

# Weekapaug Inn to host 'Weekend of the Spawning Moon'



Horseshoe crabs will be returning by the thousands to Rhode Island this spring for their mating season. The Weekapaug Inn in Westerly will host a "Horseshoe Crab Festival" Saturday, as part of its inaugural "Weekend of the Spawning Moon."

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Kristen Tomaiolo Features Editor | [0 comments](#)

WESTERLY — In the late months of spring, horseshoe crabs return to Quonochontaug Pond and crawl ashore to participate in a yearly prehistoric activity – spawning.

The Weekapaug Inn invites people to witness horseshoe crabs by the thousands glide into the Inn's protected estuaries for its inaugural Horseshoe Crab Festival Friday and Saturday.

"They're fascinating creatures," said Mark Bullinger, the inn's naturalist and director of recreation. "They're the closest any of us will come to living with dinosaurs."

The festival is one-half of the newly reopened Inn's "Weekend of the Spawning Moon." Bullinger will also host a fly-tying seminar and fishing outing as part of Cinder Worm Hatch activities Saturday. Cinder worm hatches occur from mid-April to late June, and just like the horseshoe crab's mating rituals, are brought on by the full moon.

On Saturday, people can wade through the pond with flashlights and headlamps to watch the thousands of horseshoe crabs crawl onto the sandy beaches. Horseshoe crabs with tags on their bodies will be recorded by Bullinger so fellow naturalists and scientists can track the crabs' travels. Bullinger said the horseshoe crabs' habitats surrounding the Inn were not compromised

by Superstorm Sandy last October, and he does not believe he will see a decrease in numbers this year.

The full moon creates a high tide allowing crabs to easily lay their eggs and bury them under the sand to protect them from predators. Shorebirds and eels could potentially make appearances to feed on unprotected eggs Saturday. For those who prefer not to get wet, a guest presenter will give a slide show presentation on the creatures with a crab-filled tank for viewing and holding in the inn's SeaRoom earlier in the evening.

Despite their long, pointy tail, horseshoe crabs are harmless and don't sting. They use the tail to flip themselves upright. And despite their name, horseshoe crabs are not crabs. They are arthropods.

"They're more closely related to spiders and a fossil people would recognize, the trilobite fossil," Bullinger said.

Besides existing for 450 million years, horseshoe crabs have blue blood that easily coagulates when it comes in contact with bacteria or endotoxins, creating a barrier against the bacteria. Their blood is extremely helpful for pharmaceutical companies in determining whether something is contaminated with bacteria. Bullinger said that when horseshoe crabs are being harvested, a third of their blood is extracted.

"I look forward to conveying how important they are to our well being, and how they need to be protected," Bullinger said.

For the Cinder Worm Hatch, Bullinger will lead a fishing seminar where he will teach fly-tying and casting skills.

Cinder worm hatches happen under the full moon and are a beautiful sight due to the worms' magenta-colored bodies, Bullinger said. The worms hatch by the thousands, "dancing" in figure-eight patterns in the water. Striped bass love to eat cinder worms and the hatches make for prime fishing conditions. For those who would like to fish, they can use their own gear or the inn's fly rods. There is no predicting the exact date of the hatches, so if there is little activity in Quonochontaug Pond the group will fish in nearby Ninigret Pond.

After a five-year renovation process, the Weeakpaug Inn reopened last October. Bullinger, former executive director of the Salt Ponds Coalition, was hired to plan programming based around the unique location of the historic inn – which is located on a salt water estuary and has a vibrant eco-system from foxes to shore birds, he noted.

Bullinger plans to create more programs that offer a unique experience people don't get the chance to witness every day.

"I think people who come out will have a great time," Bullinger said. "This is like stepping through your TV screen and stepping into a National Geographic show ... and actually experiencing what you see in a nature documentary."

## **Weekend of the Spawning Moon**

Weekapaug Inn

Horseshoe Crab Festival

Slideshow: Friday, Saturday, 5 p.m.

Moonlight outing: Friday, 9:30 p.m.

\$50, includes equipment

Cinder Worm Hatch

\$75, includes supplies

Seminar: Saturday, 9:30 a.m. to noon

Fishing, Saturday, 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Registration required

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