

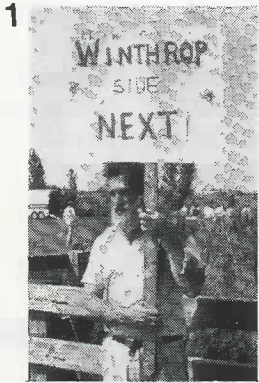
Important: Winthrop Clean-up, Saturday October 25 Photo competition

(details p.6)

Newsletter of the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

No. 13 OCTOBER 1986

Belle Isle Park Opening September 6



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PHOTO CREDITS

1. Evan Gellar
2. Evan Gellar
3. Barbara Entress,
East Boston
Community
News
4. Tim Driscoll
5. Kevin O'Malley,
MDC
6. Tim Driscoll

MARSH STUDIES

Marsh education takes many forms. One of our members recalls a Winthrop grammar school trip to see birds at Belle Isle Marsh more than 50 years ago. More recently, various other members have accompanied school and scout groups on field trips there. They have also brought the marsh into East Boston classrooms through talks illustrated with photographs and with such items as molted horseshoe crab shells. Students at Winthrop Library are often referred to a file of our Newsletters. A Newsletter at Beachmont Library brought a college student seeking ideas for a writing course out to one of our regularly scheduled field trips.

The unique features of salt marshes include: tidal drenching of surface soil and underlying peat, salt-tolerant plants

and algae, and special birds and animals which are either residents or migrants. Human visitors come to Belle Isle Park and Reservation to relax and to casually observe some of these features.

Neighborhood youngsters observe a great deal when playing in the Park, while other youngsters come to examine its life on group field trips. College students come to find material for course papers or to do intensive graduate school studies.

The first college level study of Belle Isle that we know of was done in 1971 by Catherine Stone, then a graduate student at Boston University. She evaluated the health of the marsh at the request of some East Boston residents who were fighting replacement of the "dead" marsh by proposed oil facilities. Stone's study showed that the marsh was quite alive and healthy. (See Belle Isle News, October 1985)



TWO MIT STUDIES

Recently, several graduate students at the MIT Department of Civil Engineering have been utilizing Belle Isle Marsh in their studies of water movement in peat, and two of these projects have been completed.

Bill Nuttle's work has been described in two of our Newsletters (September 1984, June 1985), in his talk at one of our meetings, and on a tour of his laboratory given to interested members of Friends of Belle Isle Marsh. His main interest is in the water storage capacity of salt marsh peat, and to this end he carried out extensive, highly technical measurements of subsurface water circulation. This is described in detail in his Ph. D. dissertation. He also inspired and supervised the projects of other MIT students using Belle Isle in their studies.

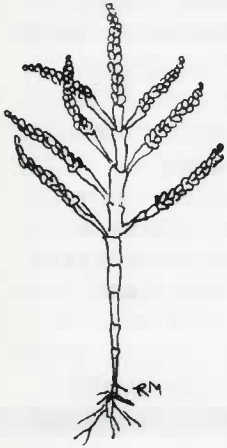
Congratulations Bill! We hope that as you go on in this exciting field you will always remain a Friend of Belle Isle Marsh.

Diane Chen, another MIT graduate student, focused on air penetration below the marsh surface in relation to the fluctuation of water. When tidal water moves in to flood open pockets and root channels in marsh peat, air is forced out. As the tide goes out, the air returns. The depth to which air is then present was found by Diane to be greater than previously believed. Her experiments are described in detail in the thesis submitted for her Master's Degree.

Congratulations Diane! Our best wishes go with you in your new life.

THE TUFTS STUDY

The overall ecology of Belle Isle Marsh -- the interactions of living things with each other, with the tides, and with other elements of their surroundings -- was studied by Barbara Gard, who became an environmentalist by an indirect route.



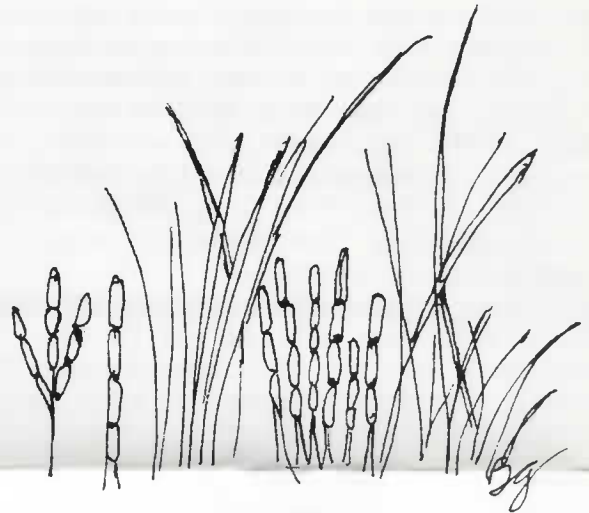
Wisconsin-born and bred, she first saw the ocean at Cape Cod and has been fascinated by salt water habitats ever since. Her arrival in New England with a degree in art education coincided with a teacher surplus, and she turned to office jobs. These eventually led her to a law

firm handling environmental cases and, finally, to the Massachusetts Office of Solar Energy. Becoming more and more interested in the natural environment, she went back to school and carried out an extensive study of Belle Isle Marsh under the supervision of professors at Tufts University. She was awarded a Master's Degree in 1984 on the basis of her thesis which includes censuses of Belle Isle plants, invertebrate animals, fish and birds, and which suggests a management plan for continuing and improving the health of the marsh.

Belle Isle Marsh has played a big role in Barbara's life. While still a student she discussed its protection with members of the Winthrop Conservation Commission. Now she is a member of the Conservation Commission in Norwell, where she and her husband are living. She also acts as consultant to the Brookline Conservation Commission, and has filled in for their vacationing Commissioner. As one of the founders of our organization and our first treasurer, Barbara did the painstaking paperwork needed to establish our non-profit status. This kind of

experience has been very useful in her capacity as a free-lance environmental consultant. She remains an active Friend of Belle Isle Marsh who has shared her knowledge of the salt marsh world in our Newsletter, at our Annual Meetings, at our 1984 Fall Symposium, and at the plant table at our recent Park Opening. Even Barbara's drawings reflect her marsh interest. We end with one of her favorites.

Esther Fich



HELP WANTED

We are constantly expanding, and need more help just keeping up with our new members. Many tasks get left undone because as a volunteer organization we are typically understaffed. We need help in the following areas:

- Communication with members
- Conservation
- Field trip leaders
- Finances and fundraising
- Graphics
- Mailing and addressing
- Publications
- Publicity

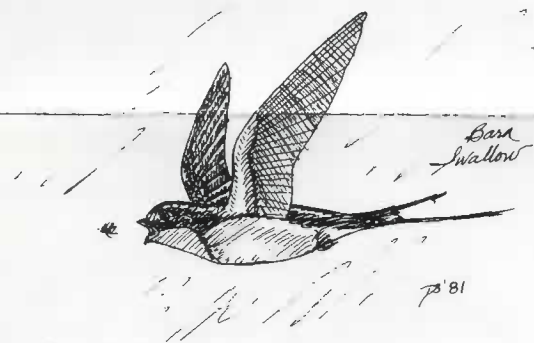
Won't you help please?

To volunteer call John Kilmartin at 846-1480, or Gail Miller at 567-5072.

BIRDFINDER

Belle Isle Marsh provides a handy resting place for migrating birds during both spring and fall. Fortunately for us, many of these birds decide to stay during the summer and make their nests in the marsh or on nearby harbor islands.

The Common Tern nested in the salt pans behind the MBTA yard at Orient Heights. Spotted Sandpipers also nested in the marsh. American Black Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, Savannah and Song Sparrows, Killdeer, Tree and Barn Swallows, Redwings, Grackles, and American Kestrels were everpresent at the marsh throughout the summer months. An Eastern Meadowlark was heard singing several times during the summer, leading some to wonder if it bred here. Frequent visitors from the Harbor Islands included Snowy and Great Egrets, Glossy Ibis, and Black-crowned Night-Herons.



Sightings of migrating birds include: Sharp-shinned Hawk, Osprey, Northern Harrier, Black-bellied and Semipalmated Plovers, Willet, Hudsonian Godwit, Dunlin, both dowitcher species, Least, Semipalmated, Pectoral, and White-rumped Sandpipers, Stilt Sandpiper, Wilson's Phalarope, Bonaparte's and Laughing Gulls, Caspian Tern, Belted Kingfisher, Eastern Meadowlark, and Bobolink. Also there were regular sightings of Great Blue Heron, Green-backed Heron, and Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs. The American Bittern, which is usually difficult to find, is frequently seen on the marsh.

The BIRDFIND of the season past was a Black-necked Stilt, spotted by Conal Foley on May 25.

Rather than just list the birds that have been seen at Belle Isle Marsh, I will give a little background on some of the birdwatchers who see the birds.

Conal Foley, a lifelong resident of Winthrop, is a biology teacher at Boston Latin Academy. He became interested in birdwatching when he was a young boy. There was a neighbor who had bird feeders on her porch, which was right at tree level. It was easy to see and identify the birds that came to the feeder. Conal was hooked.

He used to accompany Edward Rowe Snow on field trips to Governor's Island to photograph Snowy Owls in winter. One winter a Snowy Owl perched on Conal's roof, eyeing the chickens he was raising in the back yard. Conal also raised pigeons: tumblers, rollers, and homers.

In 1983 Conal took part in an Earthwatch trip to Scotland to help take the census of shorebirds.

Conal foley can be found regularly out in Belle Isle. Join him and other birdwatchers on the marsh. Become a birdfinder!

Leo E. Rogers, Jr.

[Editor's note: Leo has kindly taken on the task of compiling and reporting wildlife sightings at the marsh in these pages. Please send reports of sightings -- not necessarily of birds -- to us at our regular address, but mark your envelope: Attention Leo Rogers.]

T-SHIRTS: \$7

For the Belle Isle Park Opening we had some very attractive T-shirts made up: dark brown on tan, 100% cotton, men's sizes XL, L, M, and S. Order yours today. Free delivery in East

Boston, Winthrop, or Revere. Others please add \$1.50 for handling and postage. Write Box 575, East Boston, MA 02128.



WINDOWS

Windows in walls you can open and close when you please. Windows in time you can only use when they open. To use them you have to know when they open and what to look for. You can always see the world turning if you look for it. You can also see a long way -- sometimes east and west, always north and south.

With two hundred other species of birds, Water Pipits migrate north through our area between the end of March and the end of May. In fall they return in far greater number. Named for their noisy calls -- *tsip tsip* or *tsip tsip-it*, often given in flight -- they announce the beginning of our harvest and stay with us to its end, long after most other migrants have departed.

Water Pipits are brown and grey and yellow

larks. They have thin bodies, long legs, and long thin pointed bills. They nest on arctic tundra and mountaintops. They migrate south through our area with start of Indian Summer.

First you hear them, then suddenly you see them in flocks of 10 or 20 or 30 or more, rapidly working a field or a marsh. Then suddenly you don't see them though you still hear them. They disappear against the brown and grey and yellow background of sand and soil, stubble and cornstalks, rushes and grasses.

Two months later, they're all gone. The warm days and cool nights of September have become the cool days and cold nights of November. It's dark when you finish work. And now that the Water Pipits have reached Mexico, you can start preparing for Thanksgiving.

jhb

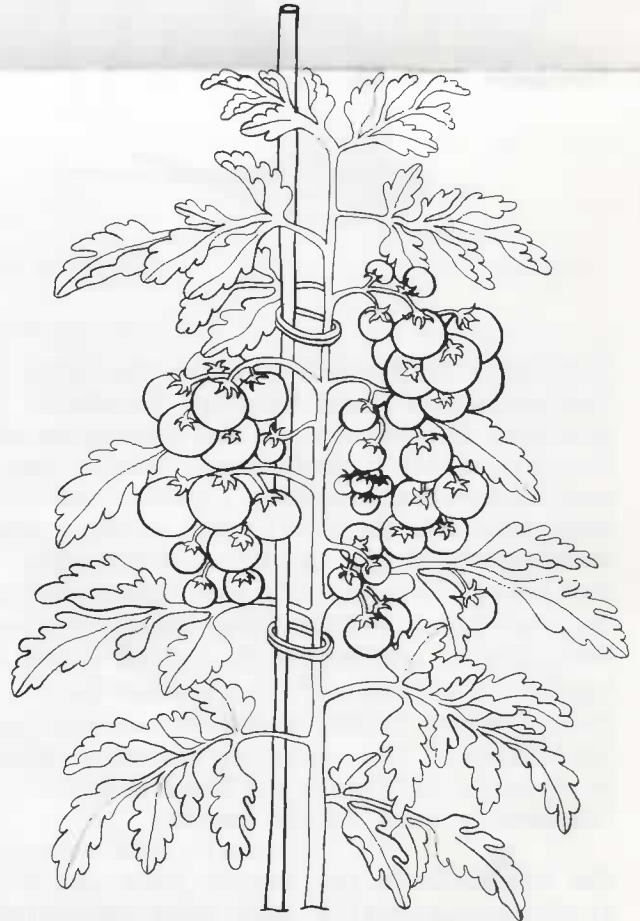
THE TOMATO PATCH

Some neighbors have taken the initiative to use the space across from their homes for a more useful growth than the weeds which generally inhabit the roadside: a vegetable garden, mostly tomato plants, has been added to the Palermo Street border to Belle Isle Marsh. While this has given some local friends the idea of creating common (victory) gardens on the site, others have voiced strong opposition to any private use of the space.

The opening of Belle Isle Park in early September was the result of years of neighborhood cooperation. It makes no sense to allure public sentiment to Belle Isle Park unless we show similar interest in the rest of the reservation. Common gardens would benefit the marsh by drawing attention to another part of it.

Belle Isle should represent to all of us the importance of working together for the same purpose. Victory gardens would not only be an extension of that idea, they would be a new channel through which the reservation could be put to better use. We should not underestimate the ability of the park to provide for us. Tending the land would be putting it to its greatest possible use, and the land would provide a common ground for the neighborhood.

--Tim Driscoll



PIX PLEASE

We hope the photos of the Park Opening in this newsletter will inspire our amateur photographer members to enter the FBIM Third Annual Photo Contest. Categories include plants, animals, people, and general. All entries must have been taken at Belle Isle. You may submit slides or photos in any format: disc camera, 35mm, color, black and white, etc. Young photographers are urged to submit entries. Write your name, address and phone on the back of each entry.

The deadline for entering this contest is January 31, 1987. Winning entries will be displayed at our Annual Meeting in March, and may be displayed at local libraries, banks, and civic centers. Prizes will be gift certificates courtesy of Hunt Drug Co., 100 Main Street, Malden, "New England's most unusual camera store."

Please mail your entries to: Photo Contest, P. O. Box 575, East Boston, MA 02128. For more information call Barbara Bishop, 846-7418.

PITCH IN!

Our clean-up in Winthrop is scheduled to begin at 9 AM, Saturday, October 25. Please come equipped with old clothes and work gloves, ready to work. We'll meet at the new pumping station at the southern end of Short Beach. For more information call 567-5072.

FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE

The following field trips have been scheduled to start at 1 PM. Please meet at the entrance to Belle Isle Marsh Reservation on Bennington Street, East Boston (half-way between Suffolk Downs and Beachmont MBTA Stations). Dress warmly and wear waterproof footwear.

Sunday, October 26
Saturday, November 8
Sunday, November 23
Saturday, December 6

Field trips are free and open to the public. Please call the following trip leaders for further information.

David Desmond 324-7527
Soheil Zende 628-8990

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Printing and mailing this newsletter, as well as all other activities of Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, is financed by membership dues and donations from generous members. Membership dues are as follows:

Individual: \$3
Family: \$5
Seniors: \$1
Under 16: \$1

Please join today. Any amount you can contribute above and beyond membership dues will be highly appreciated.

This newsletter is produced by Tim Driscoll, Esther Fich, and Soheil Zende. Tomato plant drawing by Carlene Meeker. Other graphics by Denise Braunhardt, Barbara Gard, and Robin McBride.

Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

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