, and females on the bottom. As for those in the middle of those big stacks... they actually have both male and female characteristics! In fact, if there are not enough females in the stack, one of the males will change. How's that for an unusual creature?



## Piping Plovers and Pasta?

Are Investigators having Italian dinners on the beach? Have Plovers learned to cook? What does pasta have to do with Plovers?

The Piping Plover is a small bird that nests on Napatree Point, and is a threatened species. That means that the number of Plovers has dropped over the years, and scientists are concerned that they may one day disappear. The naturalists on Napatree, along with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, keep a close watch on the nests of these birds and do all they can to make sure that they are kept safe.

We also love to teach Investigators about Plovers! That's why we spent time learning about plover nests and how they live. Remember what a plover nest looks like? Unlike other birds that build nests in trees, plovers just make a small dent in the sand for their eggs. Naturalist Laura showed Investigators how Plover eggs are naturally camouflaged. Laura put out small rocks in groups on the sand. They were the same size and color as real eggs, and we had a hard time finding the "nests" when the time came! That's good camouflage!

Next came the pasta, as Investigators got a chance to think like a Plover! Since they get most of their food by eating the insects that live in the lines of seaweed in the sand known as the **wrack line**, Plovers need to be on the lookout for trouble. Laura put pieces of pasta in the wrack line to take the place of the bugs that Plovers would normally feed on. Next, Investigators had to run back and forth from their "nests" near the dunes to the wrack lines while picking up as many pieces of pasta as they could. That might sound easy, but not when Laura would shout "dog!" or "gull!" and Investigators would have to run back to their nests as fast as they could before they were caught.

We learned that it isn't easy being a Piping Plover, and so they deserve all the protection we can give them! —HM

*That's all for this issue! Keep learning about the world around you, and we'll see you back on the beach!*

— Naturalists *Hugh, Laura, and Steve*



Photos by Hugh Markey

## 2016 Science and Education Programs in the Napatree Point Conservation Area

### The Geography of Napatree Point Conservation Area

*Peter August & Janice Sassi*

This study is the definitive compilation of statistics (areas, lengths, counts) for the physical and ecological characteristics of the Napatree Point Conservation Area (NTPCA). It is largely a GIS analysis.

### Investigators 2016: Napatree Point Children's Education Program

*Steve Brown, Hugh Markey & Laura Craver-Rogers*

Summer children's education program.

### Remapping of the Napatree Eelgrass Bed

*Bryan A. Oakley*

Dr. Oakley remapped the eastern boundary of the eelgrass patch off Napatree Point using side-scan underwater imagery. We are very interested in knowing the exact boundary so we can monitor the possible disturbance of eelgrass by recreational boaters who anchor in or near the habitat. The eelgrass patch, the largest in RI (200 acres), will be remapped again in the Fall of 2016 by URI/CRMC/STB.

### Understanding the Short and Long-term Shoreline Change of Napatree Barrier Using RTK-GPS Beach Profiles and Mapping of the Last High Tide Swath

*Bryan A. Oakley*

Quarterly monitoring of the shoreline position and dune elevations of the barrier beach. This is a long term, ongoing project.

### Monitoring Avian Diversity and Abundance in the Napatree Point Conservation Area

*Reynold Larsen*

Bi-weekly monitoring of the abundance and species of birds observed along a standardized, systematic survey transect on Napatree. Data are posted on the Cornell University eBird data repository.

### Water Quality, Watershed Watch

*Christian Fox & Grant Simmons*

Weekly monitoring of the water quality on the north and south sides of Napatree Point and Fosters Cove. This is supplemented by water quality monitoring (dissolved oxygen, salinity, temperature, etc.) in the Napatree Lagoon.

### Piping Plover Monitoring in the Napatree Point Conservation Area

*Ryan Kleinert, Kevin Rogers, Pamela Loring & Peter Paton*

Continued monitoring of the Piping Plovers of Napatree. The regular USFWS monitoring is being supplemented with Plover tagging studies being conducted by Loring and Paton using the nanotag antenna on the wester tip of Napatree.

### Project Limulus on Napatree Point: Horseshoe Crab Surveys

*Laura Craver-Rogers*

Continued surveys of horseshoe crabs as part of Sacred Heart University's Project Limulus

### Visitor Activity on Napatree in 2016

*All NTPCA Naturalist Staff, Emily Bodell & Peter August*

Daily counts of beach visitors and anchored boats on the Little Narragansett Bay. This is supplemented by surveys of visitors crossing the dunes on permitted trails and closed paths.

### Camera Trap Reconnaissance of Wildlife in the Napatree Point Conservation Area

*Peter August, Janice Sassi, Emily Bodell & Laura Craver-Rogers*

Camera trap monitoring of mammals in a variety of habitats on Napatree. This year's survey includes summer monitoring of predators and human intruders in closed Piping Plover breeding areas.

### Bats of the Napatree Point Conservation Area: A Preliminary Assessment

*Peter August*

Monitoring of bat diversity and activity in various habitats on Napatree using acoustic detectors. There have been no previous surveys of the bats of Napatree prior to this.

### Native Vegetation Restoration and Invasive Plant Control in the Napatree Point Conservation Area

*Hope Leeson, Janice Sassi & Peter August*

Annual monitoring of the survivorship of restored vegetation and monitoring of the spread of invasive species on Napatree.

### An Ecological Reconnaissance of the Napatree Lagoon: Fish and Water Quality

*Nicole Rohr, Peter August, Christian Fox, Emily Bodell & Janice Sassi*

Continued sampling of the seasonal variation in the diversity and relative abundance of fish and crabs in the Napatree. Water quality sampling is done at the same time.

### Tidal Dynamics of the Napatree Lagoon

*Nicole Rohr, Peter August & Scott Rasmussen*

We deployed a tide gauge in the Napatree lagoon in March 2016 and will retrieve it in October 2016. The goal is to measure the offset in tidal timing and amplitude relative to the Watch Hill Lighthouse.

### Monthly Macroalgae Abundance and Species Composition in the Napatree Lagoon

*Lindsay Green, Hannah Madison, Ivy Burns, Anne Filteau, Fiona MacKechni & Carol Thornber*

Continued sampling of the seasonal variation in the diversity and relative abundance of algae in the Napatree Lagoon.

### Shrubland Dynamics on Napatree Point

*Jessica Cressman, Keith Killingbeck, Emily Bodell & Peter August*

Measurement of the change in size of 54 marked shrub patches on Napatree over the past two years. Knowing how shrub patches are expanding or contracting will provide insights into future vegetation patterns on Napatree.

### Marsh Edge Monitoring in the Napatree Lagoon

*Nicole Rohr, Peter August, Christian Fox, Emily Bodell & Janice Sassi*

Establishment of a long-term assessment of the marsh boundary on the western side of the Napatree Lagoon. This will allow us to track marsh movement due to storms and sea level rise.

—JS



## Summer's Most Frequently Asked Questions

### **1. Does the Watch Hill Conservancy own the renovated Lanphear Livery – a.k.a One Bay Street?**

*No. The Conservancy does not have a direct or indirect ownership interest in the Lanphear Livery. The property was renovated and is owned by One Bay Street Center.*

### **2. Does the Conservancy own the parking lot behind One Bay Street?**

*No. Again, the Conservancy does not have a direct or indirect ownership interest in the parking lot. The longstanding owner of the parking lot is The Watch Hill Limited Partnership.*

### **3. Was the Conservancy responsible for closing Bay Street this past summer for paving work?**

*No, the Town of Westerly selected those days and advertised them in advance in The Westerly Sun Newspaper.*

### **4. Is the Conservancy involved in drafting the Harbor Management Plan?**

*No. Many years ago the Westerly Town Council appointed individuals to form the Harbor Management Plan Commission.*

### **5. Is the project to install bury utilities underground finished?**

*Yes. With the incredible generosity of many donors over \$6M was donated to the Conservancy for this purpose. Under the leadership of Chap Barnes & Fred Whittemore, and with significant help from Jane O'Connell and Deborah Lamm – among others - the Conservancy worked with the Town to bury the utilities when the Town opened the streets in the village for drainage improvements.*

### **6. Is the project to install Historic Lighting on Bay Street finished?**

*No. The Street Lighting Project was slated to be finished as part of an infrastructure bond approved a few years ago by the Town of Westerly. However, most of the funds have been spent down for other Town projects. Even though the Conservancy has never been financially responsible for this portion of improvements on Bay Street, the Board feels strongly that the project needs to be completed. Therefore, the Conservancy is working with the Town to see if the Conservancy can use its resources to get the work finished. This is very much a work in progress but the Conservancy Board remains optimistic at this point.*

### **7. Has the State of Rhode Island freed up the Transportation Improvement monies that were slated to finish off the sidewalks, curbing and other streetscape improvements in the Village?**

*Yes but the funds are not going to be available until 2019.*

### **8. Did the Conservancy restore the Indian Sculpture back into a functioning water fountain and who decided if he should face out to the Harbor?**

*No. The Watch Hill Fire District Parks Commission did the work with help and input from the Watch Hill Memorial Library and Historic Society.*

### **9. What is the Conservancy's role on Napatree Point?**

*The Watch Hill Fire District voted to grant the Conservancy a conservation easement over Napatree Point. The easement is a 17 page document delineating the District and the Conservancy's rights & responsibilities as to Napatree. It is recorded in the Land Evidence Records of the Town of Westerly. The District retains ownership of the underlying property and is responsible for enforcing relevant Town rules & regulations along with the Town.*

*continued on page 7*



Hello out there Investigators! It feels like forever since we walked barefoot on the beautiful sands of Napatree Point, learning about the amazing creatures that live there. In order to help pass the time until next summer, we'll spend some of this issue of The Investigator thinking about some of the cool things we did last year!

***Here are some questions to think about while you read:***

- **Why is the blood of a horseshoe crab important to humans?**
- **What does pasta have to do with Piping Plovers?**
- **What kind of shellfish wears a slipper?**

## ***Heads and Tails with Horseshoe Crabs***

After gathering at the gazebo in the morning, Napatree Investigators began their walk toward the beach. As always, some of them liked to walk on the sea wall that ran along the edge. As we worked our way down, we spotted a dark shape in the water. The shape was the size of a dinner plate, and might have been mistaken for a rock if it weren't moving slowly along the bottom.

Suddenly, one Investigator made the identification: "It's a horseshoe crab!"

Sure enough, we had found an animal that has hardly changed in about 450 million years: *Limulus Polyphemus*, or the horseshoe crab. Not only was it lucky that we saw one so quickly, it was even better because that was the theme of the week!

Napatree Naturalists Steve and Laura braved the chilly morning air to go in and bring the strange looking animal to the land for a closer inspection. They were careful to pick it up by the sides, since picking up a horseshoe crab by the tail (the long, pointy thing that some people mistakenly call a stinger) could injure it. Investigators got a close-up view of the legs, the gills, and even the brushy mouth of the creature. Then they got to do a bit of real science!

Naturalists are working with scientists to measure and tag horseshoe crabs as part of Project Limulus, a program that keeps track of the crab population. Horseshoe crabs are used for several purposes, but the most important has to do with their blood. The blood of a horseshoe crab is used to test medicine before it is sold to the public. Scientists remove a small amount of blood from the crab, which is later released. Investigators helped measure the crab, write down the sex and size, and place a plastic tag on the crab. That tag has a number on it, and if it is seen again, that information can help scientists learn more about where horseshoe crabs live and how far they move in their lives. *Way to go, Investigators!*

