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From the Editor

A SLITHERY MASCOT FOR LONG ISLAND SOUND?



This summer I had a front-row seat on two seines at opposite ends of Long Island Sound.

Both yielded many natural treasures, from filamentous seaweed to a seahorse to silversides by the dozens. There were even several specimens of *Anguilla rostrata* (the American eel), a creature that could be the perfect symbol of a new thrust in one of the main themes recently set for the conservation of the estuary—connecting the Sound to its inland watershed.

The first seine was in July at Calf Pasture Beach on the western side, when two counselors for The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk's summer camp drew the long net through the water onto shore for elementary and middle high school charges to behold sea life first-hand.

"We found a horseshoe crab," one boy exclaimed.

"There are a lot of little fish," said the pink-booted girl next to him.

"Could you hand me any cool animals you find?" a third camper asked Tiffany Adams, one of the wader-clad counselors who pulled the net.

She kept busy picking up blue crabs and various fish, showing them to the students then throwing them back in the water. Suddenly a two-foot long eel slithered into view. She tried several times to grab it, unsuccessful.

"He's a master of escape," she said. "I guess that's why they say 'slippery as an eel.'"

After several more tries, she captured the eel and returned it to the water.

Several weeks later, a group of researchers whose main mission was to net several kinds of juvenile flounder for a study of their diets, encircled two four-foot eels and several smaller ones in their haul. This particular seine, one of several the researchers had done that summer in Mumford Cove on the eastern end of the Sound, was especially abundant.

"We normally see a lot of fish, but this is insane," said Emma Siegfried, like the others a doctoral student in Professor Hannes Baumann's lab. "This is like Christmas."

Seeing so many marine creatures—almost too many for the researchers to count—was delightful, and exciting. Even the researchers got a little giddy. But the eels especially fascinated me. They are one of the few catadromous species that have a somewhat mysterious life cycle, migrating from fresh water to marine waters to spawn, rather than the other way around like herring and their anadromous cousins. They are also considered endangered due to decades of overfishing and a lucrative trade in juveniles, known as glass eels.

They need both healthy fresh and marine waters to survive and thrive, just like Long Island Sound itself.

The Long Island Sound Partnership, the umbrella organization for the two states and numerous other groups working to protect the estuary, this summer released a new version of its guidebook for that work, called the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan. One of the new elements is a focus on encouraging stewardship, engagement and pollution reduction not just along the two states' coasts, but into all the upland lakes, streams and rivers that flow into the Sound all the way from the Canadian border.

I think the eels would approve. When it's spawning time, an eel living in Lake Sunapee in New Hampshire will swim hundreds of miles to the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, to an area known as the Sargasso Sea.

All those waters in between are its home. It's all connected.



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Top: Left, Maritime Aquarium camp counselors pull a seine net at Calf Pasture Beach in Norwalk. Right, a UConn researcher tosses an eel caught in a seine net back into Mumford Cove.

Cover: Three generations of the Bean family—grandfather Douglas, left, his grandson Henry, center, and his son Jacob, of Middletown, get close to Wadsworth Falls on a rock ledge on a July afternoon. Photos: Judy Benson

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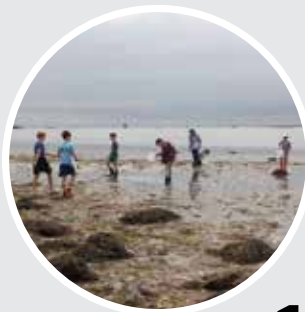
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