

Spring Tide in Flax Pond

June 4, 2004 1:00 am

If you missed the full moon tonight in Flax Pond, you may want to catch it the next time around at the June spring tide.

I started down Crane Neck beach tonight, a half hour or so before the midnight high tide, taking my last of several walks to count the spawning horseshoe crabs. As I approached the inlet, I found myself suddenly walking on a thin strip of beach, flanked on the left by the Sound and on the right by a huge spreading tide pool. The jetties were completely submerged under water, with the exception of the last few rocks at the corner of the pond on the near side of the channel. The tide had surged over the jetties and lapped into the tide pool; I had to wade my way across what used to be beach on my way into Flax Pond.

When I arrived in the Pond, a huge lagoon stretched out before me from end to end. The short, steep drop which usually runs along the channel had disappeared. The channel itself, where the tides usually rip, was gone. Only a still, wide expanse of water, reflecting pale light, extended across what appeared to be a bay. None of the long, familiar islands of cord grass and tussocks were to be seen anywhere. Instead, rafts of dead *spartina alterniflora* drifted about in the moonlight.

The spring tide, the high tide on the new or full moon in June, is the highest tide of the month. It is called 'spring' because it springs high, not because of the season of the year. The moon's pull on the tides is greatest at these times. They are at both their highest and their lowest. In May and June, these are the spring tides when the horseshoe crabs spawn...as do the fiddler crabs, the nesting osprey, many species of wildlife in the pond.

As I walked along the edge of the pond, where I had counted over 125 horseshoe crabs at the noon high tide earlier in the day, only a very few solitaires were left to be seen. In the daylight, the crabs had been spawning in earnest, females spewing bubbles and milky brown plumes that spread in the water, satellite males clustering up behind and around the burrowing females. In Flax Pond, as along Crane Neck beach, the spawning horseshoe crabs all burrow into the pebbles underwater, unlike those female crabs you read about and see in photos who climb up onto beaches to plow their crowns into sand or mud. Some of the females even burrow so deep into the pebbles, they can barely be seen below the covering males. They leave pockets along the tidelines when the tide recedes, within which are buried the eggs that they have laid and which provide essential food for migrating birds. These past few weeks from the new moon to the full moon, one could find these pockets left from the ancient ritual of the horseshoe crab, one of our oldest living life-forms.

Tonight, as I continued through the pond, there was no longer the usual path which winds behind the barrier beach. Instead I found myself wading where I usually would walk, clomping my way through lofted *spartina* rafts. The water was clouded and covered with trails of scum and silt, probably lifted from the shore by the tide. The moon disappeared behind the heavy cloudcover, leaving the pond in darkness. When I reached the island of cedars, which extends back into the pond from Crane Neck beach, I found the water flooding up well into that small forest. From there on, I waded up to the tops of my thighs, hugging the cedars until I finally reached the 'pour-over' that you all know. After that, the huge lagoon continued to rise up along the beach until I waded my way back to the parking lot and my car.

For those of you familiar with Crane Neck northeasters and hurricanes, the sight of Flax Pond flooded is no novelty. Yet there was no storm and no wind today - only the silent rising of a spring tide: the awesome power of the pulling moon made visible.

Wendy Fidao
Crane Neck Resident

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**Editor's note:**

Wendy grew up and lives near Flax Pond and has a life-long interest in its ecology and preservation. This piece was written during the annual mating cycle of the horseshoe crab (*Limulus polyphemus*) which occurs during full and new moons in June each year. There are many good references to horseshoe crabs on the web. A quick search using Google revealed a sample.....

[The Horseshoe Crab: Natural History, Anatomy, Conservation and ...](#)

A comprehensive exploration of **horseshoe crab** natural history, anatomy and conservation: contains research and educational material, plus collections of poems...  
[www.horseshoecrab.org/](http://www.horseshoecrab.org/)

[Horseshoe Crab Facts and Figures](#)

**HORSESHOE CRABS** THE ANCIENT MARINERS. **Horseshoe crabs**, common along the Delaware coast, have evolved little in the last 250 million years...  
[www.beach-net.com/horseshoe/Bayhorsecrab.html](http://www.beach-net.com/horseshoe/Bayhorsecrab.html)

[Horseshoe Crab](#)

The **Horseshoe Crab** (*Limulus polyphemus*) Although **horseshoe crabs** look dangerous, they are not. ... The **horseshoe crab** has two pairs of eyes. ...  
[www.assateague.com/horsesho.html](http://www.assateague.com/horsesho.html)

[Horseshoe Crabs "A Living Fossil"](#)

... Home. Life History | Anatomy | The Fishery | Conservation Medical Uses | Raising **Horseshoe Crabs** in the Classroom | How you can Help. ...  
[www.dnr.state.md.us/education/horseshoecrab](http://www.dnr.state.md.us/education/horseshoecrab)

[The Horseshoe Crab or King Crab](#)

The **Horseshoe Crab** or **King Crab**. ... If **horseshoe crabs** get turned on their back in the surf and get stranded on the beach, they use their long tail to turn over. ...  
[www.globalclassroom.org/hshoe.html](http://www.globalclassroom.org/hshoe.html)

## [THE HORSESHOE CRAB](#)

... By examining their underside, we can clearly see many similarities between the **horseshoe crabs**, members of the class Merostomata, and spiders, scorpions and...  
[www.marinelab.sarasota.fl.us/WHORSESH.HTM](http://www.marinelab.sarasota.fl.us/WHORSESH.HTM)

## [Horseshoe Crab Printout - EnchantedLearning.com](#)

... There are four species of **Horseshoe Crabs** alive today; they live off the coasts of India, Japan, Indonesia, the eastern USA, and the Gulf of Mexico. ...  
[www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/invertebrates/arthropod/Horseshoecrab.shtml](http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/invertebrates/arthropod/Horseshoecrab.shtml)

