

Soundside Learning

This Week On Core Sound

The Maritime Forest, A Walk Back In Time

After-School Program Resumes

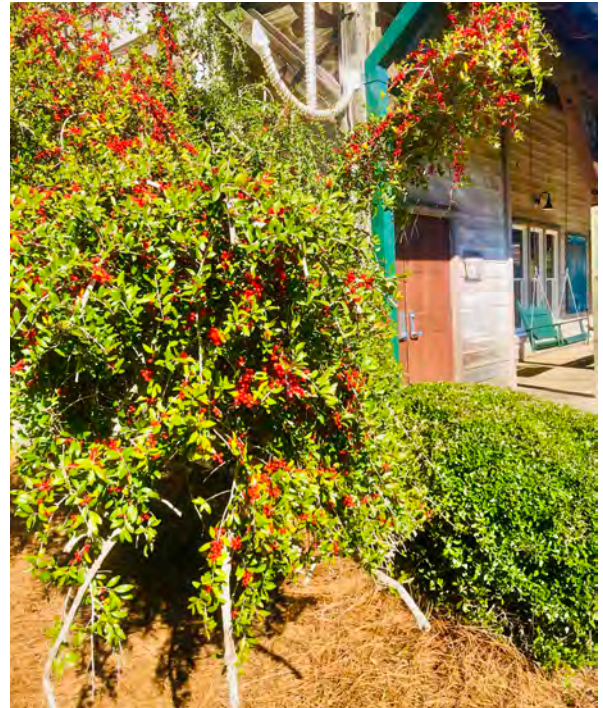
Students from our Down East area schools returned to the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum & Heritage Center on Thursday, January 13th as our after-school program resumed for the remainder of the 2021-2022 school year.

On what was a beautiful, almost completely windless day our students became *naturalists* as we took to the wilderness of the Willow Pond & Soundside Loop to learn about the wonders of the Maritime Forest and an island that *was*.

At one time, especially prior to the exodus from the Shackleford Banks community of Diamond City, almost all of Harkers Island was covered in such a wilderness. As Joel G. Hancock writes in *Strengthened By The Storm*, the island was so densely covered in “tangled thickets of oak, pine, cedar, & yaupon...” that movement about the island was almost exclusively done via the shoreline on the southern, or front side, of the island. Taking a walk along the Museum’s Willow Pond trail is, therefore, a trip back in time where one can imagine what Harkers Island was truly like around the turn of the 20th century. The Island’s early settlers made the utmost use of the resources around them, leaving nothing to waste. This applied particularly to the Yaupon Holly bushes that grew and continue to grow in great supply in the sandy soils of Harkers Island and surrounding communities of Down East.

Known by the latin name *Ilex vomitoria*, the Yaupon Holly is one of only two plants native to North America that are known to contain caffeine. It is not definitively known where this unfortunate, and mostly misleading name, originated. There is a strong possibility that the name was affixed by European settlers upon observing Native Americans consume exceptionally large amounts of a caffeinated, syrupy-like drink concocted from Yaupon leaves, which would cause them to vomit as part of a religious ceremony where the participants would intentionally purge themselves.

In the 1500s, Spanish settlers in Florida were introduced by natives to something they called “bebida negra” or “black drink”. What they were drinking was actually a tea made from the leaves of the Yaupon Holly. This tradition was passed down to generations of European settlers and to this day, Yaupon Tea holds its own place in Harkers Island lore and remains synonymous with the days before roads and bridges connected the island to the mainland world and islanders made due with what the land and water provided them. **(Story Continues on page 2)**



A Yaupon Holly flourishes near the entrance of the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum & Heritage Center, Harkers Island, NC

Photo: CSWM&HC Collection

Our Down East students learned just how their ancestors before them would have recognized, in the dense thicket of the maritime forest, the beautiful Yaupon Holly with its signature red berries set against slightly serrated, small dark green leaves. These young Core Sounders learned how to select the best leaves for their Yaupon tea, with the smaller and darker leaves having higher caffeine content. Next week, these students will learn to wash, dry, and even brew their very own Yaupon tea, much like those islanders of long ago when the mail still came by boat, when net spreads still dotted the shoreline, when Harkers Island...was Harkers Island.

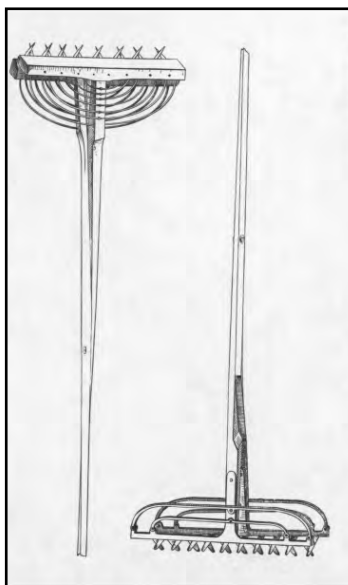
Men of Steel, Shafts of Wood

The Lost Art of Tong-Shaft Making

The majority of the wild-caught oyster harvest in North Carolina waters is still done by the same method it was done over one hundred years ago, with hand tongs. These scissor-like instruments consist of the tong-heads, with their hardened-steel teeth designed to wrestle the oysters from the muddy bottom, which are then attached to the wooden shafts of the tongs.

With the dwindling number of oystermen in North Carolina over the last twenty years has also come the disappearance of those with the knowledge and ability to hand-craft a set of tong shafts. Made strictly of ash due to its strength and relative durability, the construction of a high quality set of shafts begins with the selection of the perfect ash board from a local mill.

Any experienced shaft maker will advise you to select a board that is free of knots, splits, and with a tight grain. The boards will then be marked in accordance with the desired shaft widths on each end. Shafts are tapered slightly, with the bottom being slightly wider than the top end. In modern times, a skill saw is the most popular means of cutting the shafts out; much easier than the handsaws of the old days. Once the shafts have been cut, they are routed, hand-planed, and carefully sanded down until smooth from top to bottom before drilling out and installing the pivot pin, and the tong heads.



An illustration of oyster tongs, 1889

-George Brown Goode, The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of The United States, V. II

Did You Know? With Dr. Ike

North Carolina claims nearly 5000 miles of inner waters and has more sounds than any other Eastern State; but, what is a sound?

A sound is a regional term for a saltwater (brackish water) lagoon. In N.C. these bodies of water are typically protected from wind and ocean waves by barrier islands referred to as the "Outer Banks."

The existence of the Outer Banks has created waters of relatively shallow depth and moderate salinity. Along the sheltered wetlands of the inner banks, freshwater from six major rivers flow into the sounds to mix with ocean waters entering cuts in the Outer Banks such as Ocracoke, Beaufort and Bogue inlets. This mixing of fresh and saltwater has served to create the second largest estuarine system on the east coast of the United States. This system is collectively known in N.C. as the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine System.

Now...

1. Can you define "estuarine" or "estuary" ?
2. Can you name four of the six river basins which feed into the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine System?

If you wish to submit answers to either Question 1 or 2 by January 31, your name will be entered into a drawing to receive a \$25 gift card to Chick-fil-A in Morehead City, N.C. Two winners will be announced in February.

Mail your response to either question to Dr. Ike at Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center, P.O. Box 556, Harkers Island, N.C. 28531

All responses must be postmarked by January 31. Gift Cards are being provided by The Redhead Society of Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center.

You can find similar content and resources at the [Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership](#) & the [North Carolina Office of Environmental Education](#)

-Dr. Ike Southerland

