

ISSUE 2 | JANUARY 2021

Friends of the Ashley Schiff Preserve

2020: The Year in Review



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THE 51ST

ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

The Ashley Schiff Preserve celebrates 51 years of dedication forever wild on Stony Brook University campus

FALL 2020

WALKS IN THE WOODS

The Friends of the Ashley Schiff Preserve hosted walks in the woods for students on Saturdays during the Fall 2020 semester

STUDENT

VOLUNTEERS

the Friends launched its first Student Volunteer Program

ASHLEY SCHIFF

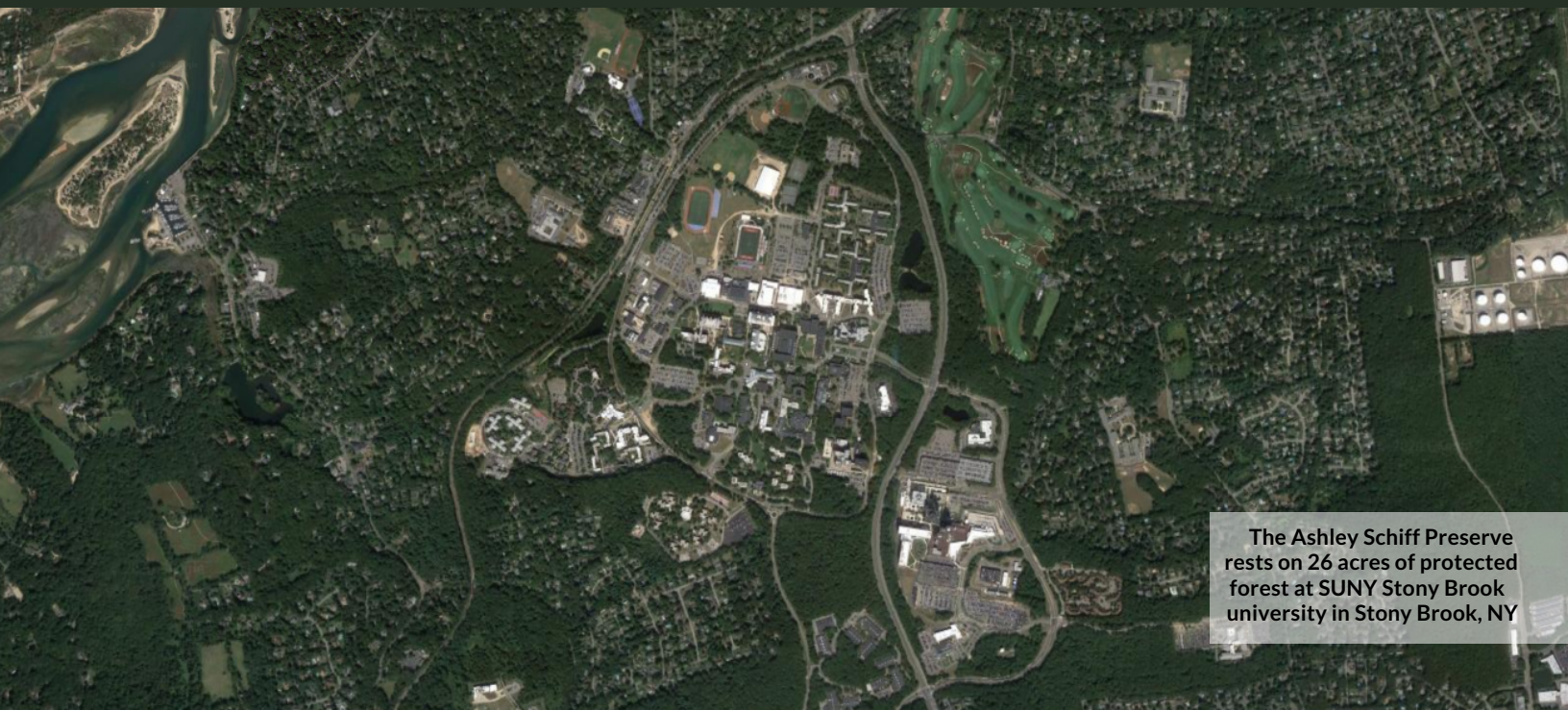
BLOG POSTS

The Student Volunteers at Stony Brook shares their thoughts and experiences on the Preserve, their campus natural environment and more

"We change by preserving.
Think of the Ashley Schiff Preserve as
a place of peaceful wild protest"
- J. Drew Lanham

Ashley Schiff Preserve

STONY BROOK, NEW YORK



The Ashley Schiff Preserve rests on 26 acres of protected forest at SUNY Stony Brook university in Stony Brook, NY

The Ashley Schiff Preserve is dedicated to its namesake, Dr. Ashley Schiff (1932-1969). Dr. Schiff joined Stony Brook University in 1965 as professor of Political Science where he was known for a philosophy of accessibility, open-mindedness and “brutal honesty” with his students.

As master of Cardozo College, Dr. Schiff was renowned for his ceaseless efforts to improve undergraduate life outside of the classroom:

"[He provided] a seemingly unending flow of celebrity guest visitors, with a calendar of educational events unmatched by any of Stony Brook's twenty other residential colleges."

-Statesman, October 3, 1969

Dr. Schiff held a deep care for the students and university. This is demonstrated by his contributions to the campus environment, one of which was his donation of the azaleas which today line Stony Brook's beloved Roth Pond. For his thoughtful commitment to the practice and promotion of integrity, Dr. Schiff remains a popular and deeply respected figure within the university community.

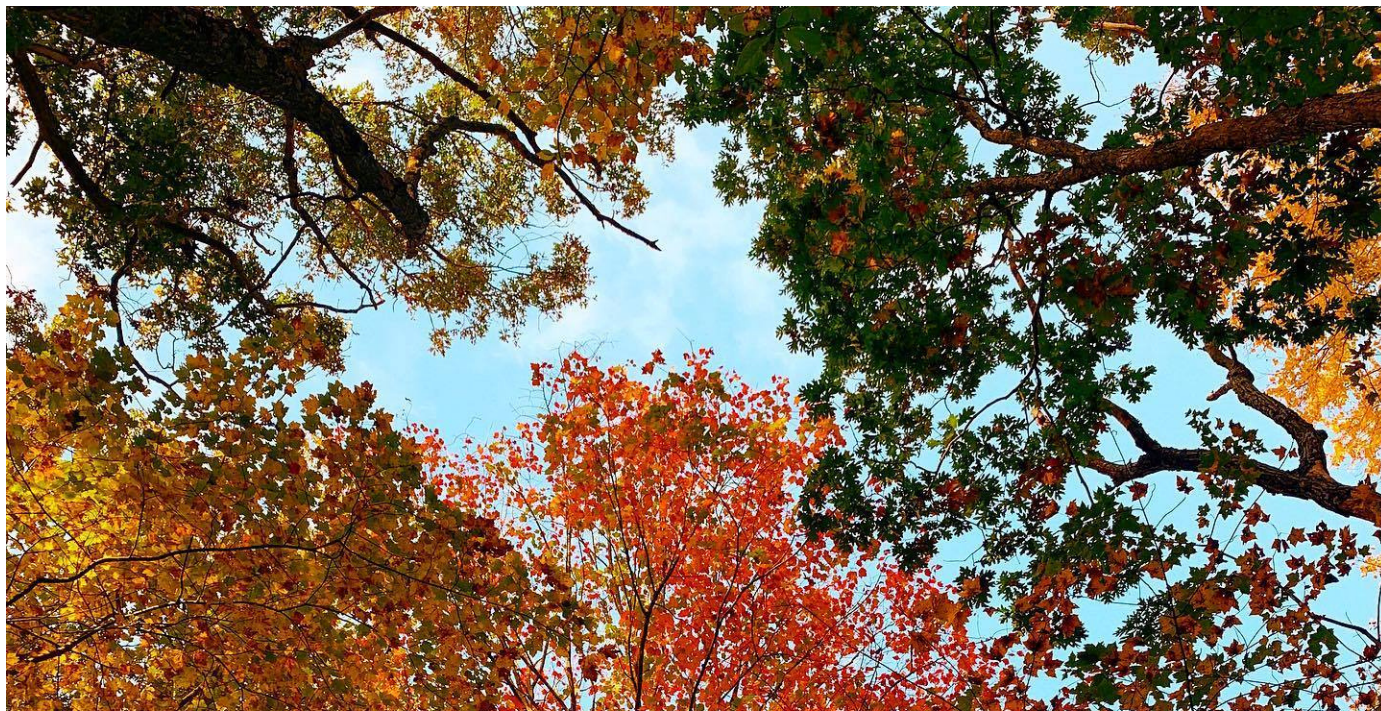
Dr. Schiff's sudden and unexpected passing in 1969 at age 37 shook the entire campus community. The university offered to name a building in his memory, but students demanded a more meaningful memorial.

To honor of Dr. Ashley Schiff's profound impact on the university, President John S. Toll in 1970 pledged the preservation of 26 acres of untouched forest on campus-- the area which is today known as Ashley Schiff Preserve.

In 2019, the University Environmental Committee passed the Ashley Schiff Resolution, securing the timeless preservation of the site's state-recognized vulnerable species. Today, the Preserve is home to over 75 plant species and serves as living lab to university students and scholars.

In 2020 the university community celebrated a significant milestone-- the 50th anniversary of our very own and *Forever Wild* Ashley Schiff Preserve.

The Year in Review



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On October 4th, 2020, Stony Brook celebrated 51 years of Ashley Schiff Preserve on campus. University president Dr. Sharon Pochron shares a statement with Friends of the Ashley Schiff Preserve and the university community.

8 Remembering Muriel Weyl

We remember Muriel Weyl, protégé to Dr. Ashley Schiff, who for over 50 years served as student ally and steadfast advocate for the Preserve. Muriel's work championing the mission of our preserve was essential to the preservation of our site as a *Forever Wild* living lab open to the university community.

9 Fall 2020 Walks in the Woods

We reflect on the sights and experiences enjoyed by university students on guided nature walks through the Preserve, with highlights on the natural and historic features of the Preserve that we encountered along the way.

10 The 51st Anniversary Celebration

Dr. J Drew Lanham (Clemson University) joined our 51th Anniversary Celebration event virtually this year as a guest speaker. Read Dr. Drew Lanham's message on the importance of social advocacy at Ashley Schiff Preserve.

Photo by Caroline Moran,
Stony Brook University

ON THE COVER

Tulip Tree @ Ashley
Schiff Preserve.
Photography by John
Griffin, Office of
Communications,
Stony Brook University.

Friends of the Ashley Schiff
Preserve

AshleySchiff.org

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The Friends' first ever volunteer program was launched last year! Learn about our volunteer team and their hands-on experience in our very own living lab.

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Read highlights from our official blog at AshleySchiff.org! Students share their experiences in the campus environment and on-site at the Preserve.

25 Executive Board 2020

Current and official ledger of Friends of Ashley Schiff Preserve executive board members.

Top

Collage of drawings produced by the Ashley Schiff Student Volunteer members - Fall 2020

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[Instagram @AshleySchiffPreserve](https://www.instagram.com/AshleySchiffPreserve)

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MISSION STATEMENT

The Purpose of the Organization is...

*To Manage the Ashley Schiff Preserve as a
“living laboratory” and an academic research
site, and to further ensure that it remains a
Forever Wild woodland.*

*The organization strives to promote its
educational and research value with
students, faculty, staff, and the greater
community*



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

ON ASHLEY SCHIFF DAY
2 0 2 0
DR. SHARON POCHRON

*"THE PANDEMIC MAKES
ME APPRECIATE
ASHLEY SCHIFF
PRESERVE ALL THAT
MUCH MORE"*

A year ago today, in celebration of 50 Years Forever Wild, Councilwoman Valerie Cartwright designated October 4 as Ashley Schiff Preserve Day in the Town of Brookhaven. Thank you, Valerie! In recognition of the importance of parks, preserves and open spaces, Kara Hahn and Kirstin Gillibrand helped us celebrate .

In the span of 12 short months, we've been beset by a pandemic and economic devastation. People have responded to the crises in part by spending more time outside. In normal times, spending time in nature is associated with a suite of beneficial health outcomes, including short-term changes in psychological, physiological, and cognitive responses in adults and improved learning in children. In COVID-19 times, being outside can bring additional benefits. For instance, walking in nature improves mental health; this study becomes more relevant in the face of the fact that mental health problems are increasingly recognized as a significant and concerning secondary effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I apologize for sounding like a nerd and referencing papers like a geek, but when you say something like, "Go outside! It's good for you!" it sounds too good to be true. But it is true. Being outside is good for you.

Whether or not my fellow humans are aware of the research, now, more than ever, people are using our trails. Last weekend, while on a walk with the Long Island Botanical Society with maybe 15 community members,

Stony Brook University's Environmental Club passed us, wearing masks and carrying trash bags. We all nodded a hello to each other. As President of the Friends of Ashley Schiff Park, the happiness accrued through the dappled sunlight and the dancing green light above us was compounded by the knowledge that so many people—the botanists, the students, the faculty, the community members—were all enjoying our woods on that glorious fall day. Not that long ago, almost no one knew that this reservoir of trees, shrubs and herbs existed.

Fall is the season of harvests and gratitude. And in a year filled with hardships, walking through our preserve with sunshine and friends, I found a lot to feel grateful for. I'm grateful to Professor Schiff for inspiring so many students, who went on to inspire President Toll to set aside our woods in Schiff's name. I'm grateful to all of the university presidents and planners who honored President Toll's promise to keep our forest Forever Wild. I'm grateful to all of the students, faculty and community members who lent their strength, leadership, and love of the outdoors to efforts to remind people that greenspace is important, even critical.

The pandemic makes me appreciate Ashley Schiff Preserve all that much more. Our students need to be outside; our faculty need to be outside, and our community members need to be outside. It's good for our cognitive abilities, our mental health—and our happiness. Thank you, Stony Brook University, for protecting our 26 acres. I hope you'll forgive the greediness of my request, but I sincerely hope you can help us with the legislation to permanently protect our Preserve. In hopes that you'll walk our trails this month,

Sharon T. Pochron,
President, Friends of Ashley Schiff Preserve

ASHLEY SCHIFF
DAY IS
OCTOBER 4TH
EVERY YEAR

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REMEMBERING MURIEL WEYL

MURIEL WEYL TRIBUTE, FOREVER FRIEND OF ASHLEY SCHIFF PRESERVE



Muriel Weyl, who passed away in July 2020, will always be remembered by the Friends of the Ashley Schiff Preserve as a steadfast advocate for maintaining the Preserve as *Forever Wild*. Muriel was an instrumental member of the original group responsible for setting aside the land for forest preservation in 1979 after the untimely passing of Professor Ashley Schiff. Muriel was a great friend of Dorothy Schiff Shannon, and together they worked to honor Ashley's memory through the Ashley Schiff Preserve as a living laboratory for students and a valued greenspace on Stony Brook University's campus.



In the fifty-one years following the establishment of the Ashley Schiff Preserve, Muriel brought grace and intellectual curiosity to every meeting and Friend-Raiser that she attended. She was especially interested in the work conducted by the students through the Friends Scholarship Program and asked pointed questions at the presentations of their research.

Muriel never ceased working with the Friends of the Ashley Schiff Preserve. It was a joy to have her presence at our meetings and gatherings. She will be missed as a vibrant member of the Friends!

Muriel's untiring dedication to keeping the Ashley Schiff Preserve forever wild is a legacy that the Friends will carry forward!



Photos provided by Laura Weyl

Fall Semester 2020 Walks in the Woods



The Friends of the Ashley Schiff Preserve hosted walks in the woods for students on Saturdays during the Fall 2020 semester. The students enjoyed guided nature walks through the Preserve highlighting the natural and historical features of the Preserve. There were white-tailed deer sightings, fungus and leaf identification exercises, as well as examinations of the American Chestnut sapling planted by the Friends. The students and all the guides followed face-covering protocols to ensure safety.

During one session the walkers participated in a Tai Chi exercise in the clearing at the center of the Preserve. It was a grounding experience of learning mindfulness movements to improve focus and reduce stress. The walks enabled students to witness the peacefulness and calmness of the Preserve which can be used as a place of respite during their busy academic lives.

The walks underscored the importance of greenspace on campus for the students to enjoy.

These walks provided a connection to nature and a much-needed uplifting outlet for the students during the pandemic. As a guide on the walks, I found myself inspired by the enthusiasm and positive energy of the students. One student said that they were so excited to sign up for this in-person, outdoor activity, as a welcome alternative to virtual meetings. The walks provided a joyful experience against the harsh realities of the pandemic.

The Friends look forward to leading more walks in the woods in all seasons...

Maureen Murphy

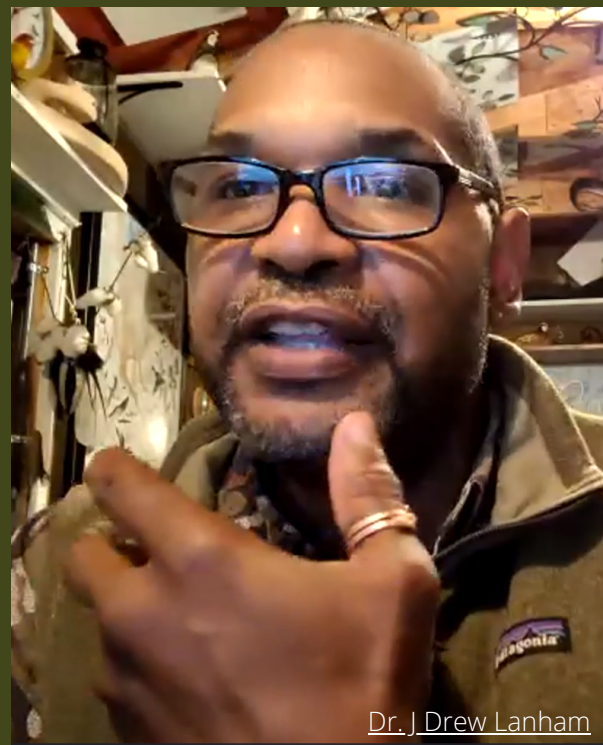
*Vice President, Friends of the Ashley Schiff Preserve
Walk in the Woods Enthusiast*

The 51st Anniversary Celebration

Our keynote speaker for the 51st Friends of Ashley Schiff Woods Celebration was Dr. J. Drew Lanham, Alumni Distinguished Professor of Wildlife Ecology, Master Teacher and Certified Wildlife Biologist, Forestry and Environmental Conservation Department, Clemson University.

Drew's talk, *"Coloring the Conservation Conversation: Environmentalism & Social Advocacy"*, looked back at the work that's been accomplished in preservation of habitats and species in the United States, without which such resources would've been lost to us. Intimately woven into this history too are issues of discrimination and justice, social ills which have left out or directly ostracized women, people of color, and the socioeconomically challenged. In order to ensure the success of long-term and meaningful conservation, we must include all the voices of our democracy and make sure that we have collectively offered our differing stories and values to the places and animals we conserve.

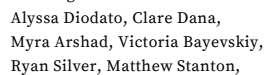
Drew reminded listeners to think of the 26 acres of Ashley Schiff Woods as a place for "peaceful, wild protest" while also honoring and being mindful of those who do not have access to such woods or greenspace. Dr. Drew J. Lanham offered his valuable insight in response to faculty and student questions, while reminding us to directly address social and environmental justice inequities where we encounter them. Dr. Lanham encourages us to continue on the path of strength, hope, and action that will lead to a healthier and more diverse world.



[Dr. J. Drew Lanham](#)



Alyssa Diodato, Clare Dana,
Myra Arshad, Victoria Bayevskiy,
Ryan Silver, Matthew Stanton,



DR. J DREW LANHAM

A native of Edgefield, South Carolina, J. Drew Lanham is the author of <*The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature*>, which received the Reed Award from the Southern Environmental Law Center and the Southern Book Prize, and was a finalist for the John Burroughs Medal. He is a birder, naturalist, and hunter-conservationist who has published essays and poetry in publications including Orion, Audubon, Flycatcher, and Wilderness, and in several anthologies, including The Colors of Nature, State of the Heart, Bartram's Living Legacy, and Carolina Writers at Home. An Alumni Distinguished Professor of Wildlife Ecology and Master Teacher at Clemson University, he and his family live in the Upstate of South Carolina, a soaring hawk's downhill glide from the southern Appalachian escarpment that the Cherokee once called the Blue Wall.

"I'd like you to think of the Ashley Schiff Preserve; a place of peaceful and wild protest.

Think of your every step as a march toward the better.

When you give your talent, time, and money, think of this 'give' as a communion for better days yet to come."

- J. Drew Lanham

*The full-recording of the 51st Anniversary Celebration event, including Dr. Lanham's talk, is available on AshleySchiff.org, under [51st Anniversary Celebration].



THE STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

For the first time in the Friends history, we officially launched our Student Volunteer Program! Curated and managed by Volunteer Program Manager and Alumni Representative Hogeum Evan Joo, the initiative was a great success. The Preserve provided enrichment through hands-on experiences to students of various academic disciplines who enjoyed our living lab from behind-the-scenes.

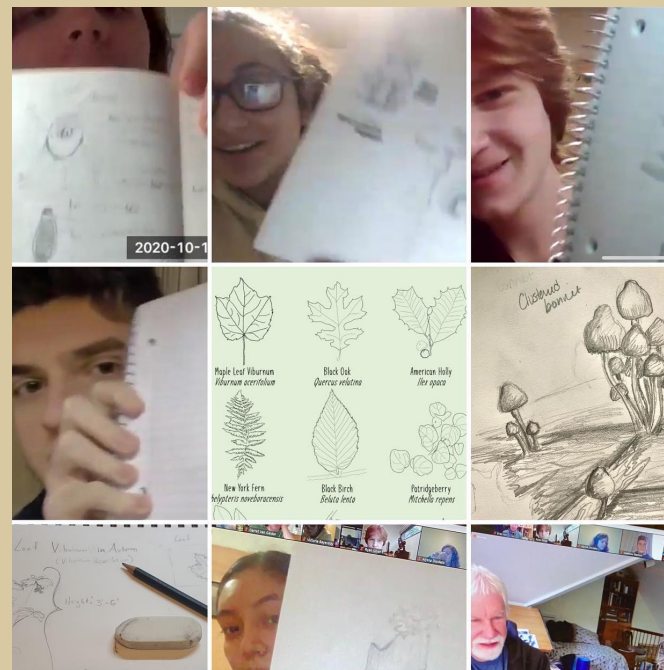
Roughly 30 people joined the volunteer team, working in 4 areas: Naturalists, Environmental Blog Writers, Illustrators and Mappers.

The Student Naturalists identified and located roughly 40 plant species, 9 fungal species, and other bird and mammal species in the Preserve using iNaturalist. We encourage our readers to view the full list of species and locations on the Preserve map here:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/ashley-schiff-preserve-wildlife-index>

Our Environmental Blog Writers shared contributions covering various topics inspired by the legacy of Dr. Schiff, including the campus environment and the Preserve. They also share with us some of their thoughts and personal experiences.

Mappers are preparing GIS projects to map the green areas on SBU campus that can be displayed with scientific illustration produced by the Illustrators.



FROM THE STUDENTS

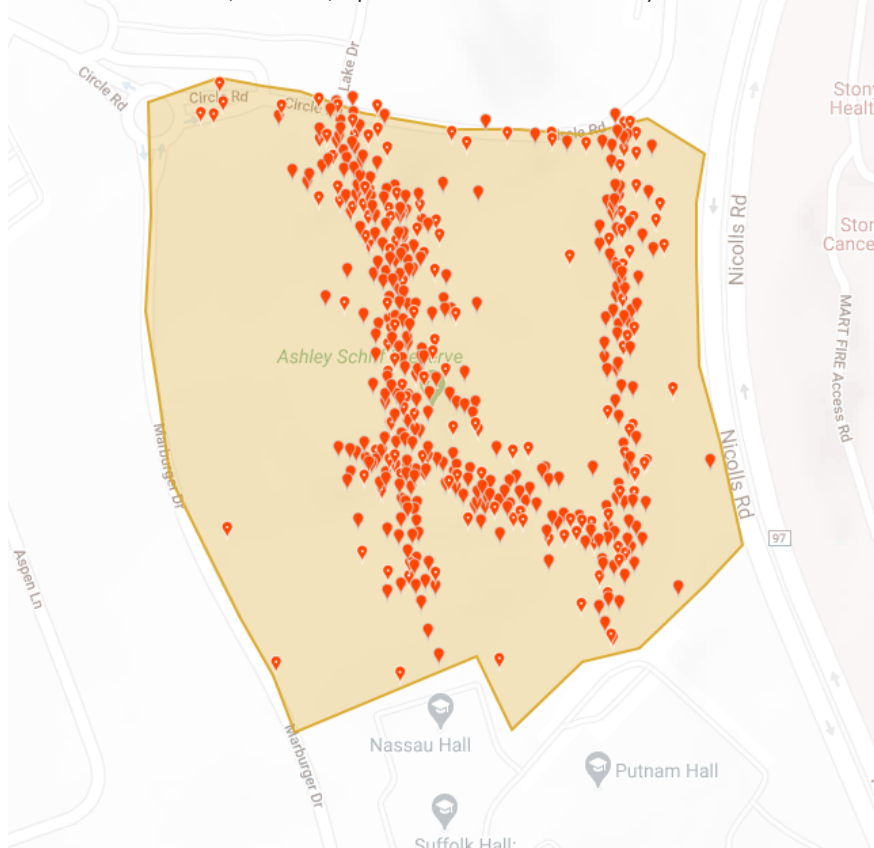
Becoming a volunteer member for the Ashley Schiff Preserve was a wonderful “positive thing” that came out of a semester which was challenging to find positives. Now living off campus for the time being, it is easy to feel separated from the activities that happen on campus with other students. Writing for the blog made it feel like I had a new connection with the campus and having the ability to connect with other students who share a similar respect for nature provided a sense of community that is easy to forget in this strange time. The idea of “forever wild” and the power that this small piece of “wildness” has in an area that is heavily developed has taught me to appreciate these small pieces of nature that are around and could be hidden in plain sight.

To me, the Ashley Schiff Preserve is a reminder. A reminder of the resilience of nature and the power that preservation has for the planet (if we do our duty to protect). It is also a reminder to stop and appreciate nature even in the midst of stressful events or tasks and remember the unique wonder that is held by the life occurring around you.

Clare Dana,
Sophomore, Marine Science / Environmental
Studies, Stony Brook University



*Locations of the wildlife species recorded on iNaturalist by the student volunteers





I had a great time being a volunteer for the preserve. I got to get outside a lot, and was able to help make contributions. It gave me the opportunity to learn more about botany and meet people who also care for the environment.

Being a volunteer gave me a community of people who I can share my interests in the natural world with. I learned a lot from the other volunteers, and also got the chance to share what I know.

The Ashley Schiff preserve is a place where I can explore my interests in botany and the environment. It has a diverse population of plants, which I like to identify and observe. It is a space where I can relax in nature.

I go to the preserve when I want a break from working, and I use the natural surroundings to de-stress. The preserve is a fun place to explore, as there is always something new to see.



**Ryan Silver,
Freshman, Biology Major,
Stony Brook University**

BLOG POSTS

Student volunteers share their thoughts and knowledge on the natural environment, the Preserve, Dr. Ashley Schiff, and environmental activism

POSTED ON OCT. 9TH

A FRESHMAN'S TAKE ON THE ASHLEY SCHIFF PRESERVE

Unfortunately for tree huggers such as myself, Long Island isn't known for its wilderness- it's known for being the home of modern suburbs. I've lived here all my life and constantly struggled to find areas untouched by development to disconnect in peace and silence to. The only place I'd go was to a small set of woods across from my house, where I'd walk every day. So when I first arrived at Stony Brook two months ago, my expectations for any sort of nature were nonexistent. But after an endless week of sitting in a baking, boring dorm I couldn't stay locked up any longer. I immediately decided to just begin walking.

I pulled up a satellite map on my phone, and started walking towards the first big forested area I saw. The sun was beginning to set and the bugs were beginning to swarm, but I kept marching forward in hopes of finding anything to do. I probably should've put a little more thought/planning into where I was going because I got lost at least four times and it took me a little bit over an hour to walk there. But eventually I got there, and when I did, I was amazed.

The sun was long gone, so all I could see were these colossal, dark treetops engulfing most of the night sky. I wandered right along into the path of the woods, not being able to see a thing and praying I wouldn't trip on anything.



I was so overwhelmed by the nostalgic comfort of the forest that I just didn't stop walking; then about ten minutes later I realized I was lost. Don't ask me how long it took to get out or even how I got out, but I found the whole experience to be completely worth it. I highly recommend everyone wander these woods (perhaps not at night though).

Knowing there's an oasis to reconnect to on campus is the best news I've gotten since being here. The stress of a normal school year in itself is high, but the pressure of this online-hybrid school year can be suffocating. Finding a place where you can disconnect and breathe in the fresh air is imperative now more than ever.

I decided to volunteer with the Ashley Schiff Preserve because I want students to know of its importance and benefits to not only the Earth but also our mental health. At my house the small set of woods helped me breathe easily, think clearly, and take time to appreciate the day. The Ashley Schiff Preserve fosters a similar outlet at Stony Brook. As a volunteer, the ability to help not only my peers but also the earth is invaluable.

I hope to see you all on the trails

Best,
Karrthik Pitchayan
Oct. 9th, 2020

Karthik Pitchayan is a freshman majoring in Environmental Studies and Ecosystems and Human Impact at Stony Brook University. He grew up forty minutes east of Stony Brook in a suburban pseudo-farm with chickens, peacocks, and at one point a goat and a sheep

POSTED ON OCT. 16TH

THE DEER AND THIER MESSAGES

I've always loved being out in nature for as long as I can remember, but something that I've come to learn about quite recently is my very own spirit animal: the deer. Now, this might sound crazy to some, but I believe that everyone has their own spirit animal, a special and unique kind of energy presented in the form of a terrestrial creature or even aquatic animal that can serve as a guiding force for an individual along their life's path and endeavors.

Ever since I stepped on campus, the deer would always present themselves in different ways, and I believe that each time that they did, they carried a special message to be delivered to me. Sometimes, I'll see a whole family of them, and other times, I'll see only one or two deer. Of course, if a deer could speak to me like a human would, it would be much easier to interpret these messages, but I've gotten better at recognizing and receiving them telepathically (this takes a ton of practice and dedication, but it is definitely possible and totally worth it!).

Born and raised in a Hindu family, I've always been fascinated by the associations of animals to the different Hindu Gods & Goddesses, as well as the importance of nature in general to Hindu beliefs and practices. When it comes to deer, I immediately think of the Goddess Saraswati, who is the Goddess of music, art, knowledge, wisdom, and education. Interestingly enough, I always manage to come across at least one deer during one of my nature walks, which I like to take to relieve any stress during the day or simply to relax. Plenty of them like to roam around the Preserve, and now that they've gotten used to seeing my face a lot, they don't really run away from me anymore. They've also gotten used to me taking my phone out and snapping pictures of them doing their thing. Here is a picture I took of one recently:

But more importantly, when I come across the deer and look at them, I am able to see and recognize the essence of Goddess Saraswati. I am reminded of why I am studying at this university, what my true purpose in life is, and that each day is filled with new opportunities and the chance to do something differently. When I start to lose track of this Higher Purpose or mission, the deer remind me of my why, and inspire me to get right back on track. I thank the deer for being of support to me on my path, and ultimately thank Goddess Saraswati for helping me to make my dreams manifest into my physical reality.

So the next time you are out on a walk, or find yourself surrounded by nature, try tuning in and listening to your intuition/gut feeling – has nature been trying to convey something to you? Are there any important signs/messages you need to receive that you may have been overlooking?

Lakshta Kundal is a junior majoring in Coastal Environmental Studies at Stony Brook University.

After graduating college, Lakshta plans on continuing her research studies in marine ecosystems and running her own business dedicated to increasing environmental/ecological consciousness and supporting humanitarian causes on the global level. Being deeply passionate about environmental sustainability & activism, Lakshta believes that a bright, sustainable future for all is possible. In her free time, Lakshta enjoys reading, drinking matcha, and watching funny Tik Tok videos.



POSTED ON OCT. 21ST

MY OUTLOOK ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) are the seventeen goals set for the world by the United Nations during 2015 (learn more about them [here!](#)). They represent guidelines for the steps that humanity must take collectively, by the target year 2030, to live sustainably.

To live sustainably is to live in a manner that allows humanity to stay on Earth indefinitely, without overconsumption or exploitation. It means guaranteeing basic human rights while protecting the environment and addressing climate change. To me, the SDGs represent a future of peace, sustainability. The goals are ones that we all should strive toward: a world with less violence, less exploitation, more equality and more wilderness. They represent a world where each of us has enough to eat and drink, without destroying ecosystems or the biodiversity our natural environment relies upon.

Each goal is vitally important in its own right. For example SDG 2, zero hunger, is just as pertinent as SDG 5, gender equality. There is also intersection among the goals. Ending poverty (SDG 1) is intertwined with equitable access to education for all (SDG 4) and all of the goals rely on those that protect our natural environment. Achieving one is making progress, but achieving all is crucial for sustainability.

Though these goals are mainly intended for big businesses and governments, small steps can make a huge difference. Take the Ashley Schiff Preserve, for example. Though the preserve is just under 27 acres, it harbors most of the biodiversity on Stony Brook University's campus and is protecting our wilderness, a cornerstone of sustainability.

Steps in our everyday life can make a big difference, too. Recycling, donating money and resources, limiting consumption and volunteering with organizations progressing toward sustainability are all ways to contribute to the global goals. Most importantly though, is being conscious of the goals and understanding the necessary global trajectory toward sustainability. If this mindset of sustainability is applied to anything, that is, to me, the most significant step in the right direction.

Matt Venezia is a biology major with a minor in writing and rhetoric. He is from Nassau County, New York and this is his second year at Stony Brook University. He began volunteering with the Ashley Schiff Preserve this year to share his passion for the natural environment and commitment to global sustainability.



POSTED ON OCT. 23RD

HOW COVID-19 HAS AFFECTED THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT, AND WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

In the midst of a global pandemic, it can be easy to forget about other ongoing global concerns as people rush to take care of themselves and their families and adjust to an unprecedented way of living. However, it is important to note that environmental issues are still present and changing due to the coronavirus.

All over the news, statistics showed that carbon and nitrogen dioxide emissions were decreasing during the worst points of the pandemic (March to April). This is due to many reasons such as the decrease in production and travel. It is easy to think that this will have a direct effect on mitigating the effects of climate change. It may not be that simple. As we have already seen, people have gone and will go back to travelling and buying what they want when they deem that it is safe again. This means that emissions will probably go back to where they were before the pandemic, and any progress that was made would be lost. This is if no action is taken soon to regulate emissions to keep them about where they are now.

COVID-19 has impacted the environment in negative ways as well. The production of waste has spiked in some areas, with people across the world using more single-use plastics and disposable masks. The plastics are on the rise as more people use plastic cutlery when eating takeout, or the increase in the use of plastic gloves for daily use. Another negative aspect is that elected officials have been focusing their efforts on sending support out to those who need it, so there has not been enough attention on environmental issues. For example, industries that harm the environment have been scrambling to produce as much as they can to bounce back from the worst points of the quarantine, which has led to an increase in both air and solid pollution.



What can we do about the effects of the coronavirus? On a personal and community level, we can strive to produce less waste. One popular way to create less waste is to invest in a few reusable masks. This ensures little to no waste as you can wash them when they get dirty instead of just throwing them out. I have invested in a few masks myself, and I have found them to be an essential as I am helping the environment while protecting others by limiting the spread of COVID-19. A small act of sustainability that goes a long way is to prepare a set of reusable utensils. Often, takeout food comes with plastic straws and silverware. Carrying a set of metal or bamboo utensils instead is a little yet important way to combat waste.

Lastly, I recommend limiting spending from large manufacturers that are contributing to pollution of the Earth. Each time we order an item from a large distributor like Amazon, we are contributing to manufacturing and transport pollution. Perhaps take a look at local stores who have been struggling during the quarantine. This is a great way to limit our footprint while supporting local economies. The COVID-19 pandemic has created an air of confusion about the environment, but with small actions on a local level, we can help to mitigate emissions and keep working towards a better future while we return to normal. Helpful Links: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/2020/06/why-covid-19-will-end-up-harming-the-environment/> <https://www.unicef.org/armenia/en/maintaining-eco-efficiency-home-during-covid-19-pandemic>

Molly Showers is a sophomore studying Biology at Stony Brook University. She is from the Adirondacks in Upstate New York. She has always had an interest in what she and others can do to help protect the environment. She is excited to be working with the Ashley Schiff Preserve to spread the message of conservation and respect for the ecosystems around us!

POSTED ON OCT. 30TH

THE IMPORTANCE OF AN AUTUMN WALK...

“The seasons and all their changes are in me”, a quote by Henry David Thoreau captures how humans have an innate connection with nature. Our survival once relied on understanding the change of the seasons, but now we commercialize it like focusing on Fall fashion trends, what landscape will make the best Instagram post, what artificially flavored drink is the most autumnal and forget to stop and see the beauty that is around us. We are told what Fall should look like and how to enjoy it rather than being encouraged to make something out of it ourselves by getting outside and experiencing it firsthand.

It is easy to become wrapped up in our daily tasks and assignments, missing what is occurring around us. We seek fulfillment in completion of work and often burn ourselves out in the process. Unfortunately, in the middle of a pandemic, the work feels more laborious and the ways we seek enjoyment may not be possible, including your own Fall traditions. As we adjust our normalcies and routines to this pandemic, maybe it is also time to reevaluate our connection to nature that may be missing or we have set aside that could benefit our own health and wellbeing. As cliché as it sounds, nature does have a way of healing. Studies have shown us that exposure to natural spaces has both psychological and physiological benefits to our health. The main factor here is stress reduction. One study measured cortisol levels (known as the “stress hormone”) of participants before and after visiting both natural and urban sites. There was a significant decrease in cortisol levels for participants exposed to natural sites but not -

urban sites. Although, this isn't just about “feeling a little less stressed” because cortisol is a crucial hormone for bodily functions and fluctuating levels of cortisol can lead to disease susceptibility, anxiety, depression, and ultimately compromised health. As we take proper precaution for our own and others' health concerning Covid-19, we should be adding a Fall walk to our list of precautionary measures for our personal wellbeing.

The psycho-evolutionary theory suggests that the effectiveness of natural environments at reducing levels of stress is because it offers specific attributes of inherent survival qualities that are simple necessities of life. So in a way, immersing ourselves in nature allows us to separate from created stressors and tune into a state of being which focuses simply on living. This theory also suggests that nature has “restorative influences,” providing a shift towards a positive emotional state and improved physiological activity levels which together assist in our attention and intake. So, once we return to our stressful tasks, the time spent in a natural space could provide a better mindset to effectively complete what must be done.

Clearly, natural spaces are nothing but beneficial for both the environment and human health. Preserving areas of wilderness protects biodiversity, fights the effects of climate change, conserves species and much more. Even smaller areas like the Ashley Schiff Preserve can protect an entire ecosystem while surrounded by development. These conserved areas, when visited respectfully, provide a window into the natural world and an opportunity to appreciate nature in all of its forms and ways of transforming while giving us an opportunity to find peace of mind.

There are only a few weeks left until the leaves will blanket the ground and the weather will become a little more suited for a day inside rather than out. And while there is nothing wrong with having a sweet Fall drink or buying a ceramic pumpkin to “artificially” celebrate this season of change, we can't push aside the natural beauty of Autumn that may help us feel a little more at ease in a stress-

ridden world. A study at the University of Exeter found that individuals who spent two hours a week in natural spaces were substantially more likely to report improved health and wellbeing than those who did not.

Only two hours a week! I encourage you to spend that time in the last weeks of Fall relishing in the ways the environment is transforming and hopefully finding a break in end of semester stress, allowing the “restorative influences” of nature to make a little bit of a change in yourself.

Clare Dana is a sophomore marine science and environmental studies double major from Long Island. She hopes to bring awareness of environmental issues and conservation in her studies and future career and volunteered with the Ashley Schiff Preserve in hopes to do just that for the campus community while meeting other students who share the same passion.



POSTED ON NOV. 20TH

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PUBLIC LANDS

Recently, the topic of public lands seems inescapable. But what are public lands exactly? Reductively speaking, public lands are lands used by the public but are owned and managed by the government. Examples are national parks, national forests, state parks, conservation areas, and various other designations. In New York, there are a multitude of federal public lands. The Appalachian Trail, Ellis Island, Erie Canalway, Fire Island, Niagara Falls, and the Statue of Liberty are just a few of the numerous public lands in New York. The federal government owns a massive amount of land, 640 million acres.

This land, usually of environmental or historical importance, great beauty, or economic value, is extremely valuable to the United States and its citizens. To fully understand public lands, it's important to know how these lands were acquired and managed by the United States government.

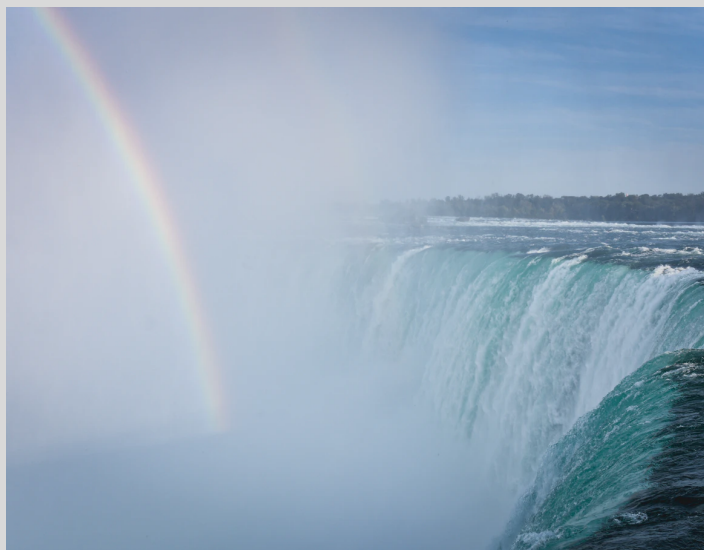
In the period referred to as “Westward Expansion” the United States acquired a lot of land through various means from France, Mexico, and Native American tribes. The Louisiana Purchase is possibly the most famous accrual of land during this period. To encourage settlement in the western areas of the U.S., the government enacted the Homestead Act of 1862, which granted settlers with this newly acquired land if they promised to settle and manage the land. It is important to note that this period of American history is also marked by the violent removal and forceful acquisition of land from the Native Americans by our government. In 1877, the government owned 1.8 billion acres of land. This land is still owned by the government and makes up all our current public lands.

By the 20th century, environmentalists grew concerned over the degradation of land due to overgrazing, barbed wire fencing which divided open ranges, dam building, and large-scale timbering and industrial mining. This concern from advocates such as Margaret Murie, John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, Marjory Douglas, Teddy Roosevelt resulted in the passing of many influential acts such as the creation of the National Forest System, Antiquities Act of 1906 (allowed for the creation of National Monuments), and the beginning of the National Park System.

The 1960-70s are famous for being decades of environmental activism. As a result, many laws were passed to ensure the protection of our lands. Some of the most prominent are The Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, The Clean Air Act of 1963, and the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Today these lands are managed by four agencies. Three of these agencies are in the U.S. Department of Interior: the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Fish and Wildlife Services.

The other managerial authority is in the U.S. Department of Agriculture: the U.S. Forest Service. Congress has the ultimate authority to govern federal public lands, bestowed to them by the Article V, Section 3, Clause 2 of the Property Clause of the Constitution. As a result, you may feel removed from this process, but you are at the center. Your vote determines who sits in Congress. If you are concerned about the mismanagement of your beloved public lands, vote for people that care about stopping the degradation of the environment and protecting our public lands. Unfortunately, the Ashley Schiff preserve has not been granted legal protection. This means our lovely preserve is at danger of one day not being the beautiful sanctuary it is today. If you are interested in learning more or getting involved with the preserve, you're in the right place! Check out these links to get involved, contact us, and visit the preserve!

I, Lara Guenzler, am a junior majoring in English and minoring in Political Science. Growing up in Montana, hiking in the gorgeous Glacier National Park, and visiting one of the largest protected wilderness, the Bob Marshal Wilderness gave me a special love for public lands and the outdoors. I believe it is essential to protect these lands because of their environmental importance, but also because of the wonderful recreation they provide. These lands are ripe with physical resources making them a target for commercial ventures, which makes their protection all the more important.



POSTED ON NOV. 27TH

HOW THE PANDEMIC SHIFTED MY PERSPECTIVE ON ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM

The year 2020 has been an unpleasant learning experience for us all. The onset of a lethal pandemic made the world witness situations that are only dystopian-fiction material. The fact that we are living through these troubled times is still difficult to comprehend. A pandemic is one of those things that you read about in history books but never think would actually happen in your lifetime; but it did happen, and very unexpectedly so.

Though the pandemic struck us unexpectedly, some intellectuals had dropped occasional hints about its possibility and how grossly underprepared the world's healthcare system was, should such a situation present itself. Such articles and documentaries only surfaced and were popularized after the pandemic hit us, therefore completely defeating the purpose of raising awareness before it was too late.

And this begged the question: If a pandemic, with so little awareness about its possibility, can become our reality and change the course of our lives, how far away are we from the much spoken about environmental doom? The pandemic is indeed a wake-up call to realize that, without immediate measures, the irreversible effects of climate change disaster could not be far away.

Before the pandemic, “environmental activism” was a term that I surely understood the importance of, but never felt the need to actively participate in. I thought that an environmental doomsday is still a distant possibility and that there were enough people to take care of it. But the pandemic made me aware that situations can flip and go out of control before you realize. And hence “environmental protection” and “climate change” no longer became terms that I casually read in an interesting article in a

glossy magazine. These terms invoked a sense of alarm and urgency to take action.

Environmental activism and awareness are our best bets to let the world know that, much like the pandemic, climate change can be the next big catastrophe that the world will have to face collectively. We do not want to learn the hard way that scientists and environmentalists warning people about the detrimental effects of climate change were right all along. And so, I have decided to contribute in any little way I can towards the protection and replenishment of the environment, and I urge you do the same before it is too late.

Aakanksha Kirtane is a junior at Stony Brook University, majoring in Mechanical Engineering and Applied Math and minoring in Women and Gender Studies. She is an international student from India who has recently started volunteering with the Ashley Schiff Preserve to raise awareness about sustainability and environmental activism and learn new things along the way.



POSTED ON DEC. 24TH

HOW TO MANAGE A SUSTAINABLE HOLIDAY SEASON

The end-of-the year holiday season can be a time of plenty. We often give gifts, eat a lot of good food, and partake in a myriad of family holiday traditions. Unfortunately, many customary practices specific to the holiday season are not particularly sustainable, though there are eco-friendly options that you may want to consider.

When picking out gifts for others, it is common to guess what someone would like, order the gift online, wrap it in shiny wrapping paper, and hope for the best. While this is a practice that can be hazardous to the environment, there are many alternatives that support the local economy and the environment. A good suggestion is to shop local whenever it is possible. Giving a gift card or item from a local shop or restaurant is a great way to cut down on harmful shipping and manufacturing impacts of the environment, while supporting smaller businesses. This is very important, especially as these businesses face harder struggles because of the COVID-19 pandemic. If you do not like the local business idea, I recommend shopping for gently used items. As a society, we typically equate secondhand products as inadequate for gifts, therefore we tend to create unnecessary products and waste. Checking out secondhand stores and websites could lead you to finding a cool trinket that is just right for a gift which did not require any new manufacturing. Lastly, changing what you choose to wrap your present in could present new opportunities to be more sustainable. Reusing gift bags, boxes, or even paper seems like the most obvious way to be a more sustainable gift wrapper. There are some more creative ways to present your gifts, however. You could use colorful newspaper, a reusable shopping bag, or even a basket or container that the gift recipient may be able to repurpose. It can be difficult to choose the right present for someone that you care about, but there are viable sustainable options that are available.

There are also ways to tweak your traditions or create new ones to be more environmentally friendly. First, in terms of the typical holiday feasts, you could try giving your family a slightly smaller plate, so the portion sizes are smaller. Therefore, food waste is limited. For any waste that cannot be used as leftovers, create compost for plants in the spring. Holiday decorations can be reused year after year, and you could donate decorations that you no longer want to different shelters or other organizations.

I think that now is the time to start some new traditions, like donating money or items to a worthwhile charity.

When the pandemic is over and it is safer to be around others, you could make volunteering at a local food or animal shelter a tradition. Ultimately, this benefits your community and gives to others, as opposed to purchasing products that will eventually end up in a landfill.

Most of these tips can be incorporated at any time of the year, but the holiday season has a lot of potential to become sustainably positive. For more information on how to be eco-friendly during the holidays, check out <https://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8829.html>.

Molly Showers is a sophomore studying Biology at Stony Brook University. She is from the Adirondacks in Upstate New York. She has always had an interest in what she and others can do to help protect the environment. She is excited to be working with the Ashley Schiff Preserve to spread the message of conservation and respect for the ecosystems around us!



All blog posts are available on the official website of the Friends of the Ashley Schiff Preserve at AshleySchiff.org.

Feel free to share online, and please respect the work of the authors. If you would like to participate in Environmental Blog writing, please reach out to Friends.ASPP@gmail.com

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