

Volunteers needed to help tag horseshoe crabs with Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk

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Posted By Chris Bosak On April 15, 2011 @ 11:02 am



Tagged horseshoe crab ready to return to Long Island Sound.

NORWALK — It may not be sweet romance but the spring moons soon will be drawing male and female horseshoe crabs up onto our beaches for an annual mating ritual.

Staff from The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk will be on hand to greet them. But your help is needed.

The Maritime Aquarium is seeking volunteers to help attach census tags to horseshoe crabs as the crabs come up out of the water to spawn at Calf Pasture Beach. It's all part of a census of horseshoe crabs in Long Island Sound, being led by Dr.

Jennifer Mattei of Sacred Heart University in Fairfield. The Maritime Aquarium is assisting with the census and tagging.

The horseshoe crab population on the East Coast may be declining as the animals are harvested and ground up for use as bait in eel pots. Fewer horseshoe crabs would mean fewer horseshoe crab eggs, which are an important food source for migrating shorebirds. Thus, fewer horseshoe crabs could mean fewer birds on our coastline. Dr. Mattei's census is establishing a baseline crab population and will reveal horseshoe crab migrations and any change in numbers.

Horseshoe crabs come up onto beaches to spawn on the nights of the full and new moons. That's a tagging bonanza time for researchers, so extra volunteers are needed to help.

To participate, volunteers should attend one of two training sessions at the Aquarium: at 7 p.m. on either Wed., May 4 or Sun., May 8. They'll learn about the natural history of horseshoe crabs, what has been learned so far from the census work, and how to safely tag horseshoe crabs. Volunteers should be in 10th grade or older. Younger children can assist if working with a parent, teacher or guardian.

Tagging sessions at Calf Pasture will be held on Mon., May 16 at 11 p.m.; Wed., June 1 at 5:30 a.m. and 11:30 p.m.; and Wed., June 15 at 5:30 a.m. and 11:30 p.m.

Each participant should bring clothing and shoes that can get wet, drinking water and a snack, a headlamp and/or flashlight, pencils and insect repellent. Recommended but not critical are waders, hip boots, gardening or flooring knee pads and a sturdy bucket to sit on.

To sign up or for more details, call The Maritime Aquarium at (203) 852-0700, ext. 2352, or e-mail

jschnierlein@maritimeaquarium.org.