

**STATE OF AMSEAS**  
*SPECIAL EDITION: SEPTEMBER 2020-JUNE 2021*



# ATLANTIC MARINE CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Promoting Marine Conservation Through Action





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*On the cover: AMSEAS Biologist Erich Dietterle prepares a Kemp's ridley sea turtle for transport south for release. Story on pages 11-12*

# MEET OUR TEAM



## STAFF

Robert A. DiGiovanni, Jr., Founder and Chief Scientist

Kimberly Durham, Necropsy Program Coordinator

Allison DePerte, Field Biologist + Research Associate

Jennifer Scalo, Field Biologist + Volunteer Coordinator

Erich Dietterle, Field Biologist

Sammi Chaves, Field Biologist

Lindsey Reisz, Education Coordinator

Joanne Biegert, Office Administrator

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PAGE TWO | MEET OUR TEAM



Dear Friends of Marine Conservation,

When contemplating writing my first letter as AMSEAS Board Chair, one word keeps coming to mind: Grateful! I join many others in being grateful for an organization with such a vitally important mission on behalf of regional marine conservation; grateful for the selfless leadership of former Board Chair Thomas Telesca, Esq. and a dedicated group of board members; grateful for our Founder & Chief Scientist Rob DiGiovanni and growing number of hard-working and generous AMSEAS staff, volunteers and supporters; grateful that, in the midst of a global COVID-19 pandemic, this group of extraordinary people continued to “promote marine conservation through action.”

Building upon this wonderful foundation, our board has put into motion a number of initiatives to further advance the work of AMSEAS. First, we have embarked upon a board recruitment plan and will be adding a number of excellent mission-driven Long Island/NYS-based professionals committed to sharing their “wisdom, work and wealth” to ensure our long-term sustainability. Second, we have refined our board committee system to better serve the AMSEAS administration in its efforts to meet its growing financial obligations; advance AMSEAS advocacy outreach; grow volunteer and supporter participation; develop additional strategic local, state and federal municipal relationships; and enhance our cooperation and collaboration with marine research institutions.

It is vitally important for all of us to work together to do no less and, with time and support, to do so much more to advance the work of AMSEAS.

Paul Jude Tonna  
Chairman, AMSEAS Board of Directors

# VOLUNTEER PROGRAM UPDATE

At AMSEAS, our volunteers are a critical part of our efforts to promote marine conservation through action. From September of 2020 through June of 2021, we conducted **11** virtual volunteer orientations, "Getting to Know AMSEAS," where we discussed the work that we do at Atlantic Marine Conservation Society and how to get involved with various volunteer opportunities. During that time, we welcomed **47** new volunteers to our team!

We also led **18** trainings with our volunteers! We were excited to host marine mammal and sea turtle response drills, where our volunteers learned about procedures and protocol followed by our team while responding to stranded cetaceans, seals, and sea turtles. We reviewed the different team member roles during a necropsy, the gear we use when responding to stranded sea turtles and marine mammals, and how we conduct external examinations on these animals. Our wonderful participants also got the opportunity to work through practice scenarios where they received hands-on experience using our team's response gear to conduct external examinations on marine mammal and sea turtle models.

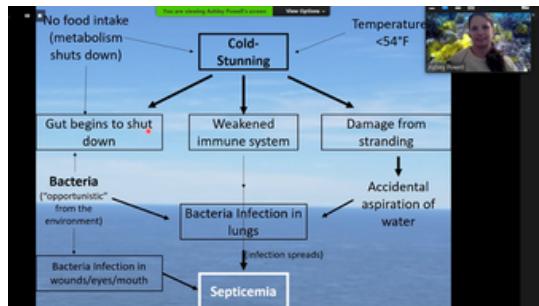
We were thrilled to work with Dr. Ashley Powell, DVM, for a virtual necropsy training series. Dr. Powell led eight trainings where she took our volunteers step-by-step through various marine mammal and sea turtle response scenarios, from the initial report of the stranding, to the external examination and necropsy, to sample analysis and report writing. Thank you, Dr. Powell, for all of your hard work and dedication to promoting marine conservation through action!

Lastly, we kicked off our Spring 2021 seal survey trainings for our volunteers. We hosted our first virtual "Seal Survey Training," where **11** of our volunteers learned about seal species identification and how to conduct seal surveys around New York. We also led seal walk trainings at Cupsogue Beach County Park in Westhampton Beach, where volunteers were able to gain experience using survey equipment and following data collection protocols while conducting a seal survey alongside an AMSEAS biologist.

Interested in learning how you can join our team and help us promote marine conservation through action?  
Email [volunteers@amseas.org](mailto:volunteers@amseas.org) for more information.



AMSEAS volunteers practice taking sea turtle measurements during a response drill training



Veterinarian Dr. Ashley Powell teaches AMSEAS volunteers about cold stunning and how it impacts sea turtles



AMSEAS volunteers participate in a seal walk and survey at Cupsogue Beach County Park

Join us at  
[amseas.org/volunteer](http://amseas.org/volunteer)

# VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

## INTRODUCING ASHLEY OLSON!

Volunteer Ashley Olson joined the AMSEAS volunteer team in October of 2020. Ashley is a Pathologists' Assistant (PA), which involves working with surgical specimens and autopsies. She has always been passionate about marine biology and conservation, so when she found AMSEAS and learned about the work we do, she immediately wanted to be a part of it.

As an AMSEAS volunteer, Ashley has helped with beach cleanups, sea turtle necropsies, and was one of the volunteers on our core sea turtle clinical care team.

Why volunteer with AMSEAS? According to Ashley, "I've gotten such a sense of fulfillment and joy in the work that I've done. Helping with the rehabilitation of the cold-stunned Kemp's ridley sea turtles was so fascinating and I learned so much. The amazing work done by AMSEAS is an integral part of maintaining and improving the state of our oceans and the creatures living within them. I look forward to seeing what the future holds for the organization and the wonderful people who work so hard to keep it running."



**“We are all connected in this world, and the ocean is a major component of that connection. Protecting and conserving our oceans is up to all of us, and every little bit helps!**

-Volunteer Ashley Olson



We are truly lucky to have a volunteer like Ashley on our team, and extend our sincerest thank you for her dedication to promoting marine conservation through action!

**GREAT  
work!**



Ashley helping collect marine debris at the Sunken Meadow Sponsored Corporate Beach Cleanup



Ashley conducting a Level-A examination on a deceased cold-stunned Kemp's ridley sea turtle

# COMMUNITY ACTION UPDATE

We were thrilled to be back out in the community safely connecting with the public for the latter half of 2020, as society started to open back up and allow in-person programs while following social distancing guidelines. From September of 2020 through June of 2021, we conducted a total of **126** programs (including **40** virtual programs), reaching **2,975** people. We were happy to partner with organizations such as Hallock State Park Preserve, All Our Energy, Group for the East End, and the Town of Hempstead to conduct **42** beach monitoring and cleanup events and remove a total of **2,589.71** lbs of marine debris from the beach! Talk about promoting marine conservation through action!

It is important to note that marine debris is not just trash left on the beach by beachgoers. In fact, much of the debris we find on our beaches ends up there from washing in with the high tide, meaning it is already out in the water! This is why we unfortunately continue to find debris on our beaches, even after some of our high-yield beach cleanups, and why continued efforts to remove debris and prevent it from washing back out into our waters is so important! Thank you to all of our partners, volunteers, and participants who joined us on the beach to help make a difference!



AMSEAS staff with participants from a First Responder Training with the Town of Hempstead



AMSEAS Chief Scientist Rob DiGiovanni receives a check from Parks & Trails New York



Participants clean Point Lookout at a beach cleanup with All Our Energy and Town of Hempstead



Participants at a beach cleanup at Hallock State Park Preserve

Join us at [amseas.org/events](http://amseas.org/events)

Earlier this year, thanks to funding provided by Long Island Community Foundation, our team kicked off our First Responder Training Program, working with agencies such as the Town of Oyster Bay Constables, the Town of Hempstead, and the Nassau Police Department Marine Patrol. Participants received hands-on instruction for what to do upon finding a sick, injured, or deceased marine mammal or sea turtle on the beach and how local agencies and organizations can take an active role as First Responders during stranding events. Thank you to all who came out to participate and learn how to help our marine animals. The support we receive from our First Responders helps make the work that we do possible!

In October of 2020, we were honored to receive a grant from Parks & Trails New York that enabled us to hire an Education Coordinator in collaboration with Hallock State Park Preserve. This grant marked an important step in expanding the partnership we have built with NYS parks. These collaborative efforts will enable us to increase our presence in the parks by spreading awareness about protecting the marine environment. Read all about our new Education Coordinator, Lindsey Reisz, on page 13.

# CORPORATE SPONSORED BEACH CLEANUPS

In October, we kicked off our cold-stunned sea turtle monitoring efforts with our Corporate Sponsorship Beach Cleanup Event at Sunken Meadow State Park. We want to thank the following sponsors for making this event possible:



We had the pleasure of meeting several wonderful groups of employees who attended the lectures and beach cleanups. While on the beach picking up marine debris, participants also learned about other types of marine life that are on our beaches, such as horseshoe crabs, jingle shells, and slipper shells, which were a big hit with the younger ones in the group. We were so excited to see the group effort pay off to remove ~75lbs of marine debris from the beach. In addition to our corporate sponsors participating in the beach cleanup, we were so thrilled to engage the park visitors and spread awareness about the sea turtles we have in our waters and what they can do to help. As stated by one of our enthusiastic participants at the event, "Today was all about awareness." The first line of defense for these incredible sea creatures is the public, by reporting what you see and helping to keep our beaches clean of marine debris. Working together, we can make a difference. Helping sea turtles starts with you!

Thank you again to all the sponsors for this beach cleanup event, along with our volunteers and the staff at Sunken Meadow State Park for making it an enjoyable and safe experience.

**GETinvolved**  
[amseas.org](http://amseas.org)



# RESEARCH UPDATE

At AMSEAS, collaboration with our network partners means joining forces to learn from each other and work together to achieve a common goal. Over the years, we have partnered with a number of groups to satellite tag rehabilitated animals prior to their release, including Marine Mammals of Maine (MMoME), Sea Turtle Recovery (STR), Seacoast Science Center (SSC), and National Marine Life Center (NMLC). It takes a dedicated team to coordinate the rescue, rehabilitation, and research efforts involved in projects like these, and we are so grateful for the opportunity to work with our partners in this capacity.

Working with our partners to tag rehabilitated animals helps us collect information about healthy *and* sick animals. Some of our objectives include:

- Monitoring how rehabilitated animals navigate and use the marine environment
- Identifying geographic areas that form their habitats
- Analyzing how rehabilitated animals utilize the habitat in comparison to wild populations
- Making comparisons between wild population health assessments vs the health status of rehabilitated animals

## Recent Tagging Projects:

-In September of 2020, AMSEAS and STR partnered up to satellite tag a loggerhead sea turtle named Tabitha. Tabitha first stranded in Cape May, New Jersey in June of 2019 and was brought to STR to undergo rehabilitation for pneumonia, severe anemia, and an intestinal blockage. After over a year of rehabilitation, AMSEAS teamed up with STR to satellite tag Tabitha prior to her release.

-In December of 2020, AMSEAS and MMoME collaborated to tag a juvenile harbor seal (#328) that was responded to, rescued, and rehabilitated by MMoME for emaciation and a viral respiratory infection. After making a dramatic recovery, she was released back to the ocean.

-In February of 2021, AMSEAS teamed up with MMoME and SSC to satellite tag two harbor seal patients prior to their release.

Learn more about these collaborative efforts by visiting our Facebook page: [Facebook.com/amseasorg](https://www.facebook.com/amseasorg)



AMSEAS Chief Scientist Robert DiGiovanni with scientists from MMoME and SSC



A harbor seal that was rehabilitated, tagged, and released in collaboration with AMSEAS, MMoME, and SSC



(L): Tracking map showing Tabitha the loggerhead's travels post-release.  
(R): Tabitha, a loggerhead sea turtle patient, receives a satellite tag from our Chief Scientist Robert DiGiovanni prior to her release from Sea Turtle Recovery's rehabilitation center



AMSEAS Chief Scientist Rob DiGiovanni works to satellite tag a harbor seal patient in collaboration with MMoME and SSC

# NY SEAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT

We kicked off our first pilot seal health assessment project in Shinnecock Bay (Hampton Bays, NY) in partnership with the U.S. Navy, Marine Mammals of Maine, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, and Stony Brook University. The objective of the project was to deploy a new net prototype to test its effectiveness in a seal health assessment project, while also determining the feasibility of conducting seal health assessment projects within New York and Rhode Island waters. These projects will enable scientists to learn more about the health status of harbor and gray seal populations in the Northeastern United States along with how they interact with the marine environment throughout the Northwest Atlantic. This is an important step towards understanding harbor seal habitat use and movements and identifying factors that may contribute to the change in behavior of the animals in the region.

During the first phase of the pilot study, our team was successfully able to deploy the new net prototype and capture seven harbor seals and one gray seal to perform health assessments. We collected weight and length measurements along with biological samples (i.e., nasal, ocular, and rectal swabs) from the animals, and successfully attached satellite tags to their fur. We want to thank our partners at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center as part of their Pinniped Behavioral Response Study, Marine Mammals of Maine, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, and Stony Brook University's Marine Station for their support in this project.

## SATELLITE TRACKING

The satellite tag emits a signal when at the surface, which sends information about the animal's movements and behavior (including dive and haul-out durations) to the AMSEAS team. The different colored dots on the map show the tracks of the eight animals tagged in the Shinnecock Bay during the pilot study. An added benefit of this project is the ability to collaborate with partners, like Marine Mammals of Maine, to compare satellite tag results from wild caught and rehabilitated seals.



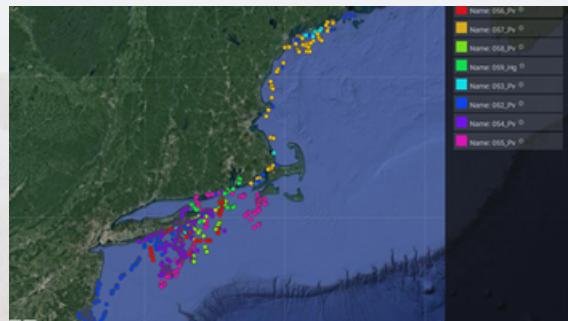
*The team on the capture vessel with the net prototype*



*The team works to satellite tag and conduct a health assessment of a harbor seal.  
Permit # 21719*



*A harbor seal is released following assessment and satellite tag placement.  
Permit # 21719*



# STRANDING UPDATE

AMSEAS conducts stranding investigations to learn as much as we can about the marine wildlife in our waters. From September of 2020 through June of 2021, we responded to 178 animals, including 69 sea turtles, 61 seals, and 48 cetaceans, 6 of which were large whales. Mortality examinations conducted by our biologists allow us to gather information about an animal's life history, diet, and anatomy.

In recent years, we are seeing more sea turtles in New York waters. As the air cools with the approaching fall season and when the water temperature drops below 50° Fahrenheit, sea turtles are at risk of becoming hypothermic, a condition called "cold stunning." Cold stunning can be fatal to sea turtles, causing them to have decreased circulation and mobility, which can also impede their ability to feed. As they become hypothermic, sea turtles become more vulnerable to vessel strikes, illness, predators, and even death. As cold-blooded reptiles, the body temperature of sea turtles is dictated by the temperature of their surroundings. Consequently, time is of the essence for these animals once they wash up on our shores and are exposed to the elements.

48 cold-stunned sea turtles were recovered from Long Island shores by our partners at New York Marine Rescue Center during the 2020 cold stun season. Tragically, the frigid temperatures took their toll during the months of November and December with a 52% mortality rate documented. AMSEAS conducted necropsies on the 25 deceased cold-stunned turtles. If you'd like to join us in our beach monitoring efforts this fall/winter, aim to walk the beaches right after high tide. North-facing beaches tend to be hot spots for cold-stunned sea turtle strandings. During the colder months, always assume that any sea turtle found on the beach is alive if it is intact and has a head. Remember to call the NYS Stranding Hotline immediately if you come across a cold-stunned sea turtle or any other sick, injured, entangled, or deceased marine mammals and sea turtles.

**"GO SLOW...  
SEA TURTLES BELOW"**

In June, our biologists responded to our first sea turtle stranding of the summer season. The sub-adult loggerhead had evidence of vessel strike, with clear signs of propeller lacerations across its carapace. Sadly, this is a phenomenon we see far too often during our summer months. In previous years, as many as 75% of the sea turtles we responded to during the summer had evidence of human interaction, with a majority of those cases involving vessel strike. As air breathers, turtles come to the surface to breathe, which makes them vulnerable to vessel strikes. While spending time on the water during the warmer months, please remember to go slow and be on the lookout for sea turtles. Please continue to report your sightings to us by emailing [sightings@amseas.org](mailto:sightings@amseas.org) and report any sea turtle strandings immediately to the NYS Stranding Hotline.



AMSEAS Biologists Jennifer Scalo and Kim Durham help release a loggerhead sea turtle that had become entangled in fishing gear and later disentangled



AMSEAS Biologists Erich Dietterle and Sammi Chaves collect samples during a necropsy on a humpback whale

**NYS Stranding Hotline:  
631.369.9829**



AMSEAS Biologist Erich Dietterle takes measurements of a deceased loggerhead sea turtle that had evidence of vessel strike

# CRITICAL CARE SEA TURTLE FACILITY

In the fall of 2020, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries requested that AMSEAS spin up a critical care triage facility to take in cold-stunned sea turtles that had stranded in Massachusetts. Due to the constraints of COVID-19 and one of the busiest cold stun events in history along the shores of Massachusetts, the state's stranding organizations quickly assessed the need to move animals to other care facilities. Many of the sea turtles that were being transferred were on the beach for two or three days before they were flown out to other facilities, thereby still in much need of critical care and support.

On December 8, 2020, we admitted 20 endangered, cold-stunned Kemp's ridley sea turtles to triage in our Westhampton Beach Critical Care Facility. The sea turtles arrived from the New England Aquarium on a flight coordinated by Turtles Fly Too, landing at Gabreski Airport. We were able to provide care to these exceptionally critical patients after quickly creating a triage facility to meet a crucial need for support. AMSEAS is one of many network partners that helped to provide temporary care for these turtles.

In February, 11 of our sea turtle patients got a second chance as we sent them to Florida to be released at Canaveral National Seashore, along with 26 other sea turtles that had also been cold-stunned and rescued from the beaches around Cape Cod last winter. The turtles were transported on a flight coordinated by Turtles Fly Too, and release efforts involved collaboration between NOAA Fisheries, NASA's Kennedy Space Center, Canaveral National Seashore, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.



AMSEAS Biologists Erich Dietterle and Kim Durham tube feed a Kemp's ridley patient



AMSEAS' Kemp's ridley sea turtles being prepped for transport south to Florida for release



AMSEAS Biologist Sammi Chaves helps load sea turtles onto a flight with Turtles Fly Too

In April, three more of our sea turtle patients joined 11 sea turtles from our partners at New York Marine Rescue Center on a flight south coordinated by NOAA Fisheries and the wonderful team at Turtles Fly Too. All 14 animals were flown to Georgia, where they were then released off Jekyll Island with the help of the Georgia Sea Turtle Center.



AMSEAS Biologist Kim Durham prepares a sea turtle for transport to Georgia for release

# CRITICAL CARE SEA TURTLE FACILITY (CONT'D)

This incredible success story of rescue, rehabilitation, and release would not have been possible without the tireless, collaborative efforts of the organizations and network partners who worked together, along with the time, resources, and support from all of our donors and dedicated volunteer team. We are immensely proud to have played a part in giving these endangered sea turtles a second chance.

In June, the last Kemp's ridley sea turtle patient in our Critical Care Facility was transported to our partners at Sea Turtle Recovery (STR) to embark on the next phase of its rehabilitation journey. This special little turtle was not quite ready to be released back into the ocean and required further rehabilitation and care.

This event marked a monumental moment in our partnership with Sea Turtle Recovery, which started five years ago. Over the years, we have collaborated to satellite tag several sea turtles that were rehabilitated at STR prior to being released. Our partnership has now come full circle, with our AMSEAS team being able to help provide support and respond to animals from New England this past winter, and now transporting one of our very own patients to the STR facility for the next step in its life.



AMSEAS Biologists with the Sea Turtle Recovery team on transport day

Recently, our partners at STR provided us with an exciting update about our former patient. When our little friend left our facility, it was experiencing some buoyancy issues and having a difficult time staying on the bottom of the tank. Our partners at STR informed us that this turtle is a fighter and quickly began making improvements! A few weeks after transport, patient #635 was able to stay on the bottom of its new tank, which indicates that its buoyancy issues appeared to have resolved.

We are so happy to see this turtle making great strides in its rehabilitation journey, and are so grateful for the partnership we have with our friends at Sea Turtle Recovery.

The power of collaboration in the stranding world truly comes to light in times like this, and we couldn't be more grateful for all of our wonderful network partners that we get to share these incredible "firsts" with as our organization continues to grow. Thank you to all our supporters, volunteers, and partners for walking alongside us on this wonderful journey.



AMSEAS Biologist Sammi Chaves prepares patient #635 for transport to STR



Patient #635 resting at the bottom of its new tank at STR. Photo credit: Sea Turtle Recovery



AMSEAS Biologist Sammi Chaves assesses a Kemp's ridley sea turtle

# Introducing...

**SAMMI CHAVES, AMSEAS  
FIELD BIOLOGIST**

Sammi Chaves joined the AMSEAS team as a Field Biologist in December of 2020. Having grown up on Martha's Vineyard, she has always been humbled by the ocean. Sammi's background in wildlife biology began back in 2012 when she had her first internship with BiodiversityWorks on Martha's Vineyard. Since then she has interned with a variety of stranding organizations and other non-profits throughout the northeast, assisting with wildlife conservation, marine mammal stranding response, and marine animal rehabilitation. Sammi's interest in marine science pushed her to pursue an undergraduate degree at Wheaton College where she majored in biology. Since joining the team, Sammi has enjoyed putting her prior rehabilitation skills to work caring for our cold-stunned sea turtle patients that were flown in from Massachusetts during the 2020 cold stun season.

# Introducing...

**LINDSEY REISZ, AMSEAS  
EDUCATION COORDINATOR**



AMSEAS Education Coordinator Lindsey Reisz assists AMSEAS Biologist Sammi Chaves with an assessment of a Kemp's ridley sea turtle

Lindsey Reisz joined Atlantic Marine Conservation Society in January 2021 after completing her Master of Professional Science (MPS) degree in Marine Mammal Science at the University of Miami RSMAS in December 2020. Previously, Lindsey worked in the Florida Keys for various organizations that focus on educating and engaging with people of all ages about the marine environment and conservation. Additionally, she taught science in the Florida public school system for three years before attending graduate school. As a part of the MPS program requirements, Lindsey interned with Mote Marine Laboratory's Stranding Investigations Program from May - December 2020, where she participated in stranding response, necropsies, and data collection and analysis. Her master's thesis consisted of a spatiotemporal analysis of a decade worth of stranded sea turtles and human interactions data in Sarasota County and Longboat Key, Florida. Lindsey says, "I'm looking forward to engaging with the residents and visitors of Long Island at some of the New York State Parks, specifically Hallock State Park Preserve and Orient Beach State Park, expanding AMSEAS education and outreach programs, and promoting marine conservation through action."

Welcome to  
the team!

# WHAT'S NEXT



AMSEAS Education Coordinator Lindsey Reisz leads a beach cleanup at Hallock State Park Preserve

## 🐳 Weekly Programs at Hallock State Park Preserve

Join us at Hallock State Park Preserve every Wednesday from 12-1pm for "Walk with a Biologist!" and every Saturday from 10-11:30am for a socially distanced guided beach cleanup. Find dates and details at [amseas.org/events](http://amseas.org/events) or by emailing [education@amseas.org](mailto:education@amseas.org).

## 🐳 Volunteer Training

Interested in helping AMSEAS promote conservation of the marine environment through action? Join us for an information session! We will discuss what our organization does and how you can get involved, including joining our volunteer program, participating in a beach cleanup, attending a lecture, and more. Conservation starts with you! Find details at [amseas.org/events](http://amseas.org/events).

## 🐳 2021-2022 Internship Opportunities

AMSEAS is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting marine conservation through action. Some of our action items include data research, surveys and health assessments, involvement in the Specially Trained Animal Response Team (START), response to entangled and out-of-habitat animals, necropsies, beach monitoring, public outreach, and education. We have a number of internship opportunities in which students can become involved with AMSEAS within the marine mammal and sea turtle stranding network. [Learn more at amseas.org.](#)



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CONSERVATION SOCIETY

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"WHAT YOU DO  
MAKES A  
DIFFERENCE, AND  
YOU HAVE TO  
DECIDE WHAT  
KIND OF  
DIFFERENCE YOU  
WANT TO MAKE."

JANE GOODALL

Thank you to all of our partners for helping us promote marine conservation through action!

Army Corps of Engineers | Center for Coastal Studies | Citizens Campaign For the Environment  
| International Fund for Animal Welfare | Long Island Community Foundation | Marine  
Mammals of Maine | Marine Mammal Stranding Center | Mystic Aquarium | Naval Facilities  
Engineering Command Atlantic | New York City Parks | New York State Parks and Connect  
Kids to Parks | National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries | New York State  
Department of Environmental Conservation | Northeast Fisheries Science Center | Parks and  
Trails New York | Sea Turtle Recovery | Tufts University Runstadler Lab | US Coast Guard ...and  
*all of the towns and municipalities that have supported our response efforts!*