



protecting the nature of the place you love

2021 SUMMER NEWSLETTER



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# Dear Friends & Supporters,

I hope you're enjoying this particularly welcome summer on the East End.

If you've been here for a few years, you likely have noticed that this beautiful place is changing, and our land, water and wildlife are facing new challenges every day.

In some areas, the Group's decades-long efforts to preserve precious farmland and forests have paid off. To improve water quality, new programs that replace outdated, leaky septic systems at a substantially reduced cost are showing good progress. The rebound of the Osprey population here from the brink of local extinction years ago is simply remarkable.

At the same time, we are confronted by some of the largest development projects in a generation, and the appetite to clear more land and build is insatiable.

As the Group approaches its 50th year of service in defense of the East End environment, we have learned that all of our victories are based on the same principles.

First, we must educate neighbors, friends, and elected leaders every day on the critical importance of protecting our natural resources. Our quality of life and local economy, now and in the future, depend on it.

Second, we must partner with civic associations to organize and mobilize communities. A collective informed voice, together with the Group's professional advocates, keeps environmental protection at the top of every government agenda.

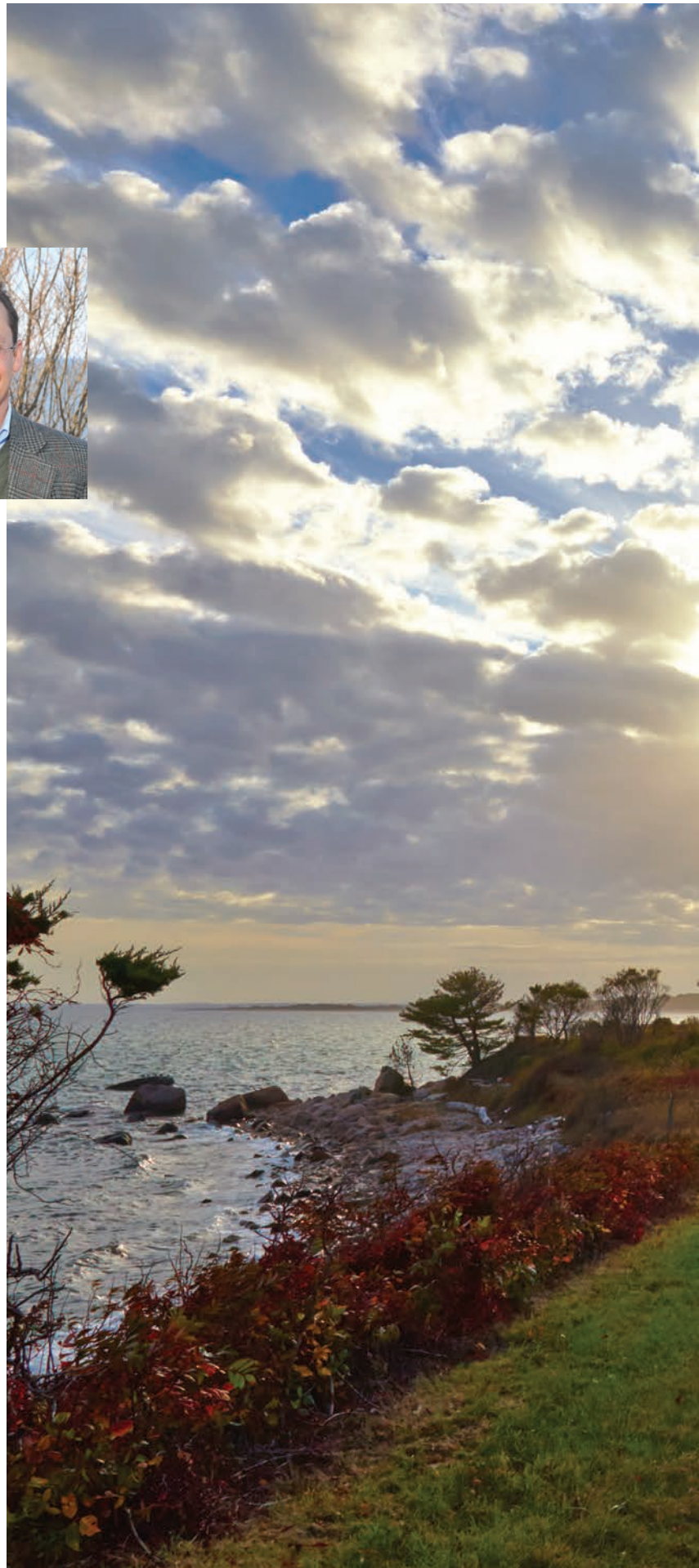
And third, we must continually seek out new and diverse members like you, who understand the value of our mission—people who care and make small changes in their day-to-day lives to protect the nature of the place we love.

I am profoundly grateful for your past support, and hope you continue on this ever-important journey with the Group.

Sincerely,



Bob DeLuca  
President, Group for the East End







# Plum Island Update: It's Not For Sale!

## ADVOCATES AND ELECTED LEADERS SECURE A MAJOR STEP TOWARD CONSERVATION

After more than a decade, thanks to your support, Plum Island was finally taken off the federal government's chopping block for immediate sale to the highest bidder. This unique, 840-acre treasure trove of natural beauty and historic significance can now be considered for future conservation under the general rules governing the disposition of government property.

This important victory was navigated through a series of strategic legislative and policy efforts initiated by the Preserve Plum Island Coalition, of which the Group is a founding member, to formally repeal the requirement for sale and focus on viable options for conservation.

Throughout this effort, we have been extremely fortunate to develop and advance a viable conservation strategy that reflects the exceptional talent and leadership of our coalition partners, the Town of Southold, our New York and Connecticut Congressional delegations, and U.S. Senator Charles Schumer.

Now that the immediate threat of a private sale has passed, our focus is on the development of a long-term preservation strategy, which must include an appropriate funding mechanism to ensure that natural and cultural resources are responsibly restored, maintained, and protected over time. The coalition also envisions allowing limited public access to the island, provided it is carefully planned.

With your generous support, we will pursue the best possible conservation outcome for Plum Island.



# Group Collects Critical Data on Horseshoe Crabs, a Species in Decline

THESE PREHISTORIC  
"BLUE BLOODS"  
MADE THE COVID-19  
VACCINE POSSIBLE

In our continuing partnership with Cornell Cooperative Extension, Group staff members monitored horseshoe crabs this spring in Southold. Every full and new moon, in the middle of the night, we and a band of hearty volunteers donned our headlamps and searched the water's edge, where they come to spawn. We tagged them so their movements can be tracked over time, and recorded their size, sex and spawning observations.

These data will be used by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to assess the status of horseshoe crabs in our area and assist with regional management and conservation.



Photo by Rob Del



Group Environmental Associates Marina DeLuca and Maddie Hrysko tend to horseshoe crabs under starry skies in Southold.

**"Horseshoe crabs have been a valuable part of the world's shorelines for millions of years and provide a remarkable number of tangible benefits to both human health and the survival of countless coastal species. We cannot afford to let these wonderful creatures slip away because of our indifference to the challenges facing their future."**

– Bob DeLuca, President, Group for the East End

It is more important than ever to protect this vulnerable and remarkable species, whose population has declined significantly over the past 25 to 30 years, due in part to American eel and welk pot fisheries using horseshoe crabs as bait.

But these ancient creatures are far more than just bait. In fact, the medical community discovered that their copper-based blue blood could detect bacterial contaminants in everything from heart stents, saline drips, and flu shots to pacemakers and prosthetic devices, and yes, the Covid-19 vaccine. The crabs are collected, bled in laboratories, and then returned to the water, but their survival rate is vastly different, depending on who you ask. As their numbers go down, several migratory bird species are also threatened. Horseshoe crab eggs provide the fuel they need to fly for days at a time.

Although not widely used currently in the United States, synthetic alternatives for crab blood are available, and scientists are working with fisheries on developing synthetic substitutes for bait. **The Group also continues to support the further research and development of artificial bait as a replacement for horseshoe crabs and a necessary conservation tool to protect the future of the species.**

Until there is safe widespread use of these alternatives, the Group will continue participating in this critically important conservation effort – with your support.

**For more information about horseshoe crabs and other Long Island species in decline, visit [nyswap.org](https://nyswap.org), the Group's NYS Wildlife Action Plan website.**



## In Memoriam: Andrea Spilka

It was with great sadness and heavy hearts that Group staff members learned of Andrea Spilka's sudden passing in December of 2020. She was an extraordinary, indefatigable advocate for the East End environment.

After retiring from her career with the New York City Department of Education, Andrea took classes at Southampton College, where she first met the Group's president, Bob DeLuca, who was an instructor there. For the next 15 years, Andrea became a stalwart volunteer for the Group, and a tireless advocate in her own right for preservation and responsible planning in Southampton Town, Brookhaven Town, and Suffolk County.

Andrea was founder and president of the Southampton Town Civic Coalition and a valued member of the East Moriches Property Owners Association, the League of Women Voters of the Hamptons, the Brookhaven Town Open Space and Farmland Acquisition Advisory Committee, and the Southampton Water Protection Alliance. She was also appointed to the Suffolk County Council on Environmental Quality.


Reflecting on the devastating loss to the Group and all the people whose lives she touched, Bob said, "In my 30 years of professional conservation and advocacy, I cannot recall a single individual who dedicated more personal time with more professionalism, passion, and conviction than Andrea. She was also a very strategic thinker, and someone who believed deeply in the power and goodness in people. She was an inspiration to me, and I miss her presence and positivity every day. Andrea always saw the best in others and never ever gave up on their potential."





# Lights Out! Group Advocates for Dark Skies

## NIGHT SKY POLLUTION ON THE RISE AS POPULATION INCREASES



Like many other coastal communities, the rural character of the East End has been under siege for decades. Despite the Group's efforts to preserve it, the consequences of irresponsible development and the sheer number of people living here now are glaring. Increased traffic, urbanization, habitat loss, and water quality degradation are slowly transforming this beautiful place into something that resembles more of a metropolitan suburb.

Other changes—like those in our night sky—are more subtle but still negatively impact the environment. Unless you're an astronomer or an enthusiastic stargazer,

you may not have noticed these changes. Especially if you come from an area where commercial, residential, or street lighting has destroyed any chance of ever seeing the magnificent Milky Way galaxy, or even the Big Dipper.

To raise awareness about the wonders of our awe-inspiring night sky—and the importance of protecting it—the Group joined forces this year with civic, environmental, astronomical, business, and environmental organizations to form the North Fork Dark Sky Coalition (NFDSC). Though focused on the North Fork, the coalition's efforts have value for the entire East End.

**JOIN THE DARK SKY MOVEMENT!**

North Fork Dark Sky Coalition: [northforkdarksky.org](http://northforkdarksky.org)

International Dark-Sky Association: [darksky.org](http://darksky.org)



# Effects of Light Pollution

- **It's wasteful.**

Outdoor lighting wastes energy, releasing 21 million tons of carbon dioxide per year in the United States, according to the International Dark-Sky Association.

- **It wreaks havoc on natural ecosystems.**

For billions of years, plants and animals—including humans—have relied on the earth's predictable cycle of day and night to survive. Artificial light interferes with that rhythm and threatens life-sustaining behaviors such as reproduction, nourishment, sleep and protection from predators.

- **It prevents us from seeing the stars.**

If you grew up taking in the awesome beauty of starry summer nights, you know how magical it is. Our children and our children's children should not be deprived of that.

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**“In a world that is often defined by gut-wrenching challenges and suffering, I believe the wonder, beauty and eternity of our night sky stands as a perpetual beacon of hope, inquiry and inspiration for all of us.”**

– Bob DeLuca, President, Group for the East End

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NIGHT SKY BLOTTED OUT  
BY LIGHT POLLUTION

VISIBLE NIGHT SKY



VERY BAD

BAD

BETTER

BEST

Illustration: International Dark-Sky Association

## Simple Things You Can Do

- 1 **Be aware of the problem and tell your family and friends!**
- 2 **Do not use up-lights in your landscaping! They may look nice on your plants and trees, but they interfere with the natural habitats of countless nocturnal species. In fact, they may be illegal in your town!**
- 3 **Turn off your lights off when you go to sleep. If safety is an issue, the Bureau of Justice Statistics National Crime Victimization Survey shows that most home invasions and violent crimes take place during the day.**
- 4 **Install motion sensors and timers on your outdoor lights.**
- 5 **Use lighting that is “fully shielded” and warm-white with a Kelvin rating of 2700K or lower.**



# Despite State Appellate Court Ruling, Sand Land Continues Mining in Bridgehampton



## DECISION SAYS NYS DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION VIOLATED STATE MINING LAW IN ISSUING PERMITS

In an unequivocal 4-1 decision, the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court in Albany ruled that the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) directly violated the plain language of a state mining law. Specifically, the Court held that the “DEC cannot process the application, let alone issue the permit. It cannot do by fiat what is prohibited under the law. *Therefore, the act of issuing the permits here ... was arbitrary and capricious.*”

The Court found that the state agency completely disregarded a letter from the Town of Southampton, which indicated that mining at Sand Land, the Bridgehampton sand mine, was not permissible by zoning and thus, was ineligible for any operating and expansion permits issued by the NYSDEC. In 2017, the Suffolk County Health Department

gained access to the site and determined that the activities at the mine were significantly contaminating the underlying aquifer. Unfortunately, to date, the NYSDEC has taken no action to enforce the Court’s judgment.



***As the newsletter goes to press, the Group and fellow petitioners have been forced to resume their fight in the courts and are presently seeking a further decision that will compel the NYSDEC to enforce the judgement of the Appellate Court and close the contaminated mine once and for all.***

**“After years of advocating for the protection of the South Fork’s drinking water, the Group was delighted by the Court’s decision. We are shocked that the DEC has still taken no action to invalidate permits and shut the mine down, despite the Appellate Court’s clear direction for the agency to do so.”**

– Bob DeLuca, President, Group for the East End





# Group Advocates for Millions in Septic Replacement Funding

| SUCCESSFUL EFFORT LEADS TO LESS NITROGEN AND CLEANER WATER



**“The Group is committed to securing long-term recurring funding to assure that East End homeowners can upgrade to nitrogen-reducing septic systems at little to no cost to them.”**

– Bob DeLuca, President, Group for the East End

Thanks to your support, we are delighted to report that thousands of homeowners have replaced their antiquated septic systems through Suffolk County’s Septic Improvement Program (SIP). That means there’s substantially less nitrogen polluting our bays and suffocating marine life.

When the Group partnered with the County on establishing the five-year pilot program, we knew that financial incentives had to be significant for homeowners to upgrade their systems.

To that end, offering grants and/or rebates to qualified homeowners of up to \$10,000 from Suffolk County and

\$10,000 from New York State has made the program widely successful. Add in the funding available for eligible homeowners in the towns of East Hampton, Southampton and Shelter Island, and out-of-pocket expenses are minimal or nonexistent.

When the pandemic hit and people sought refuge in their East End homes, interest in the program grew dramatically. To help meet that demand the Group worked with Legislator Al Krupski to advocate for the transfer of \$8 million (from a sewer rate stabilization fund) by the Suffolk County Legislature. Our efforts were indeed successful, and the transfer of funds was approved this summer!

**Want to Replace Your Old Septic System?  
Apply for a Grant!**

**Suffolk County Septic Improvement Program, Dept. of Health Services  
631-852-5811  
septicdemo@suffolkcountyny.gov**

Residents of East Hampton, Southampton and Shelter Island may receive additional funding through their town.

- **Town of Southampton**  
Community Preservation Fund Office  
631-287-5720
- **Town of East Hampton**  
Department of Natural Resources  
631-324-0496  
NaturalResources@EHamptonNY.gov
- **Town of Shelter Island**  
Building Department  
631-749-0291 x2106  
lbeardraymond@shelterislandtown.us

**For more information:  
CleanWaterCash.org**



# Group Rallies Supporters for Balloon Ban in Southampton

## TOWN BOARD FOLLOWS LEAD OF OTHER COASTAL TOWNS

The Group has hosted many beach cleanups across the East End and today we're finding more balloons than ever, washed up on our shores. Sadly, too many balloons end up in the ocean, where they are mistaken for food by sea turtles and other marine mammals, as well as birds and fish who can be injured or suffocate after swallowing them or getting entangled in the attached strings.



Based on findings in the waste stream, **Southampton Town officials recently estimated that more than 85,000 helium balloons are lost annually across the area.** That estimate, together with our own findings, prompted the Group to contact supporters and volunteers in Southampton Town. We asked them to write the town board and request that they vote yes on a proposed balloon ban, like so many other coastal communities have done.

The response was overwhelming, and we are happy to report that **a law banning the sale and release of helium balloons was passed, 4 to 1.**

*For more than 20 years Captain Andrew Dean has been fishing Jones Inlet to Montauk, and every inlet in between.*



**“We find balloon pollution almost every time we’re out on the water. Most are mylar with strings still attached. The public needs to be educated about the hazards to marine life when helium balloons are released, either intentionally or by accident.”**

– Captain Andrew Dean



# Counting Birds for Project FeederWatch

CITIZEN SCIENTISTS AT THE GROUP PROVIDE VALUABLE DATA FOR ORNITHOLOGISTS



The pandemic prevented the Group from offering most nature outings this winter, but it didn't stop us from counting birds in person at Downs Farm Preserve.

For the third straight year, the Group participated in Project FeederWatch, a weekly survey of bird species in North America conducted by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. It is a classic citizen science program where volunteers monitor birds in thousands of backyards, nature centers, and other locales from November to April each year, and then upload their findings to a massive database.

The data provide weekly snapshots of winter bird distribution and abundance across the United States and Canada, revealing where birds are and where they are not. This enables scientists to piece together increasingly accurate population maps. The data also allow Project FeederWatch scientists to understand:

- the timing and extent of sudden population increases of winter finches and other species
- expansions or contractions in the winter ranges of feeder birds
- the kinds of food and environmental factors that attract birds
- how disease is spread among birds that visit feeders
- if a species is declining over time, figure out why, and make recommendations for its recovery before it is too late

We are delighted to partner with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology on this important effort. Group staff observed cedar waxwings (*Bombycilla cedrorum*), downy woodpeckers (*Dryobates pubescens*), black-capped chickadees (*Poecile atricapillus*), and many other species. There was even a sighting of the elusive *Certhia americana*, AKA the brown creeper!



Party time for raccoons! We had our suspicions about who created a colossal mess at the Project FeederWatch site after dark. The Group's newly installed 24-hour camera revealed the culprits.

Environmental Associate Marina DeLuca checks on bird feeders at Downs Farm Preserve for Project FeederWatch, a weekly winter survey of North American birds.

Count birds with the Group or in your own backyard next winter! Learn more and sign up at [FeederWatch.org](https://FeederWatch.org).



Downy woodpecker at Downs Farm Preserve in Cutchogue. Photo by Rob Del.



# Group Partners with Southampton Arts Center

## COMBINING ART, ECOLOGY AND CONSERVATION

This spring and summer, the Group joined forces with the Southampton Arts Center (SAC) to offer a variety of programs ranging from ecological gardening to moths and migrating monarchs. The exhibition on display, *EARTH – Artists as Activists*, provided the perfect backdrop for SAC's partnership with the Group and other environmental organizations.

**Collaborations with artists of multiple disciplines and our ECO Community Group partners have resulted in a meaningful, inclusive exhibition that highlights our shared environment and the challenges it faces.**

– Tom Dunn, SAC Executive Director

## ECOLOGICAL GARDENING 101

After Outreach Director Taralynn Reynolds delivered a virtual presentation on wildlife-friendly gardens, she teamed up with Assistant Environmental Education Director Anita Wright (right) and SAC's Daniela Kronmeyer (left) to install a native plant garden at the Center.



Plover chick photo by Jay Rand





## MAGICAL MIGRATING MONARCHS

The Group collaborated with Quogue Wildlife Refuge and SAC for a magical presentation on the migration of **monarch butterflies, one of our most important pollinators.**

*Photo: Jay Rand*

## MOTHS ARE BEAUTIFUL TOO!



The Group and SAC recruited local naturalist and nature photographer Jay Rand for a virtual presentation on Long Island's varied moth species, including *Alypia octomaculata*, the eight-spotted forester seen here. **Attendees learned how beneficial they are to the ecosystem** and that they have incredible defense mechanisms such as camouflage, unmatched hearing, and sonar jamming abilities. *Photo: Jay Rand*



## BE A GOOD EGG

In addition to a virtual presentation on protecting threatened shorebirds, the Group co-hosted an event with SAC, where children made signs reminding people to Be a Good Egg! This is the fifth year the Group has participated in this successful outreach program sponsored by Audubon, which **encourages people to share the beach with nesting shorebirds.**







# Educating and Inspiring Children to Love and Respect Nature

## ◀ FIELD TRIPS

This spring, a small pod of students joined the Group on a **field trip to Scallop Pond Preserve** in Southampton, where they learned about salt marshes and estuaries.



## ▼ ESTUARY EXPLORATION

What is THAT?! Sixth graders from East Quogue **discover some of the Peconic Estuary's magical creatures** in this popular school field trip led by the Group's environmental education team.



**THANK YOU!** Your support makes our programs possible. Donate at [GroupfortheEastEnd.org](https://www.GroupfortheEastEnd.org)





## WORKSHOPS ▶

The Group teamed up with Shane Weeks of the **Shinnecock Indian Nation** for a workshop at Downs Farm Preserve. Families explored the origins, craft and culture of native dream catchers.



## ◀ PROJECT MOST

The Group has a longstanding partnership with Project MOST in East Hampton, which offers **after-school and summer enrichment programs**. This year the students were especially happy to be outside, installing a native plant pollinator garden at The Neighborhood House in East Hampton. The children planted common milkweed, stiff-leaved aster, butterfly weed and other native species.



## Our Summer Intern

The Group is fortunate to have Summer Intern Olivia Meeschaert, who has spent every summer on the East End since she was two. Entering 11th grade in the fall, she was eager to join our team in the field to learn about protecting the environment, especially native birds and plants.

Olivia is monitoring the many Osprey nests across the region, collecting important data about the iconic species that one day was almost extinct from the East End. She is also assisting young children in creating nature-inspired crafts and participating in other family-friendly activities in the outdoors. Olivia has taken environmental science courses such as sustainability and geology at Lycée Français de New York, where she has been enrolled since pre-school. In August she will continue her studies in Miami, Florida at Gulliver Prep, where she is looking forward to coursework on environmental sciences and systems. Olivia likes to read, make jewelry with metalworking, and play tennis and other sports.

We wish Olivia great success at her new school, and hope she returns to the beautiful East End during her summers!

## DOWNS FARM PRESERVE ▶

Summer Intern Olivia Meeschaert teaches children how to make a color wheel with items they find in nature.





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# Save the Date

## SWING INTO SUMMER

## 50TH ANNIVERSARY BENEFIT

## June 11, 2022



Please contact Kristina Lange at [klange@eastendenvironment.org](mailto:klange@eastendenvironment.org).



### OUR MISSION:

Group for the East End protects and restores the environment of eastern Long Island through professional advocacy and education, and by inspiring people to embrace a conservation ethic and take action. The Group is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization.

### Group for the East End

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Learn more about our work at  
[GroupfortheEastEnd.org](http://GroupfortheEastEnd.org)



On the cover: With the support of PSEG Long Island, Group for the East End monitors and tracks the nesting success of our local Osprey population. We also work with homeowners and the power utility in identifying the best possible nest options and avoiding situations that unnecessarily put these iconic birds in harm's way.