

SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY SCIENTISTS EXPAND HORSESHOE CRAB STUDY

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(Media-NewsWire.com) - FAIRFIELD, Conn. — Professors of biology spearheading a study of horseshoe crab populations in the Long Island Sound will expand their program this year by training volunteers from partnering organizations in three states to participate in a census of the animals.

Associate Professor and Department of Biology Chair Jennifer Mattei and Mark Beekey, an assistant professor of biology, have worked for several years with “citizen scientists” in a mark-and-recapture study that is part of “Project Limulus,” a research and science literacy program.

“Limulus” is the Latin genus of the American horseshoe crab. The project’s purpose is to study the animals’ migratory patterns in the Long Island Sound by involving students of all ages to help count and tag spawning horseshoe crabs on our beaches.

This year, the Sacred Heart University scientists will train volunteers to measure, tag and track the animals in Connecticut, the North Shore of Long Island and a few beaches in Rhode Island. Volunteers will walk specific beaches, count the number of horseshoe crabs, and turn the data in to the scientists for analysis.

This year, Project Limulus involves the efforts of members and employees of several regional non-profit groups, including The Nature Conservancy, The Maritime Aquarium, Connecticut Audubon Society, SoundWaters, and National Audubon in partnership with SHU.

Public participation has helped the scientists track horseshoe crabs in greater numbers each year. In 2006, they tagged approximately 3,500 animals. In 2007, they tagged 5,000. Each tag contains a unique identifying number, and contact numbers for reporting the find to the professors. Those who find the animals call and report the location to the professors.

“Our tagging data has shown the horseshoe crabs move up and down the coast of Connecticut and some cross the sound to New York,” said Mattei, who is a population ecologist. “For the most part, they remain in the Long Island Sound.” The research will affect public policy because each state with horseshoe crab populations is mandated to have a management plan in place. This is a difficult task because there is very little data on the behaviors of horseshoe crabs in the Long Island Sound.

Research can answer important questions about the animals’ movements that, in turn, could affect how state policymakers regulate fisheries. Anyone interested in participating in the census or tagging and tracking efforts can contact Mattei at:

Info@projectlimulus.org or visit www.projectlimulus.org.

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