The Nature Conservancy
Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

The Nature Conservancy, Long Island Chapter
250 Lawrence Hill Road
Cold Spring Harbor, NY 11724
www.nature.org/longisland

~ Read Inside ~

SPRING/SUMMER NEWSLETTER

SAVE THE DATE!

The Nature Conservancy on Long Island's
BEACHES & BAYS GALA

Saturday, June 29, 2013
7:00 p.m.

HONORING
Charles Marder

Chairs: Bettina and Fred Stelle
Corporate Sponsor: Mission Capital Advisors, LLC

The Center for Conservation, East Hampton, New York

FOR INFORMATION CALL (631) 329-3981 ext. 14

READ INSIDE!

Meet Charlie Marder and his family on page 6

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NATURE LONG ISLAND

CONSERVATION NEWS FROM THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

SPRING/SUMMER 2013

A Letter from The Director

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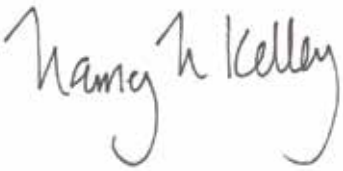
Summer is nearly here, bringing longer, warmer days in which we enjoy nature's bounty. But it also signals the start of hurricane season, even while the losses from Hurricane Sandy remain vivid reminders of the reality of rising sea levels and increased storm intensity. Natural area buffers are among the best investments we can make when it comes to preparing for coastal storms, and Nature Conservancy staff have been hard at work to include this approach in current post-storm planning efforts (see article on page 3.)

Some areas of Long Island contain natural buffers in the form of wide marshes and undeveloped coastline. While we enjoy these places for hiking, birdwatching and other recreational pursuits, we often overlook their economic value – by serving as the "first responders" in the face of storms and sea level rise, and helping to maintain clean water for swimming and fishing.

Our coastal resources, when healthy, have tremendous value. Salt marshes buffer inland areas from storm surges and provide nurseries for fin and shellfish. Seagrasses and shellfish are filter feeders, helping protect our water quality. And, healthy bays provide us with a local food source in our fish and shellfisheries – so that we don't have to rely entirely on imported goods.

Long Island's coastal economy depends on tourism to the tune of $4.6 billion each year and tourism depends on healthy beaches and waterways for recreation. Our vital coastal resources help ensure tax dollars and jobs to keep our economy thriving.

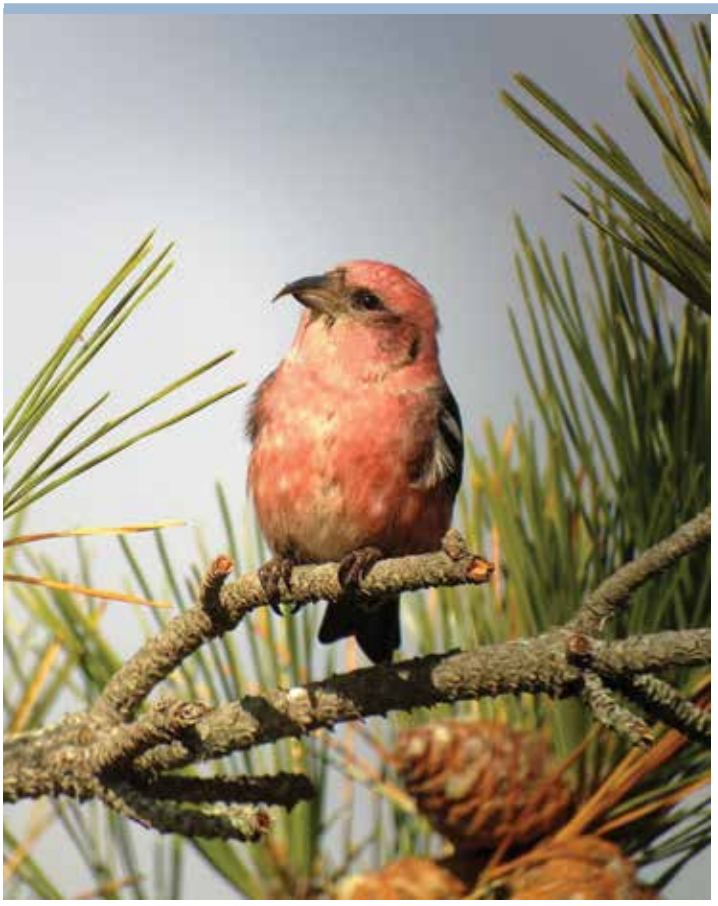
All these "ecosystem services" add up to tremendous value by keeping our coastal resources strong and healthy. So, get out there this season and enjoy nature's bounties! And remember: when we protect her, she will be there to protect us.



Nancy N. Kelley
Executive Director
The Nature Conservancy on Long Island

On the Cover:

A budding scientist herself, five-year-old Caitlin enjoys visiting Long Island wetlands with her mother, TNC scientist Dr. Nicole Maher. Here she is pictured with her seine net at the mouth of Sunken Meadow Creek in Sunken Meadow State Park, Smithtown, NY
© Nicole Maher/TNC



White-winged Crossbill

Mike Scheibel with his granddaughter Julia

Pine Grosbeak

What was the greatest distance you travelled to see a bird?

DR and MS: 600 miles. For the Gray-crowned Rosy Finch in Booneville, NY – only to find out that we were a day late.

What was the rarest species you saw?

DR: The Grace's Warbler, found during the Southern Nassau Christmas Bird Count on 1/1/12. As soon as the bird was reported, I headed down to Point Lookout where I had great views of this southwestern Warbler. It was the first record for New York State and potentially the first record east of the Mississippi.

MS: Ditto on the Grace's Warbler, sighted on January 4th.

What were the first and last species of the year that you spotted? Any "special" birds?

DR: Grace's Warbler and Hoary Redpoll. Hoary Redpoll was one of my top five bird experiences of 2012. Ever since I owned my first birding field guide 10 years ago, I've often gazed at Hoary Redpoll, the frosty tones of the male and the subtle pink wash on its breast. It was always a bird that I'd pass in my field guide, turn the page back, and pause a bit longer to study. Thankfully Larry Master, a former Nature Conservancy scientist, was gracious enough to point me toward his feeders in Lake Placid where I stood with my brother and waited, detailing every Common Redpoll in sight, until I found a male Hoary Redpoll.

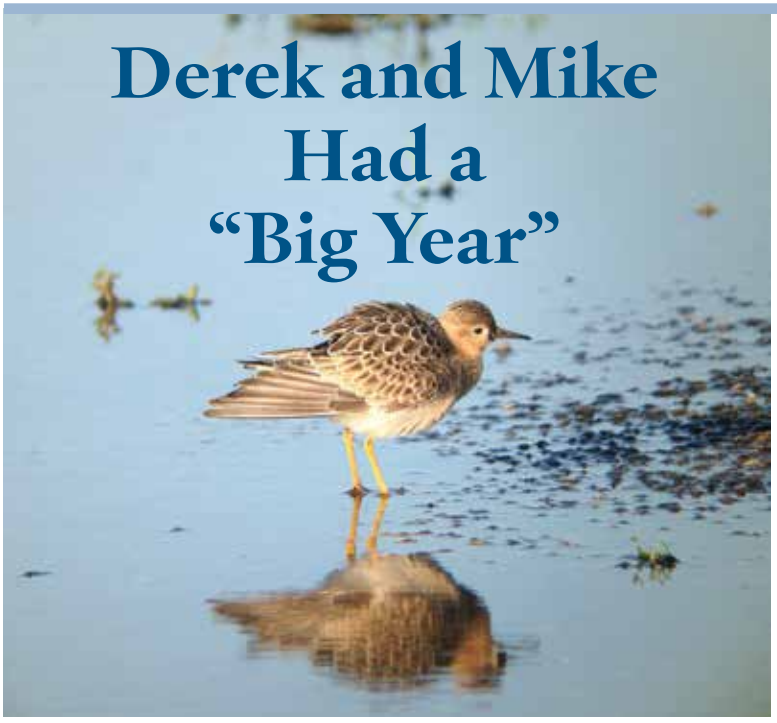
MS: White-throated Sparrow and Northern Goshawk. As for special birds, the Pine Grosbeak was one of my last species for the year and I found it at Webster Park, in Monroe County on Christmas Eve. My granddaughter Julia, age 6, and I were searching the campsite area when she exclaimed, "I hear birds, Papa!" There a short distance away, feeding in a crabapple tree were four Pine Grosbeaks. Before alerting the rest of our birding party, Julia and I enjoyed close-up views in my spotting scope of what was a "life" bird for both us. That moment, alone with my first grandchild, was the best Christmas present I ever received.

Final Tally:

Derek Rogers 315 species (5th on NYS ebird list),
Mike Scheibel 304 species (9th on NYS ebird list).

eBird News was developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society. It provides a simple way to keep track of the birds you see anywhere.
Visit **ebird.org/content/ebird/**

Derek and Mike Had a "Big Year"



Buff-breasted Sandpiper

Mike Scheibel and Derek Rogers scan the shoreline in hopes of seeing something unusual.

In 2012, Long Island Preserves Manager Derek Rogers and Mashomack Preserve Manager Mike Scheibel undertook a birding challenge – to participate in a "Big Year" – that is, to spot as many birds as possible within New York State's borders during a calendar year. Here are the highlights:

What was the most exciting bird you saw?

DR: The Pink-footed Goose I found in Holtsville on February 21 was the first rare bird I discovered (although it's rivaled by a Brown Booby at Cupsogue County Park). I've always been intrigued by geese, their behavior and migratory movements throughout the world and looked closely at flocks of Canada Geese in hopes of seeing this bird.

© Derek Rogers/TNC

Hoary Redpoll

MS: For me, the Golden-winged Warbler was one that I have never before seen in my lifetime of birding. My wife Lynne and I encountered it driving on a back road in the Adirondacks. Just before that, we saw a spectacular Blackburnian Warbler.

What about the ones that got away…or not?

DR: I never tracked down the White-faced Ibis, despite two attempts at Jamaica Bay and one try at Scoy Pond in East Hampton. Ibis groups are quite mobile and have numerous foraging areas in a wide range. At times, you have to accept that a species will go unseen.

MS: Ah, the evasive Black-headed Gull. I attempted to see it twice at Hook Pond, East Hampton; twice at Lake Montauk. In December, a reported sighting in Mill Pond, East Setauket seemed a sure bet. But who knew that the annual Christmas parade was underway in this normally sleepy village, shutting down main streets and congesting the roadways? As darkness fell that day, I was lost, wet and bird-less. The next morning, the bird was nowhere to be found. In desperation I checked a nearby bay, and there in my scope was my bird!

Superstorm Sandy Delivers Two Silver Linings

For all its negative consequences, Superstorm Sandy did at least two positive things for Long Island's environment, one on the south shore, one on the north.

On Fire Island, the storm opened a small breach at Old Inlet, in the National Seashore's Otis Pike High Dunes Wilderness Area, allowing healthier ocean water to enter eastern Great South Bay and flush out degraded bay water. And to the north, the storm removed a berm that acted like a dam, restricting the flow of salt water to the salt marsh at Sunken Meadow State Park on Long Island Sound.

Because of greater water circulation caused by the Old Inlet breach, there will likely be fewer algal blooms and pathogens this summer in Great South Bay, benefiting boaters, fishers and swimmers, and helping the millions of clams that The Nature Conservancy has transplanted to the bay since 2004.

Based on these significant anticipated ecological benefits, Conservancy scientists Carl LoBue and Chris Clapp put in many hours after Sandy to influence decision-makers not to fill the breach. They cited expert opinion that the breach posed no additional flooding risk to homeowners around the bay, and might actually reduce flooding by providing an outlet for high water during strong winds from the west. In late January, *Newsday* took an editorial position in agreement with the Conservancy.

"I can't think of any action that would provide more immediate benefit to the health of eastern Great South Bay than simply allowing the breach at Old Inlet to continue to flow, which also happens not to cost any money," said LoBue.

At Sunken Meadow State Park, more salt water may begin to weaken the invasive phagmites plants that ring the tidal marsh, and the open channel will allow fish such as alewife or river herring to swim between the Sound and the protected marsh, where they can spawn and find food. Before Sandy, the Conservancy and other groups were seeking to secure funding to remove the berm – at a cost of up to $2 million. Now, according to Conservancy scientist Dr. Nicole Maher, a fraction of that amount will be required to finish the job that Mother Nature started. "Because partners have been working to remove this dam for some time, we already have engineering designs in place to replace it with a bridge and restore intertidal marsh habitats on the exposed mudflats. Now we can focus our efforts on restoring native salt marsh habitats and monitoring the return of the river herring."

In a photo taken before Sandy, Dr. Nicole Maher of The Nature Conservancy pointed to an undersized culvert embedded in a man-made earthen dam that restricted flow from Long Island Sound to the tidal marsh in Sunken Meadow State Park, in the Town of Smithtown.

In this photo, taken in December 2012, salt water flows down the creek into the salt marsh. The rubble to the left shows where Sandy cut a channel through the man-made dam.

Governor Cuomo's 2100 Commission Recommends Wetlands Protection

At first glance, a reader might think an employee of The Nature Conservancy wrote the following two sentences:

> "Tidal and coastal wetlands protect upland areas from flooding and shorelines from erosion associated with storms. As such, their protection and enhancement must be a central part of a coastal resilience strategy."

The reader would be wrong. The statements were issued by a New York State commission appointed by Governor Andrew Cuomo immediately after Superstorm Sandy, the 2100 Commission.

To be fair, it should be noted that the president of The Nature Conservancy, Mark Tercek, served on the 2100 Commission – but so did leaders from the banking, building, transportation and communications industries, as well as academics and public policy experts.

All agreed that in trying to keep New York's coasts safe in the face of rising seas and intense storms, "natural and green methods for protection" are "a crucial complement to both existing and new 'hard' defenses." The 205-page report recommends many ways in which investing in nature – for example, in wetlands, shellfish restoration and land protection – will help communities to be stronger.

The Governor followed up the Commission's recommendations with a proposal that coastal homeowners be offered financial incentives to relocate and allow their property to be turned into public land. The Nature Conservancy has been working with the governor's office to work out the details of a buy-out program, and *The New York Times* published a letter from Mark Tercek praising the plan.

As Tercek wrote, "[p]reserving land that absorbs flood-waters and protects against tidal surge creates recreational opportunities and vital wildlife habitats. These properties will become important community assets, not only providing a strong defense from the storms that are sure to come, but also enhancing quality of life for all."

These are just some of the ways in which The Nature Conservancy and other conservation organizations have played an important role in the debate following Sandy.

Now, as the Commission wrote, the Commission's good ideas need "to become action."

Protecting Coral in the Tropics and in Long Island Sound

Long Island Sound, a federally-designated estuary, is home to an incredibly diverse array of plants, animals and habitats. Sea turtles, oceanic sunfish, flounder, bay scallops, fragile seahorses and even a species of coral (*Astrangia poculata*), shown here.

Astrangia poculata is a species of coral found in Long Island Sound.

Coral reefs are underwater cities of the sea! Reefs are a major hub of ocean activity with a diversity of architecture. They serve as the apartment buildings and restaurant chains of the sea: providing habitat, home and a source of food for fish and invertebrates. Coral reefs feed people, provide jobs, generate sand on tropical beaches and buffer coastal communities from storms waves and erosion.

Habitats in Long Island Sound and the world's coral reefs share the same threats to their health and survival – coastal development, pollution, and overfishing or destructive fishing – threats which also jeopardize our livelihood. The health of our oceans and our quality of life are inextricably linked.

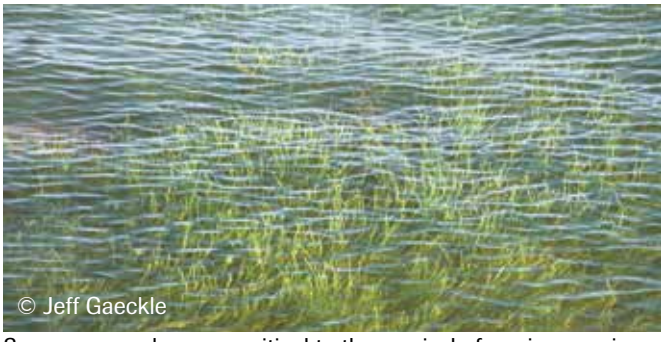
Impaired water quality is the number one threat to the health of Long Island Sound. With more than 21 million people living within 50 miles of its shores, the Sound is an "urban sea." Its watershed – the area of land that drains into the Sound – is about three times the size of the state of Connecticut. Water flowing into the sound carries pollutants generated by those who live in its watershed. Polluted water causes blooms of phytoplankton that make shellfish toxic, close our beaches, prevent us from swimming, and choke out habitats such as seagrass meadows that are critical to the survival of marine species.

Research shows that pollution, warming seas and increasing acidity of the oceans are altering the conditions needed for marine life to thrive. If these threats persist, they could make life impossible for coral reefs, seagrass meadows, and the life they support.

Despite extraordinary challenges, there is hope! The Conservancy is working in 24 countries that have coral reefs, focusing on reefs that show the strongest chance for survival. We are building capacity by connecting reef managers and scientists and providing training to maximize limited resources.

And closer to home, in Long Island Sound, we are developing tools and working with multiple coastal communities to assess risks and options for adapting to a changing climate. We are working to protect remaining eelgrass meadows and improve the conditions eelgrass needs to thrive. And we are reconnecting fresh water and marine habitats by expanding dam removal and opening up passage for fish in the Connecticut River and other rivers that feed the Sound.

You can help protect the world's most beautiful and diverse places when you Adopt a Coral Reef today. The Nature Conservancy's Adopt a Coral Reef program raises funds for important coral reef projects in The Bahamas, Dominican Republic, Palau and Papua New Guinea. Visit http://adopt.nature.org/coralreef/



Seagrass meadows are critical to the survival of marine species.

Long Island Sound provides important habitat for juvenile Kemp's ridley sea turtles, which are critically endangered.

Little-known Jewel Preserved in Long Island Sound Watershed

A quiet place of solitude in an otherwise developed part of Long Island, the Little Portion Friary, under the Society of St. Francis, will be selling 44 peaceful acres of land for preservation to Suffolk County and Brookhaven Town. The steeply sloped, wooded property has hiking trails, and views of Mount Sinai Harbor from its higher elevations. It is within the watershed of the Long Island Sound and its preservation helps protect drinking water and surface water quality.


© Randy Parsons/TNC

The Nature Conservancy's role in the preservation of this land was one of bringing the parties together and assisting with the negotiations. The Franciscan Brothers reached out to us when they were considering liquidating part of their property in order to fund a retirement program for their monks. Long Island Chapter staff member Randy Parsons served as a trusted advisor throughout the appraisal and negotiations process.

Town to Zone Most of Plum Island for Conservation

The preservation of Plum Island, an 840-acre federally owned island off Orient Point, straddling Peconic Bay and Long Island Sound, recently took a giant step forward when the Southold Town Board decided to move ahead with zoning almost 80% of the island for Open Space and Conservation use. The other 20% of the island, which is where the Plum Island Animal Disease Laboratory is located, will be zoned for Research and Development use to allow the lab to continue its operations there, or be replaced by a similar facility. A legal notice of the zoning for the island is to be published and a public hearing held by this summer.

The federal government announced plans to sell the island to the highest bidder, but with no residential or commercial use permitted, other than the existing lab, The Nature Conservancy and its partners in the Preserve Plum Island Coalition are hopeful the island will remain in public ownership and be managed as a National Wildlife Refuge.

The proposed plan for the Island, developed by Southold Town, would allow research on the 175 acres where the lab is located on the island's west end, while the rest of the land would be preserved as open space – an important part of maintaining water quality in both the Peconic and Long Island Sound Estuaries, as the island is one of the largest remaining open spaces on all of Long Island.

According to Southold Supervisor Scott Russell, "The intent of the town is to see Plum Island stay a research facility of global import with most of the island remaining open space."

Other than a lighthouse built in 1869 and buildings and fortifications from historic Fort Terry, 80% of the Island remains undisturbed wildlife habitat with 7.5 miles of natural shoreline. 190 species of birds have been observed on Plum island and it is the largest haul-out site for wintering seals in the northeast.

Catch Limit Established for "The Most Important Fish in the Sea"[1]

The Nature Conservancy played an important role in securing a 20% reduction in the catch limit on a small but essential fish – the Atlantic Menhaden – also known locally as bunker. Though not a species you would find on your dinner plate, it is the food of choice for striped bass, tuna, whales, and osprey. Menhaden also eat phytoplankton, so just like clams and oysters, they filter the water and turn tiny plants into one of the most important foods in the sea. The decision by The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to reduce coast-wide harvest by 20% is an important step towards implementing ecosystem principles in fishery management decisions.

The Nature Conservancy played an important role in securing a 20% reduction in the catch limit on a small but essential fish – the Atlantic Menhaden – also known locally as bunker.

This victory was secured by The Nature Conservancy along with many other coalition members and supporters. It is an important step in beginning to manage forage fish in a way that meets people's needs, while leaving enough fish in the sea for other creatures to eat. The Long Island Chapter's marine scientist, Carl LoBue, who sits on the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council's (MAFMC) Ecosystems and Ocean Planning Committee, helped raise this important issue internally, spurring the Conservancy to action.

Building off this recent success, the Conservancy is turning its attention to other proposed changes in fisheries management for species such as Atlantic Mackeral and squid. MAFMC is proposing amendments to the fishery management plan for the Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish fishery to protect deep sea or cold-water corals. These corals are typically found in water more than 50 meters deep on the continental shelf and slope, especially in and around offshore canyons and seamounts. These protections would likely include restrictions on certain fishing gear (chiefly bottom trawls) that can damage or destroy these slow-growing corals.

As filter feeders, menhaden consume phytoplankton, helping control the growth of algae in coastal waters."

Over-harvesting has led to the decline of menhaden.

[1] "The Most Important Fish in the Sea: Menhaden and America" © 2007 by H. Bruce Franklin, a Shearwater Book published by Island Press. This book describes how menhaden have influenced America's national and natural history, and why reckless overfishing threatens their place in both. Since the Civil War, menhaden have provided the largest catch of any American fishery. Billions of fish are harvested every year and used for animal feed, fertilizer, and oil used in everything from linoleum to health-food supplements. This massive harvest is devastating because menhaden are crucial to the diet of bigger fish and they filter the waters of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, playing an essential dual role in marine ecology. As their numbers have plummeted, fish and birds dependent on them have been decimated and toxic algae have begun to choke our bays and seas.

From the Ground Up: A Profile of Charlie Marder

© Doug Young

Kathleen and Charlie Marder.

Charlie Marder knows a lot of local dirt. As the owner of Marders Nursery in Bridgehampton, he and his wife and four sons spend a great deal of time working in it. Good dirt is the foundation of all of the magnificent landscapes that Charlie and his staff design.

"Soil is comprised of millions of living organisms and we are always trying to improve the subterranean environment. We do a lot of research into soils, organics and biodynamics. It's something we train for here and it reflects our overall goal with the family and the business – to be good and to do well and spread that goodness."

Charlie first got involved in The Nature Conservancy by joining the group in its effort to maintain native landscapes and control invasive plants. Since that time, he has become more involved, serving as a trustee on The Nature Conservancy's Long Island Chapter board. He and his family will be honored at this year's Beaches and Bays Gala in June at the Conservancy's Center for Conservation.

Marders supports a number of local and regional efforts devoted to nature, from protecting native bees to studying the genealogy of trees. Perhaps that's because Charlie is rooted in hard-working beginnings: "I grew up in Springs, and whether it was selling eggs or cutting firewood, I always had a business."

Marders Nursery, which started in his mother's living room, employs up to 150 at the height of the season. That growth comes with respect and appreciation from his clients, the community and the landscape.

"I've always been a firm believer that if you are a geologist, you better go out and climb the mountains. To really understand the landscape, you need to spend time exploring before you can really understand what you want to do and what the land is telling you."

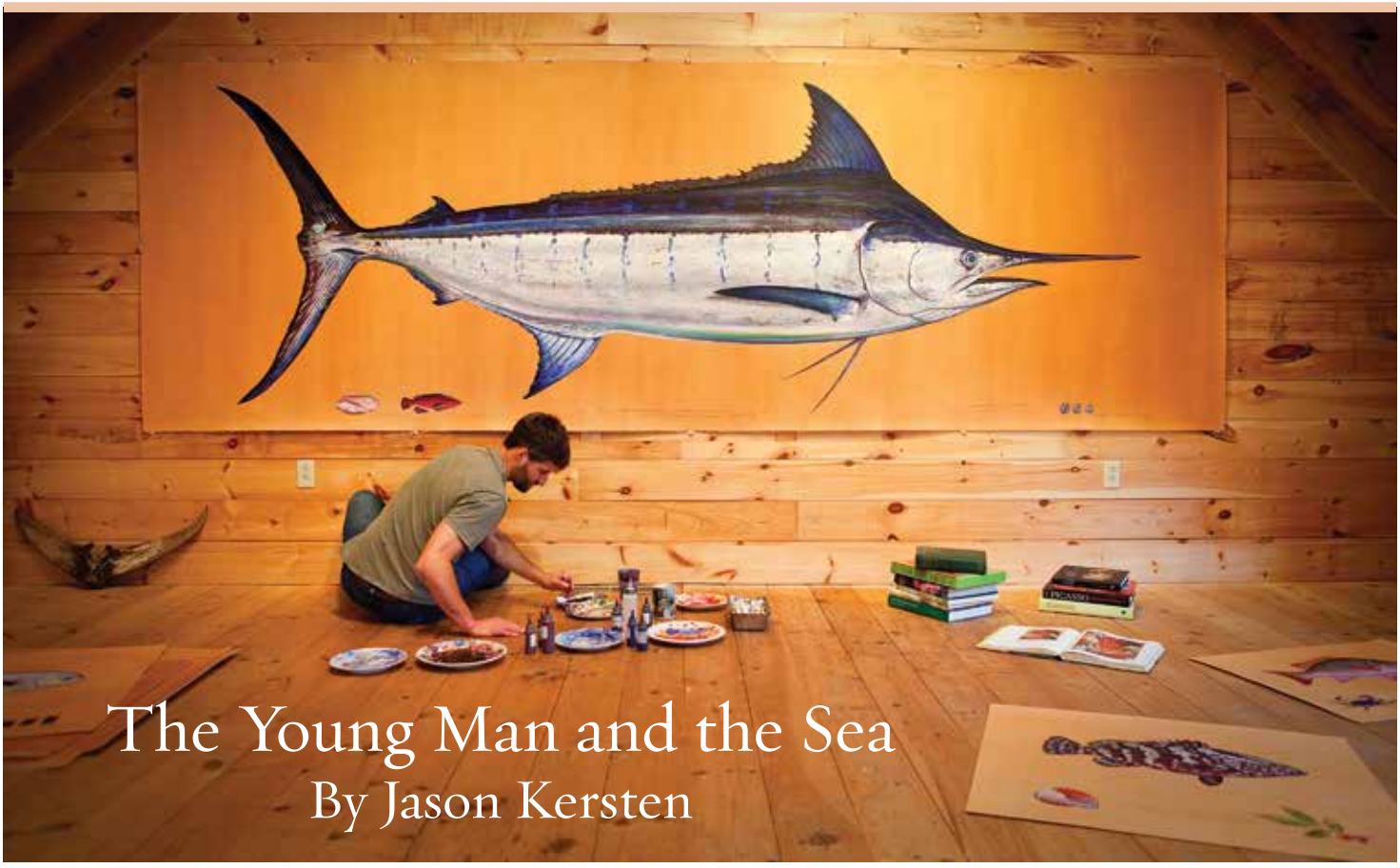
Charlie and his wife Kathleen are cognizant of keeping the connection to the land strong and instilling that connection in their four sons, Silas, Mica, Dashiel and Tucker.

"My hope is that the next generation engages in the environment, and is not overwhelmed by the issues; just attack them in small bits."

Even if that means starting at the ground level – with the dirt.

© Doug Young

Charlie with his dog, "Sage".



The Young Man and the Sea

By Jason Kersten

Excerpt reprinted from Nature Conservancy magazine, 2012/issue 3

Artist James Prosek made his authorial debut at 19 years old with Trout: an Illustrated History (Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), which features 70 of his watercolor paintings. Since then, he set out to paint an entire collection of life-size Atlantic game fish.

"I wanted to paint fish that are important to humans. Mostly food and game fish – a lot of them are being exploited. But also some of the larger or more colorful or hard-fighting or magnificent fish in the Atlantic," says Prosek.

This personal endeavor took the artist to the far corners of the Atlantic, including the Cape Verde Islands, the Bahamas, Florida, Rhode Island and Montauk. He painted 35 fish in all – giants like swordfish and big blue marlin, and dinner-table staples like Nassau grouper and tautog.

For Prosek, painting and preserving nature are inseparable. "Without these sources of awe and inspiration, we would have no faith, we would have no spirituality, we'd have no art," he says. "They're the sources of everything that we are. Without [nature], it would be a very pale and depressing existence."

No two paintings (or fish) are alike. Each image captures the animal's beauty in a fleeting moment when the fish – still vibrant, still emanating colors that will drain away only with death – is pulled from its world and enters ours.

Prosek's paintings will be on display at the Center for Conservation in East Hampton this summer.