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139th Year, No. 43

June 9, 2011

\$1



Celebrating a centennial study

University of Hong Kong research student Milka Chung holds a box turtle as her colleagues (left to right) Jim Arrigoni and Tess Youker with SUNY Syracuse College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Elaine Yuen, Edward Lau and Dr. Nancy Karraker, Assistant Professor of Environmental Science, also with the University of Hong Kong, take notes. The research study headed by Karraker is taking place this week at the Willam Floyd Estate and is in its 100th year. See story on page 16.
ADV/Leuzzi

Walmart scheduled for scoping

Glitch rescinds Draft Environmental Impact Statement

By LINDA LEUZZI

Walmart's draft environmental impact statement was rescinded at Monday night's Planning Board meeting because of a procedural step that was missed. A scoping meeting, where public comment is recorded so recommendations may be included in the DEIS, was never held.

A public scoping meeting will now be held on June 23 at 7 p.m. at Town Hall.

"I would say this was an administrative error in part because of a retirement by an individual who was involved in the process," said Brookhaven Supervisor Mark Lesko. "Staff went back and reviewed it and discovered the scoping wasn't done and what they don't want is have a legal challenge. The town attorney's office goes through project files all the time to make sure a procedural incident hasn't taken place."

The misstep was brought to the Brookhaven Town Planning Board's attention on May 23 by one of the nearby residents to the proposed East Patchogue project off Hospital Road.

"I'm on record saying that Walmart at that location isn't appropriate and the concern I have is the Hospital Road Bridge." Lesko reiterated the conditions that the property owner was to adhere to. The property owner was to pay \$250,000 for improvements to the Hospital Road Bridge when zoning took effect in September 1997; the remaining \$107,730 was to be paid at the time of the final site-plan approval. Yet a \$250,000 check, dated May 22, 2007, was forwarded and filed in the Brookhaven Town Clerk's office on May 25, 2007.

"That was exactly why the zoning was rescinded because the funding was made to repair the bridge was much lower and now the cost ranges to several million dollars," Lesko said. "Unless they have some funding source we aren't aware of, the town doesn't have \$20 million [for bridge renovations]. The other problem I have is that Brookhaven Memorial Hospital is in the middle of plans to build a cardiology center and medical arts building and that will only increase traffic at that intersection and I'm very much in favor of providing more services to Brookhaven Hospital. They cover the entire expanse of Brookhaven south of Sunrise Highway and we support those efforts. That creates a lot of pressure and to add Walmart to that site, I don't think is appropriate."

The Planning Board Walmart public comment meeting scheduled for Monday, was cancelled on the town's website on Friday, June 3.

Joanna Larkin, who lives on Barton Avenue and is an EP Walmart Free member said there were over 1,000 petitions signed and submitted to the town. Those who signed the petitions were to be notified of any meetings. They were not. She also mentioned that the site plan is listed under New London Road. "That's the old name of Hospital Road Bridge," she said. "So it makes it hard to research."

Gail Hoag, executive director of the Greater Patchogue Chamber of Commerce said she signed the petition and received no notification. "My understanding is that we were all supposed to be notified."

Calls to Phil Serghini, vice president of public affairs at Walmart were not returned. ■



Tess Youker measures a box turtle as (left to right) Edward Lau, Milka Chung, Elaine Yuen, Jim Arrigoni and Dr. Nancy Karraker, professor of biology at the University of Hong Kong observe at the William Floyd Estate. The box turtle study is in its centennial year at the William Floyd Estate; and Karraker's group has partnered on research along with SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

Studying a survivor with hopes it will endure

Centennial box turtle study at William Floyd Estate

By LINDA LEUZZI

Besides the sleeping juvenile fox in the parking lot, the students from the University of Hong Kong and SUNY Syracuse College of Environmental Science and Forestry had already found a box turtle by 8:30 on Saturday morning, their first, searching for these slow but ancient creatures at the William Floyd Estate.

Their subject, older than 15, wasn't budging head or limbs outside its tight, shell home.

This was the centennial year for the study, and the group, headed by Dr. Nancy Karraker, assistant professor of environmental sciences, School of Biological Sciences at the University of Hong Kong, has picked up the gauntlet initiated by John Nicols, an ichthyologist and curator of fishes at the Museum of Natural History who was married to Cornelia Floyd. He began marking box turtles on the grounds in 1911, the year after he married Cornelia, until 1958. National Parks Service Ranger Richard Stավdal continued the study from 1980 until his retirement in 2006.

After arriving last Friday, they will remain until June 11, lodging at a rented house in Mastic Beach.

Data on their status will reveal environmental indicators, Karraker said.

"Box turtles can live over 100 years," she explained. "We're looking at the size, a bigger turtle is obviously a healthy turtle, also age structure of the population. The idea is that you want to see all age classes represented. Finding young turtles means reproduction is occurring but old turtles mean they're living as long as they could."

This is the second year Karraker has conducted the box turtle research along with Dr. James Gibbs, who is with SUNY Syracuse College of Environmental Science and Forestry, via a grant from the University of Hong Kong. They found 103 turtles in 2010.

Last year, 42 percent the turtles found and scrutinized bore some kind of injury to their shell or a limb. "We can only guess at what caused them," Karraker said. "Mainly, they get hit by cars and lawn mowers." The other measurement in environmental terms Karraker takes is the sex ratio. "That should be one to one, just as we'd expect in humans," she said. "What we found last year, it's 3.5 males to

one female, which is concerning."

With hiking boots, covered arms, long pants, and protective wrapping around their legs, Karraker and her team will proceed daily over an 8-hour span, by walking 200 hectares of the property in sections in a distanced line abreast of each other. As soon as one is found, they pair up. "Once we find a turtle, we look to see if it's been previously marked," Karraker said. "We take a photo at the top and the bottom of the shell and look for any malformations and mark those down. We weigh it, take measurements of the shell, determine its sex and age. We can determine that by counting the scales on the shell up to 15 years." After that, the rings of the scales merge but they're able to make estimates. Karraker's team creates a small triangular notch on its shell that doesn't harm the turtle. "We take a GPS location that advises us of exactly where we found it and then let it go at that spot," she said. The process is quick and takes about five minutes.

There have been turtles found that go

back to the time when Nicols marked them said William Floyd Park Ranger Mary Laura Lamont. "The Wildlife Conservation Society from the Bronx Zoo did a herpetology study around 2003 or 2004 and were the last to find a Nicols turtle," she said. "I think two that were found were around 120 years old."

As for what led Karraker, who grew up in Yosemite and Olympia National Parks as the daughter of National Parks Service parents, to the William Floyd Estate, it was a book written by Ken Dodd, Jr. a herpetologist and expert on box turtles, *North American Box Turtles: A Natural History*. He emphasized the value of long-term studies. The one being conducted at the William Floyd Estate was among the three most important in the works.

Karraker plans to do these intensive surveys until 2012 and then undertake a retrospective analysis. "The students pay for their plane ticket," Karraker said of those who signed up from the University of Hong Kong. "If they can do that, they sign up in one second flat."

The young scientists were clearly enthusiastic about the work. Edward Lau, a graduate student, is a return student. Lau is working on a project that will analyze the effects of toxins on tadpoles. It was the first time for Milka Chung and Elaine Yuen. Chung had graduated and was working for an ecological consulting firm in Hong Kong; her interest is in reptiles, amphibians and birds. Yuen was studying fresh water ecology and wants to work with fresh water insects. Jim Arrigoni, with SUNY Syracuse College of Environmental Science and Forestry, who came with Tess Youker, had returned again as well. Arrigoni was in the middle of a wetland restoration project.

As for the turtles' population at the William Floyd Estate, they had found 53 by Wednesday morning. Karraker hoped to find 100 by the end of the week. Karraker pointed to the work by Nicols and Stավdal. "I hope to honor their hard work by continuing in their footsteps," she said. ■

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