

# Arts in the Park at Belle Isle Marsh

Sunday, September 20, 1992  
Noon to 4:30 PM



(Rain date: Sunday, September 27)

Join Friends of Belle Isle Marsh and MDC staff for our sixth annual *Arts in the Park* festival, and celebrate the preservation and protection of our natural heritage. The program includes activities for young and old:

## Entertainment:

Revere's own *Joel Cote* of "Ultimate Music" as MC  
*Inca Son*: Music from the Peruvian Andes and Latin America  
Cambodian children's dance troupe from Revere  
*Tony Toledo*: Children's storyteller  
Live animals, Hay rides

## Arts and Crafts:

Displays by local artists, Adult sketching

## Children's activities:

Face painting, Kite flying

## Nature:

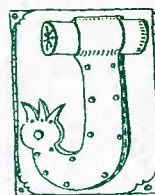
Tree planting  
Guided nature walks  
Bird-watching from the tower  
Self-guided trail brochures available

## Refreshments (but bring your own lunch)

*This festival is made possible by generous support from Boston, Revere, and Winthrop Arts Councils, MassPort, and MacDonald's of Winthrop.*

*Handicapped-accessible toilet available.*

## Samuel Sewall (1652-1730)



Judge Samuel Sewall was the first major personality connected with Belle Isle. But although he owned and wrote about Hog Isle, now Belle Isle and Orient Heights, he never, in fact, lived there.

Sewall acquired Hog Island on May 2, 1687, claiming it by the ancient rite of "taking livery and seised of the lland by Turf and Twigg and the House." This was much to the displeasure of Sir Edmund Andros, then Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Governor Andros decreed against Sewall's ownership, saying that it was a "violent intrusion into the king's possession." (*History of Chelsea*) Sewall petitioned against the decree, but it took the bravery of Increase Mather to clear it.

Mather was chosen by his fellow Puritans to return to England to complain

about the Governor's tyrannical behavior. To board the ship *President*, Mather went from Boston through Charlestown to a small boat at Crooked Lane (Belle Isle Inlet). He sailed up the inlet to avoid Andros' soldiers, who were searching for him with a



*Increase Mather*

warrant to stop him. Mather eventually returned with a new charter and was greeted as a hero and long remembered as a symbol of freedom and of rebellion against tyranny. Andros was confined to Castle Island in 1689, and the decree against Sewall was cleared. As for Mather, he became president of Harvard University.

Sewall wrote in his diary that he picked cherries where Orient Heights is now, as cherry trees were very abundant there. He also planted chestnut trees on the island and earned income from farming and raising livestock. He did not do the farming himself, but had a tenant farmer named

Jeremiah Belcher.

Sewall's travel was done mostly by water: Pulling Point (Winthrop) was a one hour trip from Boston by water, whereas Sale's Farm (Beachmont) was a one day trip by land. Judge Sewall frequently went to see Deane Winthrop at Pulling Point. He would leave from the wharf he built, often in an Indian-style birch-bark canoe. On October 1, 1697, the jurist's diary



Sewall

records a luncheon of "bread and butter, honey, curds and creams. For dinner, very good roast lamb, turkey, fowl, and apple pie. After dinner sang the 121 Psalm. A glass of spirits...stood upon a joint stool, which Simon W. [Willard] jogging it, fell down and broke all to shivers. I said it was a lively emblem of our fragility and mortality..." (History of Winthrop)

On July 11, 1699, Sewall returned with Reverend Willard to attend a wedding at the home of Deane Winthrop. "Between one and two Mr. Willard married Atherton Haugh and Mercy Winthrop... Gave very good advice and exhortation; especially most solemnly charged them not to neglect family prayer. Between three and four, Major General Fitz-John and Mr. Adam

Winthrop came... Sang a psalm together. I set St. David's tune; sang part of two psalms and concluded with the last four verses of 115. When Mr. Willard asked Mr. Winthrop's consent to the marriage, he also complimented me respecting Atherton Haugh. I said I was glad he had found so good a family and so good a wife, and when I saw the bridegroom and the bride together after the wedding, I prayed God to bless them and give them such an offspring wherein the

names of Haugh and Winthrop should flourish... The wind was against us going home so 'twas nine o'clock before we landed. Were four hours on the passage..." (History of Winthrop)

Sewall last mentions Hog Isle in his diary in 1717. He died in 1730.

*Sam Sewall.*

*Deane Winthrop*



Sources and quotations from:

*History of Chelsea*, by Mellen Chamberlain; Boston, 1908. (Available at Boston Public Library.)

*The History of Winthrop*, by William Clark, Winthrop Centennial Committee; 1952. (Available at Winthrop Public Library.)

Ian Ogilvie

[Editor's note: The author was a seasonal interpreter at Belle Isle Park during the summer of 1987. This material was excerpted from his *The History of Belle Isle*, and Especially Belle Isle Marsh Reservation, which he researched and wrote that summer.

It should be noted that Sewall was one of the judges at the Salem witch trials in 1692. In later life he regretted his role in those proceedings.]

## Bermed in at Belle Isle Marsh (Part 2)

In 1990, the Massachusetts Environmental Trust funded research to explore the potential for restoring twenty-five acres of Belle Isle Marsh enclosed by an artificial berm and dominated by the tall reed *Phragmites*. In the June issue we described a Massachusetts Audubon Society study of the benthic community and vegetation in the area. Here we describe its birds and fish and make some general observations about this unique part of Belle Isle Marsh.



Phragmites

### Birds

Birds are the most obvious wildlife at Belle Isle Marsh and are the main attraction to naturalists, educators and local residents. They are also valuable indicators of environmental quality. Much valuable information on bird use of the marsh has already been collected by members of FBIM. Hence, we considered them a logical focus. (See Table 1.)

Our overall assessment, based on observations made during our twenty-five field visits, is that the area enclosed by the berm is used by fewer birds than other parts of the marsh. Typical birds that were commonly

observed along Belle Isle Inlet or in Rosie's Pond but rarely or never seen in our study area included snowy egrets, black-bellied plovers, dowitchers, greater and lesser yellowlegs, and gulls. Although plovers and dowitchers sometimes appear in numbers up to 1000 at Rosie's Pond and other parts of the marsh, they were never recorded by us in the study area. Mallards and black ducks were occasionally observed in the ponds and pannes there, but were more common in other sections of Belle Isle. We speculated that this may be due to the lack of prey organisms occurring in the mud.

Table 1. Birds observed within the bermed area at Belle Isle Marsh during 25 field trips, from August 1990 through November 1991. Birds flying over the study area not recorded, unless they were obviously foraging (e.g. swallows).

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>WADERS</b>  | <b>GULLS AND TERNS</b>  | Barn swallow ( <i>Hirundo rustica</i> )               |
| American bittern ( <i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i> )          | Herring gull ( <i>Larus argentatus</i> )                            | Blue jay ( <i>Cyanocitta cristata</i> )               |
| Great blue heron ( <i>Ardea herodias</i> )                 |   | American crow ( <i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i> )        |
| Green-backed heron ( <i>Butorides virescens</i> )          | <b>RAPTORS</b>  | American robin ( <i>Turdus migratorius</i> )          |
| Black-crowned night heron ( <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i> ) | Northern harrier ( <i>Circus cyaneus</i> )                          | American pipit ( <i>Anthus spinoletta</i> )           |
|  | Red-tailed hawk ( <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i> )                        | Cedar waxwing ( <i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i> )          |
| <b>DUCKS</b>   | American kestrel ( <i>Falco sparverius</i> )                        | Northern shrike ( <i>Lanius excubitor</i> )           |
| Green-winged teal ( <i>Anas crecca</i> )                   | Merlin ( <i>Falco columbarius</i> )                                 | European starling ( <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> )         |
| American black duck ( <i>Anas rubripes</i> )               | Short-eared owl ( <i>Asio flammeus</i> )                            | Yellow warbler ( <i>Dendroica petechia</i> )          |
| Mallard ( <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> )                      |   | Yellow-rumped warbler ( <i>Dendroica coronata</i> )   |
| <b>SHOREBIRDS</b>  | <b>GALLINACEOUS BIRDS</b>   | Savannah sparrow ( <i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i> ) |
| Greater yellowlegs ( <i>Tringa melanoleucus</i> )          | Ring-necked pheasant ( <i>Phasianus colchicus</i> )                 | Sharp-tailed sparrow ( <i>Ammospiza caudacuta</i> )   |
| Lesser yellowlegs ( <i>Tringa flavipes</i> )               |   | Song sparrow ( <i>Melospiza melodia</i> )             |
| Spotted sandpiper ( <i>Actitis macularia</i> )             | <b>PIGEONS AND DOVES</b>  | Red-winged blackbird ( <i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i> )   |
| Least sandpiper ( <i>Calidris minutilla</i> )              | Mourning dove ( <i>Zenaidura macroura</i> )                         | Common grackle ( <i>Quiscalus quiscula</i> )          |
| Pectoral sandpiper ( <i>Calidris melanotos</i> )           |   | House finch ( <i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i> )           |
| Common snipe ( <i>Capella gallinago</i> )                  | <b>PASSERINES</b>   | American goldfinch ( <i>Carduelis tristis</i> )       |
|  | Willow flycatcher ( <i>Empidonax traillii</i> )                     |   |
|  | Tree swallow ( <i>Iridoprocne bicolor</i> )                         |   |
|  | Northern rough-winged swallow ( <i>Stelgidopteryx rufficollis</i> ) |   |

(See last article on benthos.)

Nonetheless, some bird species were more common in the study area than elsewhere in the marsh. These included sharp-tailed sparrows (which are numerous in the water-logged, short-cordgrass areas) and black-crowned night-herons (which roost in groups of up to thirty birds during the day around a pond in the *Phragmites*). Occasional observations were also made of two state-listed species, American bittern and short-eared owl. The *Phragmites* area is also the major site for nesting and roosting red-winged blackbirds (thanks to Leo Rogers for this information). In addition, black ducks and occasional green-winged teal were observed in small freshwater ponds among the *Phragmites*, where this tall, feathery reed apparently provides good cover for skittish birds. A number of muskrat lodges are hidden within the *Phragmites* zone but nowhere else at Belle Isle.

On one field trip with members of FBIM we determined indirectly that a number of birds were nesting in our study area. These included robins, yellow warblers, and sharp-tailed sparrows. (Finding sharp-tailed sparrow nests is a real challenge!) Based on the bird list for Belle Isle compiled over several years by Soheil Zende, more extensive surveys would have likely turned up nests of American kestrel, killdeer, and song sparrows.

**Fish**  
We sampled fish near and within the berm area using seines and minnow traps. Five species of salt marsh fish were caught, the most abundant one being the mummichog, *Fundulus heteroclitus*. The numbers of mummichogs caught in minnow traps at the breaches in the berm were roughly comparable to those caught in a more rural salt marsh in Ipswich. Thus, our impression is that the creeks leading up to our study area and breaching the berm in two places support mummichog populations typical of salt marshes in the region.

Fish were only sporadically present in the study-site salt pannes, perhaps because these depressions are too shallow to support fish. They usually dry out between

Table 2. Fish and macroinvertebrates caught at Belle Isle Marsh by seining in the creeks. An asterisk indicates that the organism occurred in the study area (i.e. behind the berm).

#### FISH

Mummichog (*Fundulus heteroclitus*) \*  
Nine-spined stickleback (*Pungitius pungitius*) \*  
Three-spined stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus*)  
Siversides (*Menidia menidia*)  
American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*)

#### MACROINVERTEBRATES

Grass shrimp (*Palaemonetes pugio*)  
Shore shrimp (*Crangon septemspinosa*)  
Northern comb jelly (*Bolinopsis infundibulum*)  
Mud snail (*Ilyanassa obsoleta*)



twice-monthly spring tides.

### Conclusion

Our overall assessment is that the area enclosed by the berm is a unique habitat at Belle Isle Marsh and should not be subject to radical restoration procedures. Although it is relatively poor in birds and their benthic prey organisms, it does contribute to the overall diversity of species and nesting habitats found at Belle Isle by sustaining some species that rarely occur elsewhere on the marsh, such as black-crowned night-heron and American bittern. *Phragmites*, despite its generally poor reputation among wildlife managers and salt-marsh aficionados, does provide a buffer from the urban activities and traffic of Bennington Street, a buffer that reduces disturbance to wildlife and to people trying to enjoy the beauty of the reservation. Assuming that a basic goal of MDC management at Belle Isle Marsh is to sustain and increase the diversity of life here, complete removal of the *Phragmites*, even if it were possible, is not desirable.

Salt marshes are changing systems, but this dynamism is often ignored in management decisions. At present, we do not know whether the *Phragmites* is spreading further onto the natural salt marsh. Our permanent vegetation transects (described in the previous issue) will facilitate long-term monitoring of the relationship between this invasive plant and the natural salt marsh. The overriding management objective should be to prevent farther encroachment of *Phragmites* onto the existing salt marsh in the study area.

Robert Buchsbaum

The author is coastal ecologist at Massachusetts Audubon: North Shore.

## **RANGER'S RAMBLINGS:**

### **To Dredge or not to Dredge**

That is the question that the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) is trying to answer regarding Belle Isle Inlet.

For years, local politicians and boating enthusiasts have proposed that this tidal waterway be dredged. Their reasons have included improved boating access (primarily for Beachmont Yacht Club members), greater flood-storage capacity to protect area residents, and health concerns tied to possible toxic substances in the sediments.

Earlier this year, under a DEM contract, the Aneptek Corporation of Natick sampled the water and sediments for contaminants such as heavy metals and PCBs. In addition, they are searching for sites where toxic material could have been dumped. The inlet is also being surveyed to determine its present channel configuration and depth.

According to Eugene Cavanaugh, Director of DEM's Waterways Division, and Dave Clark, also of DEM, tests results and survey data will be the basis of a feasibility study to determine whether or not the inlet can be dredged. Both MDC and FBIM will have an opportunity to comment on this project to DEM.

Major factors in determining whether to dredge include the quality of the sediments and, depending on their quality, the availability of a disposal site.

As supervisor at Belle Isle Marsh Reservation, my main questions regarding this project are:

If the sediments are indeed toxic, what impact would disturbance of them have on the salt marsh ecosystem?

What effect would increased levels of turbidity (cloudiness of the water) have on the ecosystem?

*Coming in September:  
Our self-guided trail guide*

### *Belle Isle Marsh Reservation*

Self-guided trail



*Metropolitan District Commission  
Public Information Office: 727-5215  
20 Somerset Street, Boston, MA 02108*

*Friends of Belle Isle Marsh  
P.O. Box 575  
East Boston, MA 02128*

This brochure, funded through generous grants from Massachusetts Bays Program and MassPort, and sumptuously illustrated by our own Carlene Meeker, will be available around mid-September. Be sure to pick up one next time you're at the Park.

At what time of year would dredging be done to minimize its impact on the marsh? (Late November though February would probably be the best.)

According to DEM, test results should be in by early September, with work on the feasibility study to begin soon afterward. The completion date for this study has not been set.

*Karl Pastore*

# THE CHILDREN'S CORNER

When asked by former President Gail Miller, "What is the best thing about Belle Isle Park?" five-year-old Matthew Aiello responded: "The butterflies and bugs." And it's true. The park is teeming with our smallest "friends." This fall, plan a trip with your favorite little entomologist and see what you can find. Remember to be gentle and leave all our friends at the park in good health.

## Book Reviews

*\*The Very Quiet Cricket*, by Eric Carle; Philomel Books, New York 1990.

Eric Carle has created another beautiful, multisensory "bug" book using his traditional watercolor on tissue-paper illustrations. The young male cricket travels from page to page and meets many insects who hum, whirr and screech their friendly hellos, but he cannot respond. But wait for the surprise at the end of the story. As always, Eric Carle's book will be enjoyed by young and old.

*\*\*Where Animals Live: The World of Jellyfish*, by David Shale and Jennifer Coldrey, photographs by Oxford Scientific Films; Garth Stevens Publishing, 1987.

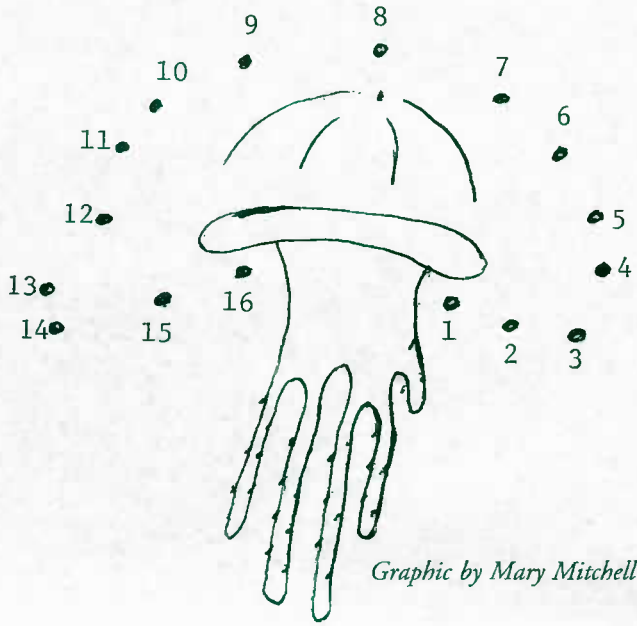
This is one of a series of nonfictional photo books for children. Youngsters will delight in the gorgeous photographs as they delve into simple but detailed information about jellyfish and their habitat.

\*Available at Orient Heights Library.

\*\*Available at Winthrop Library.

Mary Mitchell

*Connect the dots to see the jellyfish*



*Graphic by Mary Mitchell*

*Now color it in*

Although jellyfish washed up on a beach are colorless blobs, underwater they are dancing umbrellas in pale, see-through colors. At times they can be seen from Belle Isle Bridge as they dance their way in and out of the inlet. Most are harmless, but you should avoid touching them because some sting.



Don't miss out on this fall's canoe trips. (Details on back page.)

## Birdfinder

It's hard to believe that the fall migration begins shortly after summer arrives. During the last week of June, the first batch of greater and lesser yellowlegs arrived in the Key. Since then, there have been several unusual visitors to Belle Isle. Perhaps the most unusual sight was a group of upland sandpipers feeding in the grass of the open marsh. These were most likely birds that had originally nested at the airport. As their name suggests, upland sandpipers usually hang out up-land, in tall grass. Though not uncommon in the Midwest, they are difficult to see in these parts.

Four whimbrels and a stilt sandpiper were the other unusual birds among the usual summer flocks of shorebirds: semipalmated and least sandpipers, dowitchers, semipalmated and black-bellied plovers, greater and lesser yellowlegs, and killdeer. Wading birds were also well represented this summer. Great blue herons, snowy and great egrets, green-backed herons, glossy ibis, and a little blue heron were all present.

Common terns, least terns and a belted kingfisher kept the skies busy.

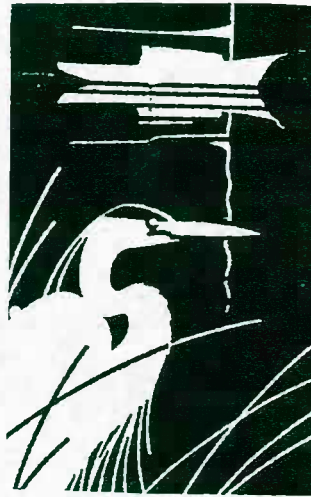
The most rewarding experience for me involved a common species of bird seen at Belle Isle Marsh, the American kestrel. For the past two summers, there have been no kestrels to be seen at Belle Isle, nor at any other of the local hang-outs. Normally, by the beginning of August, there should be numerous kestrels around; I have seen as many as eight hunting in the marsh at one time.

This year, during the first two weeks in August, a family of three Kestrels were hunting in the park. The parents were calling to the youngster from the trees and showing it the ropes while hunting grasshoppers and meadow voles. Fortunately, it is late enough in the season for this little falcon to learn to hunt. A few weeks earlier, the whole kestrel family would have been harassed by redwinged blackbirds, mockingbirds and swallows, all protecting their own young and their territories.

Welcome back, kestrels.



Leo E. Rogers, Jr.



## Coastal Futures Conference

*When:* Saturday, November 14;  
8:45 AM - 4 PM

*Where:* O'Maley School,  
Gloucester

*Who:* Massachusetts  
Audubon Society (MAS)

*Contact:* Laurie Martinelli,  
MAS Director of Public  
Policy,

(617)259-9500x7800.

Massachusetts Audubon Society is combining its annual meeting and presentation of the Audubon A Awards (for environmental activism) with a broad-ranging all-day coastal conference. Workshops will cover the following topics and more:

*Protecting the coast from wastewater discharges.*

*The impact of toxics on coastal resources.*

*Creating coastal buffer zones.*

*New models for regional environmental protection.*

*Fisheries resources.*

*Protecting the coast from non-point source pollutants*

*The State Endangered Species Act.*

*Effectiveness of coastal engineering such as seawalls.*

*How to put a price tag on our coastal resources.*

*Septic systems on the coast.*

*Restoring coastal marshes.*

The last topic is to be presented by Ed Reiner and our own ex-President Robin Snyder.

For more information or to register for this conference call or write Massachusetts Audubon.

*Looking for something to do? Then be sure to call the*

**Environmental  
Event Line  
876-3341**

## Bonaparte's Gulls

*Winter visitor from Hudson's Bay,  
this is your south  
on a bone-chilling day!*

*Quick on the wing, quick to espy,  
Larus philadelphia -- clever lawyer --  
nothing misses your eye.*

*By the hundreds you scour our coastal waters.  
Can your mind's eye weed out the offal? Not as  
if we have betrayed you. We're just not as swift  
in the mind as you are on the wing.*

Conal Foley

## Fall Events

Saturday, September 19, 10 AM: *Self-guided trail  
dedication.*

Sunday, September 20, noon to 4:30 PM: *Arts in the  
Park.*

### Canoe Days . . . at Belle Isle Marsh

Sunday, September 13, noon.

Saturday, September 26, 9:30 AM and noon.

Saturday, October 10, 9:30 and 11:30 AM.

### Canoe Days . . . at Rumney Marsh

Sunday, September 27, 10 AM.

Sunday, October 11, 10 AM.

This is the fourth year for this program. Starting

*Belle Isle News* is published quarterly by **Friends of Belle Isle Marsh**, a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of this marsh. We are staffed entirely by volunteers and funded through generous contributions and dues: **\$8** (Family), **\$5** (individual), and **\$1** (Seniors and Youths under 16).

Each and every one of you is important to us. Thank you for your continued support.

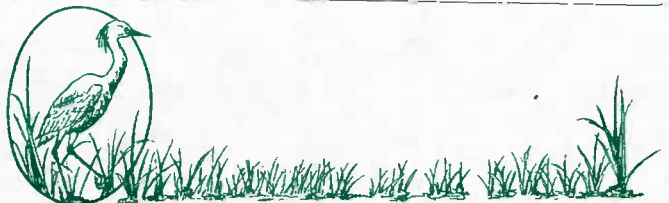
This issue was produced by Esther Fich and Soheil Zendehe. Illuminated letter by Scott Bickerton. Technical support by Bob Oliver. Printed on recycled paper by Delta Printing Co., Inc. of Lynn, Massachusetts.



*Friends of Belle Isle Marsh*  
P. O. Box 575  
East Boston, MA 02128

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ROBERT W. ANDERSEN PH.D  
62 FRUIT ST  
NORFOLK, MA 02056



this year we are offering tours of MDC's new Rumney Marsh Reservation in Revere and Saugus. Please pre-register with Ranger Karl Pastore for all canoe trips. Call 727-5350, or sign up at *Arts in the Park*. Sorry: no one under 12, please!

**Saturday, October 24, 10 AM: *Wildlife walk at Rumney Marsh.*** Call 727-5350 for details

**Sunday, October 25, 10 AM: *Close-up nature photography.*** Join FBIM member Bob Andersen for a workshop on the basics of nature photography. Any variety of camera welcome. Please pre-register by calling 727-5350. Limited to 10 participants.

**Sunday morning walks, 9 AM (10 AM when Daylight Savings Time ends):** Friends of Belle Isle Marsh lead a casual walk around the marsh every Sunday.

## Hawk Watch Coming Up

All of us who got rained out during the spring hawk migration are hankering for a good fall flight. Join us on the following dates; the meeting place is the hill in the middle of Belle Isle Park. Dress warmly and bring a lawn-chair.

Saturday & Sunday, September 26-27

Saturday & Sunday, October 3-4

Saturday & Sunday, October 17-18

Saturday & Sunday, October 24-25

For more information please call the Belle Isle Hawk Watch Coordinator, Soheil Zendehe: 863-2392.