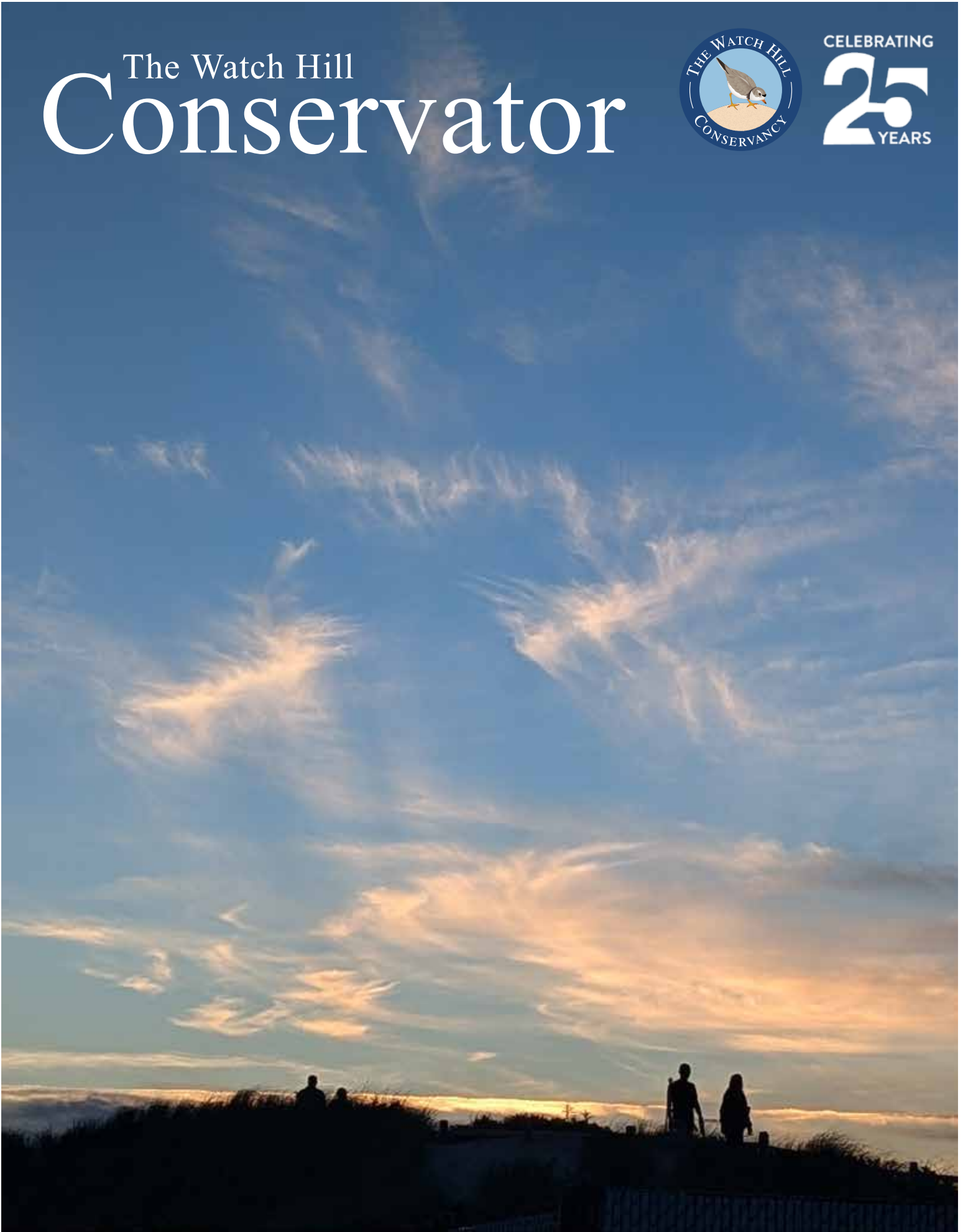


# The Watch Hill Conservator



CELEBRATING  
**25**  
YEARS



# WATCH HILL CONSERVANCY SUMMER RECAP

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Preserving the values of Watch Hill and Little Narragansett Bay would not be possible without the dedication of those who educate the public about the vital stewarding of the Napatree Point Conservation Area and about maintaining the historic and community character of Watch Hill.

We are especially grateful for the support of the membership of the Conservancy, our Community Programming Sponsors, the A.M. Roberts, Jr. Charitable Foundation, the URI Coastal Institute; and our staff, Board of Directors, Science Advisors, and volunteers who give so much of their time and wisdom to achieve our mission.

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Janice Sassi, B.S., *The Watch Hill Conservancy*

## “Summer’s lease hath all too short a date”

– William Shakespeare

Celebrating our 25th anniversary, the Conservancy embraced the spirit of the summer 2024 season with a vibrant calendar of programming that kept our community engaged, informed, and entertained. The season was a swift celebration of history and education reflecting the Conservancy’s commitment to preserving the unique heritage of Watch Hill.

Our beloved kickoff event, the Celebration of Summer, set the tone for a memorable season. A perfect summer night of camaraderie, the event reminded us of the invaluable support the Watch Hill community has for the Conservancy.



All summer, we proudly hosted an impressive lineup of special presentations at the beautifully restored historic Lanphear Livery. Throughout the season, our 7th Annual Lanphear *LIVE!* public education lecture series brought together audiences for five outstanding presentations held in the charming Chaplin B. Barnes Reading Room. Participants enjoyed intimate discussions on interesting topics, and delightful libations provided by Grey Sail Brewing of RI. We are incredibly grateful for the support we receive, which enables us to provide enriching experiences for our community. A special thank you to our marvelous guest speakers and to our generous 2024 Community Programming Sponsors, whose support plays a vital role in our public programming initiatives.

The Reading Room, not only a hub for our Lanphear *LIVE!* lecture series, serves as a venue for other community programming. We had the pleasure of welcoming the launch of REFLECTIONS, an oral history initiative created by the Westerly Historical Society, “Fort Mansfield, 1898-1926, A History,” presented by local historian Captain Jack Spratt and finally Watch Hill resident Dean Brenner, CEO & Co-Founder of The Latimer Group, offered a thought-provoking presentation titled “Cutting Through the Noise: Strategies to Survive and Thrive in Our Distracted World,” which prompted an engaging discussion.

Highlighting the rich history of Watch Hill, a photography exhibition “Watch Hill, Through the Lens of Edward N. Burdick, Edwin A. Scholfield, and George B. Bishop,” curated from the private collection of Captain Spratt, was on display from July – September. This collection showcased a captivating photographic journey through nearly fifty years of local life from 1875 to the 1920s.

Our commitment to community engagement continued as the Conservancy partnered with The Lily Pad Gallery to co-host a successful Business After Hours event with the Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce. This wonderful evening of connection and collaboration brought together representatives from over 35 local businesses and organizations!

As we embrace the quiet of the off-season, we reflect on the successes of our 25th Anniversary year. Our commitment to making a meaningful difference in the Watch Hill community and the Napatree Point Conservation Area remains strong as we prepare for 2025. Your support is vital to advancing our mission, and we’re grateful for your involvement.

Enjoy this season recap edition of *The Conservator*, filled with highlights and accomplishments from this milestone Anniversary year. Thank you for being part of our journey!

*Barbara*

Barbara Axmacher  
*Executive Director, The Watch Hill Conservancy*



# A MESSAGE FROM OUR NEW CHAIRMAN



As I step into the role of Chairman of The Watch Hill Conservancy, I want to express gratitude for your commitment to preserving the natural beauty of Watch Hill and our important work. As a Westerly native who has spent 32 years in Rhode Island public service, I have witnessed our community's strong connection to the environment. Today, I am excited to blend that passion with our collective mission to protect the precious landscapes that define our home.

Having witnessed the power of collaboration for many years, partnerships are essential for success. As the Conservancy works to strengthen our ties with local businesses, schools, and government agencies to make conservation a shared priority, I invite you to stay engaged with us. From beach clean-ups, guided nature walks, family-friendly programs and important educational lectures and presentations, the Conservancy proudly designs programming to bring our community together, fostering an appreciation for our natural surroundings and the importance of keeping them clean and thriving.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to the conservation of our precious environment. Let's work together to ensure Watch Hill remains a vibrant and sustainable haven for generations to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis".

Dennis L. Algieri  
*Chairman, The Watch Hill Conservancy*

## DEBORAH LAMM HONORED

At our 2024 Annual Meeting, The Watch Hill Conservancy proudly presented the Director's Commendation Award to outgoing Chairman, Deborah Lamm.

Taking the reins in 2017, Deborah upheld the important mission of the Conservancy for seven years with fervor, always remaining poised, articulate, and clear in our messaging. With Deborah at the helm, Napatree programs flourished, Lanphear *LIVE!* always had a strong line-up of speakers, and the Conservancy showed itself to be a good partner with other local non-profits.

During her tenure, she ran a tight financial ship, but never hesitated to budget for excellence. Her attention to detail was everywhere as she guided the Conservancy towards the achievement of our goals.

Please join us in thanking Deborah for her commitment, leadership and many significant contributions to The Watch Hill Conservancy.



(l to r) WHC Chairman Dennis L. Algieri and WHC President Dr. Peter V. August presenting the Director's Commendation Award to Deborah Lamm at the 2024 Annual Meeting.

# LANPHEAR LIVE!

## 2024 Summer Presentations

Janice Sassi & Peter August

The Conservancy's flagship summer program – Lanphear *LIVE!* – had a spectacular lineup of speakers this 25th Anniversary season. Gemologist Simon Teakle regaled the audience with his overview of the international rare jewelry market. His fascinating presentation included many personal stories surrounding the sale or purchase of internationally-known gems. Amanda Wallack from the nonprofit Edesia Inc. in North Kingstown, RI shared with us their important work in developing and distributing nutritious food products to feed starving youth. To date, they have saved the lives of 25 million children in 65 countries. Professor Jon Scott Logel from the Naval War College in Newport described the history of war gaming and its role in training senior officers from the U.S. Navy and our military allies around the world. Charlotte Taylor, the RI State Archaeologist, gave a riveting presentation on the history of shipwrecks in Rhode Island waters and their archaeological importance.

Following the Annual Meeting, we had special 25th anniversary celebratory presentations: Steve Brown and Hugh Markey reviewed the history and success of the Conservancy's premier youth education program – The Napatree Investigators. Dr. Peter August followed with an overview of the scientific studies underway on Napatree and how they support our stewardship and conservation programs.



If you missed any of the presentations this summer, you can watch them on The Watch Hill Conservancy YouTube Channel at <https://bit.ly/WHC2024Presents>

### THANK YOU TO OUR 2024 COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING SPONSORS FOR THEIR INVALUABLE SUPPORT!

PK  
**PARSONSKELLOGG**  
**Bob Valenti**  
 FAMILY OF DEALERSHIPS  
 WASHINGTON TRUST  
 TOWN FAIR TIRE FOUNDATION, INC.  
 The Wine Store  
**MICELI'S**  
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**ALFRED M. ROBERTS, JR.**  
 CHARITABLE FOUNDATION  
**OLYMPIA**  
**WH20**  
 barrecoast  
**Lathrop**  
 INSURANCE  
 Celebrating 25 Years  
 In Honor Of  
 CHAP BARNES & FRED WHITTEMORE  
 WATCH HILL YACHT CLUB  
 CABANA GROUP

## WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBER **Lisa McCormick Mannix**

Lisa McCormick Mannix is excited to join the board of The Watch Hill Conservancy. Lisa holds a BA from the University of Vermont and a Master's from Bank Street College of Education. Her commitment to community and nature is reflected in volunteer work, including trail clean-ups, and



formerly serving as a docent at the Maritime Aquarium in Norwalk and chairing children's programs for the Watch Hill Library and Improvement Society. Lisa is a Westerly native and while residing in Wilton, CT she is a Watch Hill summer resident. Lisa and her husband, Matthew, share a love of the outdoors with their three children, often enjoying early morning walks on Napatree, as well as passion for tennis, travel, skiing and photography.



*Celebrating Collaboration and  
Connection with The Lily Pad  
Gallery and Ocean Community  
Chamber of Commerce*

~~~~~

**AUGUST 14, 2024**

*Business After Hours*



# SURPRISE VISITOR TO NAPATREE'S SHORES

Few people bothered to dodge the occasional showers to visit Napatree on this July day. Naturalists Paige Leitzelter, Emily Watling, and Emma Bean were there on their regular beach patrol. As they traveled along the ocean side, they came across a startling sight. A fish had washed up on the beach. The animal was 4' 7" long and covered in armor-like plates called scutes. The head narrowed to a snout, and its mouth was on the fish's underside. A quick text and some pictures sent to Conservancy President Pete August confirmed that this primitive looking animal was likely an Atlantic sturgeon, a federally listed threatened species. August contacted DEM, and they quickly sent an environmental police officer to retrieve the carcass for further study.

DEM Fisheries was grateful for the prompt notice they received, since it was important that the fish be retrieved and frozen as quickly as possible to halt deterioration. Later, DEM's Principal Marine Fisheries Biologist Eric Schneider reflected on the importance of the find and about the species.

"A find like this is always a mixture of emotions," said Schneider. "You're never happy to see a dead sturgeon, but there's always an opportunity to learn when one is found. As a scientist or from fisheries management, we're always thankful that folks report it. Sometimes people don't know what it is, and they want us to be aware of it. Other times, they just want us to come and get rid of it. Whatever the motive, it increases the chances that we will actually learn from it. Because it's endangered, interactions are rare."

Tentatively, the animal was identified as an Atlantic Sturgeon. Testing is needed to be certain. In addition to identifying the species, there are a host of scientists that will request body parts for aging the animal. The samples taken will also be kept for future genetic analysis. Further examination may reveal the cause of the fish's mortality, whether through boat strike, net entanglement, or other events.

There are several entities, including NOAA Fisheries Protected Resources and other partners that have been taking samples of fish and sending them out for genetic analysis. Sturgeons are anadromous, meaning they begin their lives in fresh water. They reach a point in their development and move to salt. Later, they will migrate back to fresh water to spawn. For Rhode Island, sturgeons are typically in the area from May to July. Which rivers are they migrating to? Over time, scientists have been able to determine what the genetic signature is for different river systems.

"When someone gets a fish," Schneider said, "there's a certain process used to take a sample of it and compare it against a genetic database to try to determine where that fish originally came from. We can have pretty decent confidence that we can identify the actual natal river system."

While further testing is necessary to make a positive identification, Schneider says the size of the Napatree fish makes



it likely that it is an Atlantic sturgeon, rather than a short nosed.

Despite the fish's impressive size and intimidating appearance, Schneider says there's no reason to worry: "Definitely not. Although they can be up to 14' long, weigh 800 pounds, and have a life span of 70 years, these fish are not normally at the surface. They're searching the bottom for shellfish, crabs, crustaceans and other bottom dwellers. Their mouth is simply not shaped to bite someone."

If you should have to rare privilege of seeing a sturgeon, alive or dead, there are several ways to report it:

## Reporting a dead sturgeon

CONTACT RI DEM

**Division of Law Enforcement (DLE):** You can contact RI DEM DLE by phone at 401-222-3070

**Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF):** You can contact RI DEM DMF by phone at 401-423-1923 or email at [DEM.MarineFisheries@dem.ri.gov](mailto:DEM.MarineFisheries@dem.ri.gov)

CONTACT NOAA FISHERIES

**NOAA Fisheries:** You can also contact NOAA Fisheries at (978) 281-9328 or email at [noaa.sturg911@noaa.gov](mailto:noaa.sturg911@noaa.gov).



## NAPATREE BY THE NUMBERS

Napatree's summer 2024 season was exciting, with many noteworthy observations. Here are some of them "by the numbers":

**11** amazing Napatree Naturalists delivered our programs and educated our visitors.

**30** outreach and educational programs offered.

**268** individuals participating in outreach and educational programs.

**35,000** estimated number of visits to Napatree in the summer.

**4,850** boats at anchor off Napatree.

**646** visits to our Discovery table over 10 different days.

**75** kids participating in the Napatree Investigators program.

**3,045** horseshoe crabs counted in 19 surveys (with the help of 25 volunteers!).

**18** Piping Plovers fledged on Napatree by 15 pairs of adults, the most Plovers fledged since 1992.

**58** breeding pairs of the threatened Least Terns, the most recorded in the last 24 years.

**1,458** pounds of trash taken off Napatree.

**106** species of birds observed in 12 shorebird surveys.

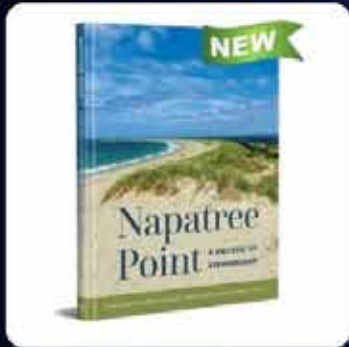
**15** species of birds and one species of bat detected 64 times on their migratory flights by the Napatree MOTUS antenna, with flights ranging from Canada to the southeastern United States.



Many interesting wildlife observations including Atlantic Sturgeon, Hooded Seal, and a Bald Eagle.



# HOLIDAY *shopping list*



**THE WATCH HILL CONSERVANCY  
ONLINE STORE IS OPEN!**

Visit [thewatchhillconservancy.org/online-store](http://thewatchhillconservancy.org/online-store) today!





*Celebration of Summer*  
*Friday, June 28, 2024*

# NAPATREE

## Investigator



FALL 2024

### AHOY INVESTIGATORS!

We always find cool things when we're out on the beach, but last summer we found more than usual! In this issue, we'll learn about some of them, and we'll also challenge you with a brand-new crossword puzzle. Let's get this started!



## THE JELLIES: COMB OR MOON?

Whenever Investigators are seine netting, they scoop up unusual animals. One that we see often is almost completely transparent (see-through), and about the size of your finger. When the sun is out, these creatures look a little like a rainbow. It's a jellyfish! But what kind? There are two species that we're likely to find on Napatree.

If you look closely at one of these animals, you may see that they are not made up of a single part, but rather they have eight comb-like plates that shift and move to push itself forward. This is a comb jelly! The name comes from the fact that each of those plates is lined with hairs, making it look like a comb. Comb jellies do not hurt humans, but they do love eating other jellies. In fact, some comb jellies can expand their stomachs to hold prey nearly half their own size!





## THE JELLIES: COMB OR MOON? (CONT.)

Another common jelly in New England waters is the **moon** jelly. The moon jelly is round and comes in many different sizes. They may be as large as 10 – 16 inches, but the ones we found on Napatree are much smaller, possibly because they are younger. They can also be identified by the four horseshoe-shaped gonads you can see through the main body, called the **bell**. Like the comb jelly, moon jellies are completely harmless to humans.

The moon jelly is very plentiful. However, plastic bags that end up in the ocean often look like jellies to animals that depend on these drifting creatures for food. Thousands of turtles and birds die each year after swallowing indigestible wads of plastic mistaken for jellies. You can help by eliminating single-use plastics (like cups and straws) in your daily routine!



## KNOBBED WHELK

One of Investigators' favorite parts of the program is clamming and quahogging. For one week every summer, they dig for the creatures that lie just beneath the surface of the mud. But this year, we made a surprising find: a very large, knobbed **whelk**!

An adult knobbed whelk can be five to nine inches long, and the one we found was about eight. Normally, they live in shallow waters, but they can be found in depths of up to 150' in the open ocean. They have a spiral shell, and the shell color varies: the outer shell ranges from grayish white to tan, while the inner shell ranges from pale yellow to orange

If you look at the bottom side of the knobbed whelk, you'll find a hard plate called the **operculum**. This acts like a trap door when the snail retracts into its shell. The body of the snail is divided into head, abdomen and **foot**. Two pairs of tentacles are located on its head: one senses light, while the other is used for touch and smell.

This animal feeds on clams, oysters, mussels and other **bivalves** (shellfish made up of two shells, like clams). To feed, the snail uses its foot to hold prey while the lip of its shell chips and pries at the bivalve. Once a big enough hole has opened, the snail inserts its foot and begins to feed.

Crabs, sea stars, and sea urchins think knobbed whelks are tasty snacks!

**Crossword Puzzle Key**  
 DOWN: 1. Whelk 2. Predators 3. Eight 4. Bell 5. Operculum, 10. Algae, 11. Foot  
 ACROSS: 4. Bivalves 6. Transparent 7. Spider 8. Carapace 9. Triangle 12. Rigs 13. Moon 14. White



## SPIDERS IN THE MUD?

Another favorite with Investigators is crabbing. We love having our crab **rigs** in the water! A string, a bent wire, and of course our chunk of hot dog always brings the green crabs out for breakfast! But this season we found a crab that we've never found in our usual crabbing spot: a **spider** crab.

Like the name implies, spider crabs have **eight** legs. Their shell (called a **carapace**) is shaped like a **triangle**, and the top of the carapace is often covered with **algae**, which help camouflage it and protect it from **predators**. Although the spider-like appearance may look creepy, spider crabs are harmless to people. They have tiny **white** claws that they use to pull apart their food, which consists of algae and decaying animals that they find on the bottom.

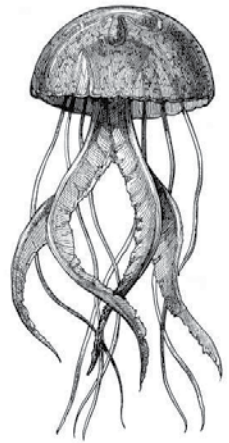
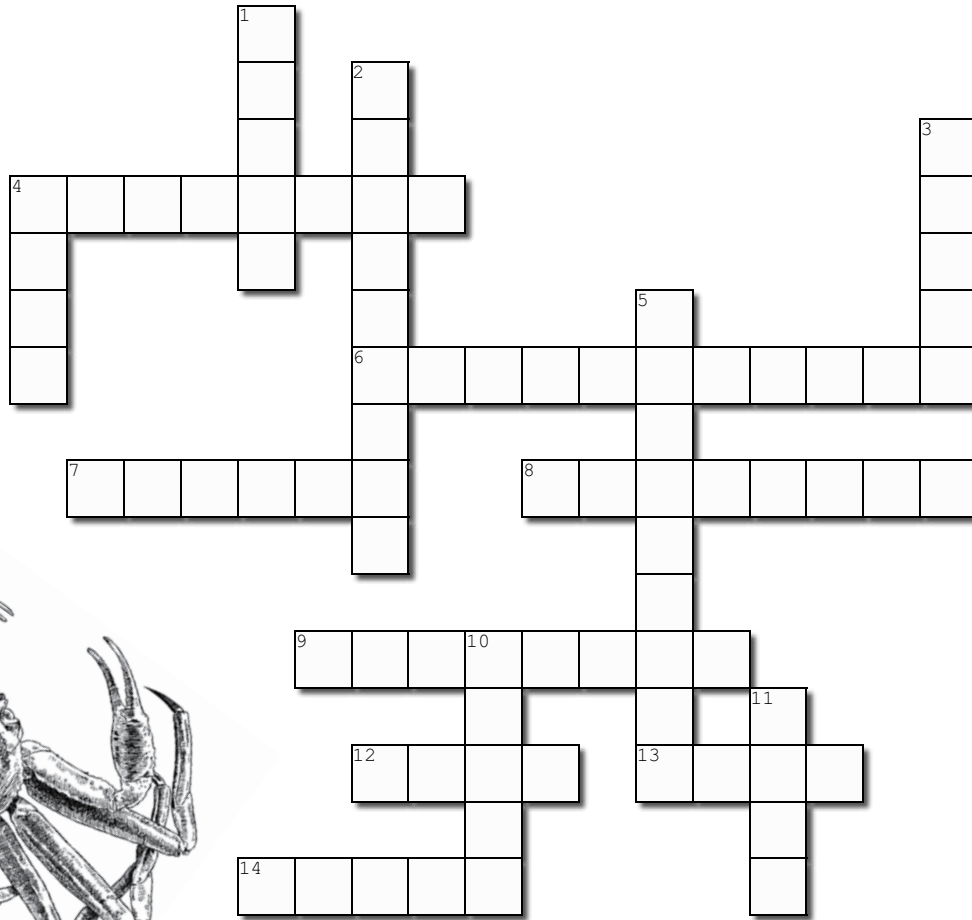


That's all for now, Investigators! Steve and I hope you remember the fun you had last summer, and we're looking forward to seeing you next season!



# It's the Investigator Crossword Puzzle!

Here's a new challenge for you: a crossword puzzle! All these words are taken from this issue of The Investigator. Do you know the answers?



## ACROSS

4. Shellfish that are made up of two shells are called these.
6. You can see right through this answer!
7. This crab was one we rarely see at Napatree.
8. The shell of an animal.
9. The shape of a spider crab's carapace is shaped like a \_\_\_\_\_.
12. We use crab \_\_\_ baited with hot dogs for crabbing.
13. A round species of jellyfish.
14. What color are a spider crab's claws?

## DOWN

1. This knobbed \_\_\_ was the biggest we've seen on Napatree.
2. The name for animals that feed on other animals.
3. How many legs does a spider crab have?
4. The main part of a moon jelly.
5. A hard "trap door" that closes when whelks are threatened.
10. Spider crabs usually eat this.
11. The body of a snail is divided into the head, abdomen, and \_\_\_\_\_.