

FALL 2019 / WINTER 2020



ATLANTIC MARINE CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Promoting Marine Conservation Through Action



PROTECT OUR WATERWAYS: BREAK THE PLASTIC HABIT

Plastic pollution is a worldwide problem, but it's a problem we can solve. Plastic products such as bags, straws, bottles, utensils, containers, and cups are used for a few minutes, and then discarded, remaining in our environment for hundreds of years. Plastic pollution in our waters can harm wildlife such as whales, dolphins, turtles, seals, shore birds, and more.

YOU can help fight plastic pollution! Our actions matter, so let's all pitch in! Instead of single-use plastics, choose re-usable bags and refillable water bottles, and never leave garbage on the beach. We can all care for wildlife by being good stewards of our earth.



Together we can make a difference.





Balloon piece picked up during a beach cleanup

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TEAM

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

Kimberly Durham, Necropsy Program Coordinator

Allison DePerte, Research Associate + Field Biologist

Jennifer Lopez, Field Biologist + Volunteer Coordinator

Erich Dietterle, Field Biologist + Education Coordinator

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On the cover: Going strawless to combat plastic pollution - Story on Page 4

FROM OUR CHIEF SCIENTIST



AMSEAS Founder and Chief Scientist Robert A. DiGiovanni, Jr. on a seal cruise in Shinnecock Bay

Dear Friends:

A small team of marine biologists at Atlantic Marine Conservation Society "AMSEAS" has been fortunate to have the support of a growing volunteer base to carry out our mission of promoting marine conservation through action. Since our last newsletter, AMSEAS has responded to more than 200 animals, including 14 large whales, 30 other cetaceans, 132 seals, and 50 sea turtles from Montauk and Orient Point to Manhattan. During aerial surveys, we have documented grey seals hauling out on eastern Long Island during the summer. We have also satellite tagged and tracked grey seal pups from Massachusetts and Delaware to Canada, and everywhere in between, and conducted more than 45 beach monitorings and cleanups. None of this would be possible without your support.

We continue to build capacity for various types of stranding events. We outfitted our mobile response unit and have added a new mobile emergency response hospital. We aim to be the most mobile emergency resource in the stranding network. We can go onsite during a stranding event and increase investigations on both live and deceased animals, even during environmental catastrophes such as oil spills, or more frequent occurrences such as Unusual Mortality Events, cold stun sea turtle strandings, large whale mortality investigations, and more.

Team partners and volunteer training is essential to building capacity across the region. We need your support by helping us locate the best sites for mass responses, creating a database of available heavy machinery, identifying response routes and travel restrictions, and of course, volunteers willing to support our efforts.

As we progress, we look forward to seeing you at beach cleanups, seal cruises, and outreach events. We have made it this far with your support and together, we can achieve our conservation goals by continuing to protect the marine environment and its inhabitants.

Thank you for your continued support,

Robert A. DiGiovanni, Jr.

PAGE TWO | INTRO

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT MEET THE KOSINSKI FAMILY

What better way to spend the weekend than to have the whole family join in and volunteer with Atlantic Marine Conservation Society? Debbie and Mark Kosinski and their two children, Bethany and Alexis, joined AMSEAS' volunteer team in July of 2019 as a result of a combined love for the ocean and desire to learn about marine life. Debbie and Mark come from medical backgrounds. Debbie is a small animal veterinarian and Mark works as a podiatrist. Bethany and Alexis have also shown a deep compassion for the ocean and all of its critters, with an expressed interest in pursuing careers in marine veterinary medicine in the future.

The Kosinskis have not only attended several of our volunteer trainings, but have also helped out at several AMSEAS necropsies, including examinations of loggerhead and leatherback sea turtles and a recent large whale necropsy.

Why volunteer with AMSEAS?

“ We have found Atlantic Marine Conservation Society, as well as doing such important work for marine mammal conservation research, to be so warm and welcoming to us, especially our girls! We love volunteering with AMSEAS!

-Volunteer Debbie Kosinski



We are very excited to have this family on our team and want to extend a special thank you to the Kosinski family for all of their help and passion for promoting marine conservation through action!

Join us at amseas.org/volunteers



Bethany, Mark, Alexis, and Debbie Kosinski



The Kosinskis assist in a loggerhead sea turtle stranding response

**GOING
STRAWLESS**
WORKING
TOGETHER
TOWARD
PLASTIC-FREE SEAS

AMSEAS has partnered with Citizens Campaign for the Environment and the Long Island Sound Futures Fund for a project called “Going Strawless for Sea Turtles: Educating to Protect Marine Life and Eliminate Single-use Plastics.” This wonderful project has enabled AMSEAS to connect with communities throughout the Long Island Sound region. We have conducted seven species-focused presentations about marine animals in our waters and the harmful effects of marine debris on the animals and the environment.

We also organized three beach cleanups on Long Island Sound, collecting 104 pounds of floatable debris with the help of about 113 volunteers. A very successful beach cleanup took place on June 2, 2019 at Sunken Meadow State Park. On that date we took part in the unveiling of the sea turtle sculpture seen on the cover.



AMSEAS Chief Scientist discusses partnership to protect our waterways by breaking the plastic habit



Before the sea turtle sculpture unveiling, 60 community members joined us to remove marine debris from the beach. We collected 43 pounds of small debris, including plastic beverage bottles. This is a significant amount of debris, considering the park personnel regularly cleans this section of the park's beach.

This is just the start. Join us as we continue patrolling Long Island Sound beaches in search of cold stunned sea turtles and continue efforts to remove harmful debris from the marine environment.

Join us at amseas.org/events



Saying "no" to single-use plastics

COMMUNITY ACTION

So far this year, AMSEAS conducted more than 45 beach monitoring cleanups picking up more than 1,264 pounds of trash, attended 145 community outreach events, presented lectures and other events at 63 different locations, led 21 teaching necropsies, led five seal cruises and three public seal walks, and held four volunteer recruitment trainings. Events spanned from Montauk and Orient Point to Manhattan. That's more than 156 events in total!

Our communities were very active this past winter and spring. We were fortunate to work with several Girl Scout Troops to present information about marine life and clean their local beaches. We interacted with a Daisy troop in Babylon, discussing the seals, sea turtles, dolphins and whales that can be observed in New York waters. Two Girl Scout troops raised money through cookie sales to donate beach cleanup and stranding response supplies to AMSEAS.

Last winter, AMSEAS was honored to be a part of Charlotte Heller's bat mitzvah celebration. Charlotte has a great love for the oceans, and wanted to make a big difference. Through the money that she was gifted during her celebration, she donated beach cleanup kits to AMSEAS with pencils, clipboards and data sheets, work gloves for adults and children, grabbers, and reusable bags made from recycled plastic bottles. Those kits were instrumental in our beach cleanup efforts this past summer. In April, Charlotte and 21 of her friends and family joined AMSEAS at Gateway National Park at Fort Tilden for a beach cleanup. The group collected over 100 pounds of marine debris! Charlotte is an inspiration to us all, and is commended for her dedication to the marine environment.

GET involved
amseas.org



Volunteers help keep our beaches clean



Charlotte Heller with family and friends at a beach cleanup at Gate Way National Park at Fort Tilden



Earth Day beach cleanup

RESEARCH UPDATE

In January, AMSEAS worked with National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric (NOAA) Fisheries Northeast Fisheries Science Center, Northwest Atlantic Seal Research Consortium, Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University, and Marine Mammals of Maine to monitor grey seals in the northwest Atlantic. This project included conducting health assessment studies on Muskeget Island off Nantucket and Monomoy in Cape Cod, Massachusetts. We also attached 20 satellite tags provided by National Marine Sanctuary Foundation on seals to understand their movements.

Research trips like this require our team to brave the elements and travel in small boats throughout survey sites, often in harsh environmental conditions. Our team was out on a number of occasions in below freezing conditions. When the water in your bottle freezes, you know it's too cold!

Despite the elements, this project allowed us to look at the health status of weaned grey seal pups. Biological samples such as blood for serum chemistry and swabs for disease surveillance were collected, along with fatty acid samples to look at diet. Length, weight, and sex of the animals was recorded, as well as an assessment of body condition.



AMSEAS Chief Scientist prepares satellite tags a grey seal on Seal Island, Maine

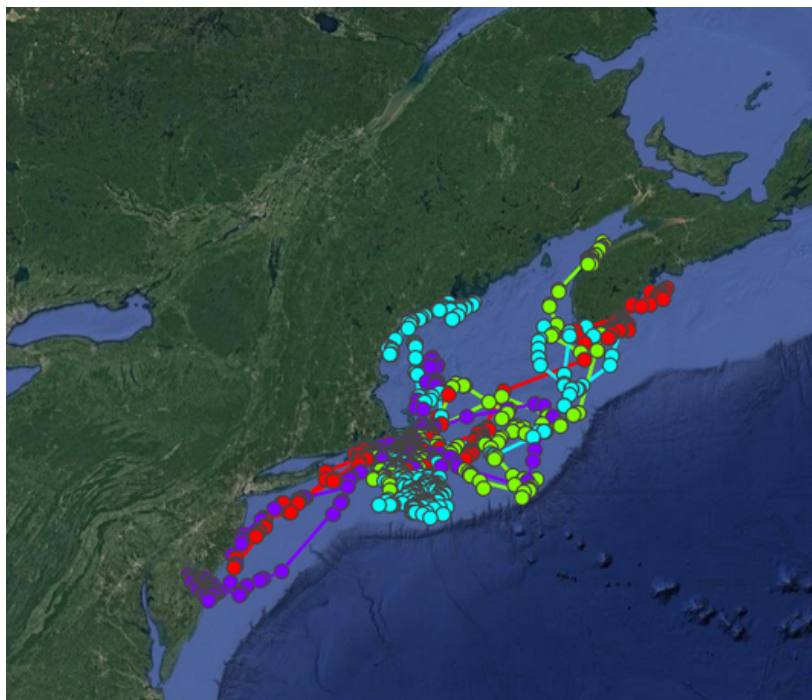


Grey seal in Great Point, Nantucket

We tracked the satellite tagged animals from January through July. Animal #1476 traveled from Muskeget Island to Delaware and back, then to Great Point, Nantucket and Monomoy Island off Cape Cod. #1464 traveled from Muskeget Island to Monomoy Island, to No Man's Island, southwest of Martha's Vineyard, to East Hampton, New York and down to southern New Jersey. As of September 1, this animal was in Halifax, Canada. #14074 traveled from Great Point to Nova Scotia, while #1407 went from Monomoy Island to Nova Scotia.

Learn more about this project at:
amseas.org/northwest-atlantic-seal-survey

Continuing this project, we will head to Virginia this winter to conduct health assessments on harbor seals.



Satellite tracking map of seals #1476, #1464, #14074, #1407

STRANDING UPDATE



Harp seal pup

A. HARP SEALS

Harp seals, which are normally an arctic species, are becoming more prevalent on our beaches for the first time in a decade. This year, 62 harp seals stranded on New York shores, seven times greater than the previous year. These animals represent 48% of the seal mortality investigations conducted by AMSEAS in 2019. These examinations found undernourishment, dehydration, advance renal impairment, and elevated parasitic loads to be common causes of death. 27% of harp seals examined ingested sandy debris, shells, and rocks. This is a condition known as pica and can be a life threatening response to stress. AMSEAS' stranding investigations further our understanding of the threats, both natural and human-induced, marine animals face.

When people think of harp seals, they often envision the fluffy white seal pups resting on ice, peering at the camera with big, black eyes. That picture represents just 25 days in the animal's life. The origin of the common name for the harp seal is actually derived from the black wish-bone shaped marking found on the backs of adult animals. Northwest Atlantic harp seals give birth off the east coast of Canada from late February through mid-March. After shedding their white fur, these animals have a black spotted grey pelt. In New York, it is these young harp seals that are encountered on our shores. Other common seal species found on Long Island are grey and harbor seals.

An influx of these various species on our shores increase the potential for humans to interact, either positively or negatively, with these animals. According to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries, the public should always maintain a distance of 150 feet from marine animals for the safety of both animals and humans.



Join AMSEAS biologists this winter for seal watching cruises around Shinnecock Bay! We will learn about the diversity of seal species and how to protect them while observing them in their natural environment.

Learn more at amseas.org/seal-cruises.



AMSEAS biologist documents a humpback whale that stranded in Southampton in 2019

B. LARGE WHALES

On July 15, AMSEAS biologists responded to a report of a humpback whale entangled in a fishing net. Our senior biologists arrived on-scene with the support of the US Coast Guard Station Shinnecock to assess the animal. We also coordinated resources with NOAA Fisheries and the Center For Coastal Studies Disentanglement Team. Photographs were taken to possibly identify the animal. We observed the animal's behavior and the extent of the entanglement. This information was shared with experts in Massachusetts to evaluate the potential for a successful disentanglement response. Whale disentanglement is extremely dangerous work and requires intense training. Only trained professionals should ever approach an entangled whale.

During the time AMSEAS biologists were observing the whale, it managed to free itself from the net and swim away. AMSEAS appreciated working with our partners to make this response happen, including the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, Town of Southampton Bay Constable and police force, the US Coast Guard, NOAA Fisheries and the Center for Coastal Studies.

So far this year, we have responded to 14 large whales on the beach and at sea.

"Watch out for turtles!"

This doesn't apply to just those crossing the road! A common cause of death for sea turtles in our waters is vessel strike. AMSEAS has responded to 21 loggerhead, four Kemp's ridley and four leatherback sea turtles so far this year. More than 70% of sea turtles had signs of human interaction, with vessel strike being the predominant cause of death. We all need to share our waters with these amazing animals and report strandings immediately.

NYS Stranding Hotline:
631.369.9829



Loggerhead sea turtle response



Introducing...

ERICH DIETTERLE, AMSEAS
FIELD BIOLOGIST AND
EDUCATION COORDINATOR

JENNIFER LOPEZ, AMSEAS
FIELD BIOLOGIST AND
VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

*Welcome to
the team!*

Jennifer Lopez is a recent graduate of Stony Brook University, where she received a Master's degree in Marine Conservation and Policy. From a young age, Jennifer's passion for the marine environment blossomed. Growing up, she frequented the ocean with her family and began pursuing ecotourism and conservation advocacy during her free time. Before joining Atlantic Marine Conservation Society, she participated in a variety of field research projects, including tagging and collecting samples from Caribbean Reef Sharks for stable isotope analysis in Eleuthera, tagging and tracking black-backed gulls in New York, and completing health assessments of sea turtles in the Bahamas. She most recently completed research focused on the age structure and residency of humpback whales in the New York Bight using drone-based imagery. Jennifer is very excited to be surrounded by a team of hardworking scientists committed to promoting conservation of the marine environment. As she says, "I am so honored to work with an organization that embodies the values that I align with in my aspiration to become a marine mammal conservationist. I am constantly inspired by the dedicated individuals on the AMSEAS team and the members of the public that help us work to make a difference."

Erich Dietterle joined Atlantic Marine Conservation Society in early August. He joined the team from the Seacoast Science Center in New Hampshire where he volunteered on the Marine Mammal Rescue Team to gain experience handling live and deceased seals. His cetacean experience started in 2012 with Blue Ocean Society for Marine Conservation doing observational research off the coast of New Hampshire. Erich has also worked on North Atlantic right whale research with the Center for Coastal Studies. He wrote his master's thesis on cetaceans around the archipelago of Madeira in Portugal through James Madison University, the University of Malta, and Centro Interdisciplinar de Investigação Marinha e Ambiental da Madeira (CIIMAR-Madeira). By joining AMSEAS, Erich has increased his experience with stranding and response, as well as necropsies of sea turtles and marine mammals. Erich shares, "It has been a great pleasure working with a highly dedicated team of professionals on such an important goal as promoting marine conservation in a highly diverse marine environment. The impact AMSEAS has on the local communities is incredible and it is easy to see it in everyone we talk with through our work, especially the younger generation."

WHAT'S COMING UP



Educational sea turtle tracking map

Cold Stun Sea Turtle Season

Cold stunned sea turtle season is here! Join AMSEAS for walks from October through December to help save the sea turtles that may wash up on our shores. Help support the efforts of the New York State Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Stranding Program by joining us in monitoring our beaches. [Find dates at amseas.org/events](https://amseas.org/events).

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](https://amseas.org/events).

Seal Cruises Winter 2020

Our popular seal cruises are coming back in winter 2020! [Find dates and details at amseas.org/events](https://amseas.org/events).

Spring 2020 Internships

AMSEAS is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting conservation of our marine environment through action. Some of our action items include data research, surveys and health assessments, involvement in the Specially Trained Animal Response Team, 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](https://amseas.org).



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Promoting Marine Conservation Through Action

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**"IF YOU WANT
TO GO FAST,
GO ALONE. IF
YOU WANT TO
GO FAR, GO
TOGETHER."**

AFRICAN PROVERB

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

Center for Coastal Studies | Citizens Campaign For the Environment | International Fund for Animal Welfare | Long Island Sound Futures Fund | Marine Mammals of Maine | Mystic Aquarium | 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 | Pacific Marine Mammal Center | US Coast Guard ...and all of the towns and municipalities that have supported our response efforts!