

Mordecai Matters



2005 Tentative Calendar

- Saturday, May 21 – Spring Erosion Measurement: 12:30 PM, LEHYC dock.
- Thursday, June 2 – Trustee and Committee Meeting: 7:30 PM, Molly Allison Sailing Center.
- Friday, June 3 – Mordecai Living Museum: 1–2:45 PM, Beach Haven School, multipurpose room.
- Sunday, July 10 – Garden Tour and Cocktail Party Fundraiser: Beach Haven & LEHYC.
- Sunday, August 28 – Annual Meeting: 3 PM, Coast Guard Station.
- Saturday, September 17 – Fall clean-up, 9:30 AM.
- Saturday, October 8 – Trustee and Committee Meeting, 11 AM, Molly Allison Sailing Center.

DON'T MISS IT!
Beach Haven School
Living museum



President's Update: Trust Active Heading into Spring

The winter months have been a very active for the Trust. Back in October, we expanded the Board of Trustees to 21 members to better reflect a presence from the local community. We also formed many new committees and brought additional members on board to further the Trust's activities throughout the year.

Our Education committee has a project underway with Beach Haven Elementary School. The children have chosen topics related to the Mordecai ecosystem and plan a "Living Museum" presentation June 3. We are in the process of getting the children out to the island to observe the avian life and help with natural plantings.

The Bird Observations Committee chaired by John Walton has made contact with the State of NJ Endangered Species Program and invited Tom Virsi to come to the island to study the American Oystercatcher. Tom is finishing his doctorate on this species and hopes to study its nesting and behavior on Mordecai.

The Mordecai Garden Tour and Sunset Cocktail Party Committee is hard at work planning our annual fundraiser, scheduled for Sunday, July 10th, with some interesting ideas. One is to have a contest to name a cocktail called the "Mordecai." (We will have more on that soon.)

Our Grant Writers in the persons of Jeanne Runne and John Cramner have been busy apply-

ing for grants and funds for our SWMER project. (Southwest Mordecai Ecosystem Restoration) We have received the initial General Permit from the NJDEP and we will soon schedule the dates and the plan for marsh grass plantings and the installation of biologists in severely eroded areas. Work on SWMER will begin this summer with a completion date of next April 2006.

The signage committee is planning to erect additional interpretive displays for street ends. Our goal is to have our signs at every street end that has a view of Mordecai. The Logo Items Committee is designing some new items for supporters to purchase this summer and, hopefully, our egret mascot will be seen on t-shirts around town. By the way, have you seen our new look on the Web? The website was completely redesigned by Bill Pilling and now has greater and more informative content.

We continue to make progress, albeit slow, on our primary project, the installation of an offshore breakwater to retard erosion on Mordecai. There is a special report on page 2 to bring you up to date.

So, you can see that there has been a great deal going on this year.

We thank you all for your continued support and we welcome anyone who wants to join our ranks and become another person for which Mordecai truly matters.

Richard Oelkers, President

Beach Haven Students Study LBI Ecosystem/Mordecai

Shellfish, horseshoe crabs, eel grasses and bay heather are just some of the island life that will be part of the Beach Haven School's "Living Museum" on June 3rd.

Fourth and fifth grade students chose topics related to the overall theme of "LBI Ecosystem/Mordecai Island," and are researching and developing presentations in their chosen format.

Under the guidance of Pat Daggy, Beach Haven School's principal and superintendent, and Deb Harkness,

science teacher, the project is the first collaboration between the Mordecai Land Trust's Education Committee and the school.



Future plans include a tour of the island, participation in fall plantings and clean-ups, and, at the secondary level, more intense study of Mordecai's ecological system and endangered species.

The "Living Museum" will be held on Friday, June 3rd, from 1:00 to 2:45 PM in the Beach Haven School's multipurpose room. Admission is free and the community is

Breakwater Project: Funding and Status



Core samples of the bay bottom were taken this past February (see picture to left). However, funding appropriated by Congress for the Army Corps of Engineers' Section 1135 Ecological Restoration Projects for Fiscal Year 2005 (October 2004-October 2005) was \$25 million. The nationwide need for FY05 funding in this program exceeded the limit by a considerable amount. As a result, the Corps of Engineers is experiencing a nationwide shortfall in funds for Section 1135.

Due to the limited funding provided for use this fiscal year, the Corps of Engineers is currently unable to allocate additional funds for use in conducting on-going studies, such as the Mordecai Island study. As a result, all work on the study will be suspended. Work on the study will not resume until additional funds are available for allocation.

Once additional funds are allocated, the geotechnical borings will be analyzed and the

project development team will begin 90% plans and specifications, meaning we are nearing the end of the design process and approaching the construction phase.

The outlook for funding in FY06 is uncertain. The Trust has reached out to our NJ representatives to name the project for \$185,000 in the FY06 federal budget, but as of this date the particular budget bill has not been enacted. We also have been advised that even if the project is included, that does not guarantee funding, as Congress must still allocate the funds.

The lack of funding is not reflective of the merits of the Mordecai project. Army Corps funds are allocated first to those projects in construction and then to those ready to go to construction. As we learn more, we will inform our members. In the worst case, if funding is not available in FY06, our project will be dormant awaiting funds. We remain optimistic that fund-

Save the SAV'S, To Save Barnegat Bay

by Pete McLain

(This article was written for and first published in Alliance for a Living Ocean's newsletter.)

The term "Submerged Aquatic Vegetation" (SAV) has crept into our vocabulary in talking about the aquatic habitat of our tidal bays and rivers. The submerged aquatics are plants which grow underwater as compared with the dry or wetland habitats. In the past, not much attention has been given to the submerged aquatics, but today the public realizes that the SAV plants are important in supporting our aquatic life and the commercial and recreational uses.

In Barnegat Bay there are a number of aquatic plants, and the average person could find eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) and widgeon grass (*Ruppia maritima*) by simply wading into the shallows, generally on the east side of the bay, in water less than three to four feet deep. The long and slender leaves of eelgrass and the delicate leaves of the widgeon grass make them easy to tell apart.

For centuries, the vast eelgrass and widgeon beds have dominated most of Barnegat Bay and provided the feeding areas for hundreds of thousands of waterfowl, which made Barnegat Bay one of the most popular waterfowl hunting areas in the United States. In addition to serving as food for wintering waterfowl, eelgrass was gathered by the ton along the bay and river shorelines where it was then loaded on horse-drawn wagons and sold for road building, garden

mulch (still in vogue), insulation and a number of other uses.

In the early 1930's a mysterious disease destroyed over 90 percent of the eelgrass beds from Nova Scotia to North Carolina, which was its range on the Atlantic Coast. This same disease destroyed the eelgrass in northern Europe. The great waterfowl populations, such as Atlantic brant, showed a marked decline as their food disappeared.

In the late 1940's and early 1950's the eelgrass began to reappear in Barnegat Bay and during the next 20 years it had returned to much of its former range. The brant and other waterfowl numbers increased.

Today there are beds of eelgrass and widgeon grass extending from Little Egg Harbor Bay to Mantoloking in Barnegat Bay. It grows best on the sandy-mud flats. Field studies show that the grass begins to grow in March, the growth accelerating in April and early May, and then slowing down as the water warms. There is a second growth spurt in late September and October.

Of what value is the eelgrass? When it dies, or is torn up and washes ashore where it decomposes, the local residents may not appreciate the heavy odor and wish there wasn't any eelgrass. Boatmen, who find it wrapped around their propellers, call it the "weed".

(Continued on page 3)

"...today the public realizes that the SAV plants are important in supporting our aquatic life and the commercial and recreational uses."

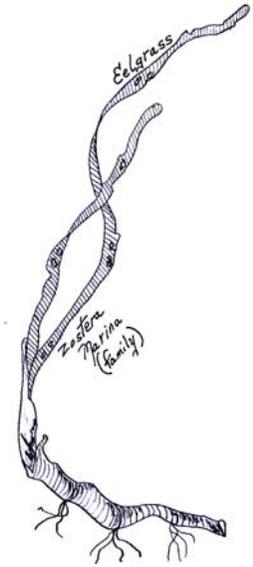
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However, for the little inconvenience eelgrass and widgeon grass cause, it's more than offset by the SAV's role as the backbone of the aquatic plant and animal life in Barnegat Bay. Eelgrass stabilizes the bay bottom, purifies the water, and provides the lush growth which is required for the shellfish and marine fish to breed and their young to grow. The grass meadows are the areas where the microscopic organisms live and form the valuable food chain which supports all life in the bay. Without eelgrass, the bay would lack the production of fish, clams, crabs, mussels and other shellfish we take for granted. The habitat, oxygen and nitrogen produced by the eelgrass is essential to the life of the Barnegat Bay.

There are areas of the bay where eelgrass is not healthy and is dying. Where chemical

pollution and nonpoint pollutions enter the bay from streams and rivers, the over-production of nitrogen and phosphorous result in algal bloom. This bloom prevents sunlight from reaching the plants. Eutrophication also occurs, which destroys plant growth. All these factors directly affect the eelgrass meadows. Wherever boats dump their holding tanks, where the eelgrass beds are ripped up by boat propellers and jet skis, and where dredging disturbs the bottom, the eelgrass beds die as the result of habitat loss or alteration. When the eelgrass beds are gone, so go the dependent creatures, from the tiny shrimp to the hard crabs and wildlife, which rely on the eelgrass and widgeon grass.

These grasses growing below the surface of Barnegat Bay represent a natural resource as valuable as our tidal marshes and the woodlands and wildlife which we enjoy. It has become evident that we must recognize the sub-



At Winter's End, A Letter from the Beach

By Frank Crumbaugh

The barometer on the front porch at the Club says 29.82, and it's holding steady. There's slushy ice in the Thoroughfare, and though slushy, it's tight enough that gulls can stand on it. The surf at the bird sanctuary is dirty green, and the wind gusts on the beach are hard. On the bay side, it's not nearly so raw.

Snow has turned to rain for now, and the streets have been ploughed. As the light dies and it cools off, the slush at the plough margins in the street will harden into jagged, tire scarring spines of ice on the pavement.

Observed from the street, the lamp is on in Gates Sturgis' living room, the fire is lit, and the grand old man is sitting on the couch, watch-

ing television in the toasty quiet of a gloomy afternoon. Cow Shed is dark and very still, Smedley's place seems lonesome, Marnie Rigby's Ford is backed into the driveway, and it's very quiet all along both sides of Bay Avenue.

The grate in the Rectory is dull grey-red, and the bed of coals derived from the fire begun at 0745 today now reduces green oak and beech at a fierce rate, pitching good heat into the room.

Black-capped chickadees, cardinals, house sparrows, house finches, mourning doves, a squirrel, and dark-eyed juncos have called at the back porch rail here all day. They seem urgent to get as much eaten as they can before dark. Smart birds. They long for the bounty of summer days on Mordecai.



Don't Know When Your Membership Expires?

The expiration date appears on your mailing label. Use the enclosed envelope to renew or become a member today!



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Address Correction Required

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We're on the web! Mordecaimatters.org

Save the Date!
Mordecai Land Trust
Garden Tour & Sunset Cocktail Party
Sunday, July 10th, 2005

