

Sunday, June 3, 2012

On Sunday, June 3, 2012 volunteers from the Bayshore Regional Watershed Council, an all volunteer group dedicated to restoring Raritan and Sandy Hook bays, joined with local residents to seine and monitor water quality along four bayside beaches to see who was home along the shallow edge of the estuary.

One of the best ways to learn about the diversity of aquatic life in Lower New York Bay is to conduct a seining program, in which naturalists or scientists pull a long net through shallow water to capture fish, crabs, and anything else that lives along the shallow edge of the bay. After recoding and taking a close look at what was found, participants then release the animals back into the water.

For this project, volunteers with the local watershed council were using a 50-foot long, hand-woven net with a five foot pole on each end. No marine life was harmed. All fishes, crabs, and other aquatic creatures were identified, cataloged, and returned to the water. In addition to seining, water temperature and turbidity information were documented by volunteers at each site.

People on hand not only had a fun time seeing what interesting life lives in the bay, but many people had a good time holding different species of fish, such as snapper blues, croakers, flounders, Hermit Crabs, Pipefish and more before releasing them into the estuary. Each haul of the seine net brought something new to discover.

Along the beach was caught many YOY (young-of-the-year or born this year) river herring as well as Bay Anchovies, Atlantic Silversides, Blue-Claw Crabs, Pipefish, Winter Flounder, and two Sheepsheads, a fish that lives in estuaries around pilings and muddy bottoms. There was a substantial number of Sand Shrimp and Mud Snails in the bay too.

In one haul of our seine at Conaskonck Point in Union Beach, volunteers caught a large school of this year's river herring, mainly Alewives with perhaps some Bluebacks in the mix as well. While these two herring look very similar (Alewives have a larger eye than the Blueback), their life histories are distinct. Adult alewives enter the bay from the Atlantic Ocean in late March and spawn in tributaries in April and May. Adult blueback herring enter the bay from the Atlantic Ocean a few weeks later. Some will spawn in nearby tributaries, while many others continue on a long voyage far upstream in the Hudson and Raritan rivers to spawn. Come summer, these YOY of both specie will be found in huge schools possibly numbering in the thousands as they slowly migrate to the ocean to join the adults.

Below are the details of the event. Species found and data collected are listed beneath each seine location. The weather was partly sunny with air temperatures in the low 70s. Winds were breezy out of the northwest. A brief shower occurred between 2:30 to 3:30pm. Thanks and appreciation goes to Gene and Panse Geer, Casey, Tom, Jeff, Margret, and Neil for all their wonderful help. Much obliged, JR.

10am - Aberdeen Township/Cliffwood Beach

Outgoing tide. Water temperature 72 degrees F.

Visibility up to 3-feet.

100+ Alewife River Herring around two-inches in length

100+ Atlantic Silversides, sizes ranging from less than an inch to around 4.5 inches in length

100+ Bay Anchovies

50+ Sand Shrimp

10 juvenile Atlantic Croakers

3 adult Pipefish, 6-inches long, 4-inches long, and 3-inches long

1 YOY Blue-claw Crab

12 Noon - Union Beach/Conaskonck Point - Where Front & Dock streets meet

Outgoing tide. Water temperature 74 degrees F.

Visibility 1 foot.

400+ River Herring, mostly Alewives

50+ Sand Shrimp

30+ Atlantic Silversides

20 Mud Snails

10 juvenile Atlantic Croakers

10 Oyster Drills

10 Isopods

5 Amphipods

5 Black-tip Mud Crabs

2 Blue-claw Crabs (1 soft-shell)

2 juvenile Winter Flounder

1 adult Spider Crabs, about 8-inches wide

1 juvenile Sheepshead

1 juvenile Pipefish

1 Salp

2:00pm: Middletown Township/Port Monmouth - Pews Creek

Dead low tide. Water temperature 74 degrees F.

Visibility was 2 feet. A shower took place between 2:30pm to 3:30pm.

100+ Bay Anchovies

20+ Hermit Crabs (including one without a shell)

20+ Mud Snails

20+ Alewife

20+ Sand Shrimp

5 Atlantic Silversides

4 juvenile Winter Flounder

1 juvenile Pipefish
1 juvenile Windowpane
1 Blue-claw Crab
1 Oyster Drill
Masses of Snail Eggs attached to Sea Lettuce

4:00pm: Atlantic Highlands/Mouth of Many Mind Creek

Incoming tide. Water temperature 74 degrees F.
Visibility 1/2 foot. Lots of seaweed located along the edge of the water.

10+ Blue-claw Crabs
2 juvenile American Eels
20+ Pipefish
100+ Sand Shrimp
15 juvenile Winter Flounder
10+ River Herring
2 juvenile Blennies (species unidentified)
10 Isopods
Mass of Snail eggs attached to Sea Lettuce
1 juvenile Atlantic Croaker
200+ Bay Anchovies
1 Spider Crab
20 Atlantic Silversides
1 Snapper Bluefish, about 2 inches in length
1 adult Horseshoe crab, male - shell was 7.5 inches wide.