



Stony Brook University School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences

Spring 2016 Lecture Series

Friday, March 4, 2016 7:30 p.m.

Duke Lecture Hall – Chancellor's Hall
Southampton Campus

Kevin Woo

SUNY Empire State College

“Fauna in our Backyards: The Return of Native Wildlife and Seals to New York City”



*Throughout its young colonial existence, the humans of New York City dominated the landscape, and ultimately pushed out native wildlife from their natural habitat. However, in recent years, instances of native fauna that have returned to the city suggest important ecological, environmental, and perhaps behavioral changes. In this discussion, we will examine examples of wildlife that are reclaiming their territory, and focus particularly on a specific model: the harbor seal (*Phoca vitulina*). Like their vertebrate counterparts, seals were historically native to the New York City water ways. Consequently, they experienced a steep decline and local extinction nearly 100 years ago. Over the last couple of decades, seals have been reported on the foreshores of the five boroughs. As a result, the Center for the Pinniped Ecology & Cognition (C-SPEC) has studied local populations for the last five years, and monitored the demographic and behavioral trends of seasonal individuals. Their presence informs us that ecological and environmental conditions must be more favorable; however, there are likely other anthropogenic (i.e., man-made) issues that they must endure to survive. To complement our field work, we also engaged in studies of cognition and sensory perception in the laboratory - two important life history aspects that may inform us of how these abilities operate to negotiate the natural environment. Furthermore, and along with our research agenda, C-SPEC is committed to citizen science and STEM education, and we work to educate the community about the importance of all biological life in our backyard. As there will always be an interaction between humans and animals, the presence of native fauna in the New York City suggests positively improved conditions that enable the success of all existing life forms within an urban ecosystem.*