Sara Morris, a well-respected leader dedicated to student academic experiences and a passionate ornithologist, has been selected as the new executive director for the Shoals Marine Laboratory (SML).

No stranger to SML, Morris has served as the longtime director for the Appledore Island Migration Station, the lab’s bird banding program that runs each spring and autumn. Her ties to the island run the gamut from lecturing in field marine science teaching courses about marine science, field ornithology and ecology to supporting SML’s necessary functions — including volunteering to wash dishes, serve as the kitchen sous chef, fold T-shirts and drive trucks. As she prepares for her new role starting Feb. 3, 2024, Morris has great enthusiasm for leading SML into the future.

“Since May 1990 when I first took the R/V Kingsbury to Appledore Island as a Cornell graduate student, the Shoals Marine Lab has been an integral part of my professional and personal identity,” Morris says. “The community and learning environment that SML creates is unique and impactful, and I am so excited to have the opportunity to support and continue the Shoals tradition as the next executive director.”

SML is a remote field station located on Appledore Island, Maine, and is jointly operated by the University of New Hampshire and Cornell University’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. It is the largest field station in the U.S. that focuses on undergraduates, offering them a unique opportunity to live on the island and study its marine habitats, as well as the island’s plants and wildlife. SML, which is part of the UNH School of Marine Science and Ocean Engineering (https://marine.unh.edu/), also provides educational programming for community members through a range of public programs.
Morris currently serves as the vice president for academic affairs and a professor of biology at Canisius University in Buffalo, New York, and is the president-elect of the American Ornithological Society. She succeeds Jennifer Seavey, who served as the SML Executive Director from 2014 to 2023.

With both her M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in zoology from Cornell University, Morris brings to the SML executive director position not just a deep understanding of biology and ecology, but also her higher education leadership skills. Morris looks forward to getting to know the next generation of SML students and alums, and she anticipates staying engaged in the academics through lectures and seminars.

“We are thrilled that Sara will be taking the helm of Shoals Marine Lab — her deep history with SML, along with her leadership experience and vast ornithological knowledge makes her a perfect fit for this position,” says Diane Foster, director for the UNH School of Marine Science and Ocean Engineering. “Sara’s excitement for her new role advocating for all of SML is palpable and contagious, and we look forward to SML’s future with her leadership.”

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