

HCCC Summer Fellowship Write Up

This summer I had the opportunity to work with BiodiversityWorks, a conservation organization on Martha's Vineyard, thanks to Harvard Club of Cape Cod summer fellowship program. The goal of my work this summer was to contribute to a scientific resource for the community while familiarizing myself with the island's biodiversity.

My time was split three ways this summer: learning about Martha's Vineyard's wildlife, learning about its plants, and working on a community resource on the island's natural areas. On Wednesdays, I spent the morning with BiodiversityWorks staff and interns learning about the field of wildlife biology. These activities ranged from small mammal trapping to shorebird enclosure building to insect collecting and ID'ing, all focused on introducing the group's interns to the many facets of the field. On Thursdays, I spent the day at Polly Hill Arboretum, working with the grounds crew and the community outreach coordinator on plantings and upkeep on the property and around the island. I also went out in the field with local botanists Margaret Curtin and Greg Palermo a few times, which helped introduce me to the island's native plants.

I spent the rest of my time on my main project: updating Island Life, a book with species lists of most of the major groups present on the island (including flora and fauna). I added in new species that were missing from the first edition or had been found through research since its publication. My references ranged from news articles in the local newspaper to intensive scientific papers. I also updated the taxonomic organization of some groups. The moths in particular required serious reshuffling based on genomic research that was published after the first edition. I added in a few animal groups as well, including echinoderms, lower invertebrates, bees, and orthoptera. Most importantly, however, I converted what was previously a nearly 300-page book into an online resource. I moved the lists from word files into excel spreadsheets, which can now be sorted and changed easily. In addition to its higher accessibility and convenience, a benefit of the online resource will be the ability to search the comprehensive lists for species' scientific names or common names, as well as search by species status or location. We are also able to link out to other sources and publications where the book could only list website sources. And, most importantly, Island Life will be much easier to update in the future.

I really enjoyed getting to know the wildlife and flora surrounding me through my time in the field and at the arboretum, and was lucky to be able to put that exposure to use contributing to a resource for the Martha's Vineyard naturalist community. I was surprised to learn how many contributors a resource like this requires. This gave me the chance to interact with naturalists across the island as I updated various chapters of Island Life, which increased both my interaction with Martha's Vineyard residents and the book's roots in the community. Luanne, my sponsor, was an incredible mentor for me throughout the fellowship. From the beginning, she worked with me to tailor my fellowship to fit my interests while contributing to a meaningful community-based project. Throughout the summer she was supportive of my work, checked in often on my progress on Island Life, and exposed me to many facets of wildlife monitoring and research. I can't thank her and HCCC enough for my amazing summer!