



Belle Isle News

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FBIM NEWS!

The Boston Foundation has announced that the FBIM have been awarded an educational grant. See Upcoming Events (back page) for more information.

President's Notes

A chilly New England spring has come and gone and sultry summer has settled in. As always, the marsh is one of the best places to look for signs of the changing seasons - the early birds and pale green grasses of spring have become the quiet splash of a wading heron and the deep lush greens of hazy summer. Among the events on the FBIM spring calendar were: the Annual Meeting and the Spring Clean-up.

The Annual Meeting, held on Sunday

March 11 at St. John's Episcopal Church Hall in Winthrop, surprised us all with a great turnout, as good as last year's for Dave Eatough's presentation on coyotes. Our featured speaker, Sara Grady, an expert on the horseshoe crab, gave an excellent presentation on that elusive creature. Sara, who has a Ph.D. from Boston University's Marine Program, is the South Shore Regional Coordinator for the Mass Bays National Estuary Program. Sara's field of study is horseshoe crab population ecology on Cape Cod. Sara has the rare ability to present complex scientific information without dumbing it down, in a direct and conversational manner for a lay audience, as evidenced by the lengthy and lively Q & A session after Sara's talk. This year, we revived the Photo Contest, with some terrific entrants; all of them were postcard-worthy, but Joanne McKenna of Revere won for her close-up of a thistle.

Jack Markley spotted 3 horseshoe crabs mating in the Revere side of the main channel on the bank of The Key. This is significant because horseshoe crabs only mate in very clean water!

By the time this issue of the newsletter is in your hands, the Spring Cleanup will have come and gone (April 14, 9:00 - noon) but we'll report back in our next issue on the details - nothing highlights the hard work of our volunteers like tallying the tons of trash, construction debris, tires, and the odd car engine or two that we have pulled out of the marsh over the years.

This summer, if you're in Belle Isle Park on a weekday, you may notice Geoff Wood

operating some shiny new tractors and other machinery. If you think this is a drastic change, then you would be right. After struggling for at least the past five years to maintain the park without adequate equipment, and equipment that was

constantly breaking down and being repaired the Coastal Region of the DCR is finally receiving \$75,000 worth of new, desperately needed equipment, including tractors, trail groomers, brush cutters, and a backhoe. Thanks to House Ways and Means Chairman Bob DeLeo, the 2006-2007 budget included language directing the DCR to work with the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh in using the money appropriated "to enhance the public's access to and enjoyment" of the marsh. Bob has really been our champion; we thank him again for his support and his tenacity in wrestling with the bureaucracy to deliver, once again, for Belle Isle Marsh.

The Nature of Belle Isle



Caution! Breeding Birds

by Soheil Zende

As I arrived at the park today for my weekly survey, up high and heading west was a Rough-legged Hawk, the first I've seen in many years. It is long-winged and elegant, hanging and twisting in the wind with a feather touch. There are two other records for this bird at the marsh: 29 April 1989 and 24 March 1994. Frankly, I don't know where these records came from. Maybe I saw them, but I have no memory of it, and no written record other than dates in the bird data-base I've been keeping.

Walking through the marsh, there was almost nothing to note of other wildlife. A few baby spiders are beginning to grow under the boards, the usual pile of amphipods and isopods, few ducks and only one Greater Yellowlegs. Then I started flushing snipe. They kept flushing and *kirrupping* as they twisted away low over the marsh. Finally I had flushed at least 8. That was fun.

Later on, Geoff Wood said that snipe had not been around last week and that they just seemed to have arrived. He also told me that a couple of male woodcocks display in the early morning right next to the entrance gate to the Park. He said they had stopped displaying in the last couple of days and were probably nest-building now. He is sure they breed in the Phragmites area. But how to confirm--ah, that is the question.

Tree swallows also have arrived. Half a dozen were wheeling and buzzing over the marsh. Geoff and his

assistants, including Jack and Edie, were pulling on rubber boots and going out into the *Phragmites* area to set up tree swallow nest boxes. Jack Markley helped Geoff develop a new



(Jack Markley with his Swallow Box. photo courtesy of Soheil Zende)

style of tree swallow box that keeps raccoons at bay. It has a long access tunnel, so raccoon arms cannot reach in and pluck out the babies.

Some of you may know that the Massachusetts breeding bird atlas census is starting off this year and lasts five years. Simon Perkins, field naturalist for Massachusetts Audubon, is one of the coordinators of the atlas. He is adamant that every quadrangle in the state will be covered this year, as opposed to the last census (1974 - 1979) wherein many quadrangles were not covered or not covered adequately.

In any case, the census officially started today, April 1. And I had my first probable breeders at Belle Isle Park—a pair of Mourning Doves copulating right above the walking path.

The breeding bird atlas is a series of maps of the Commonwealth

marked with each species of bird that is possibly, probably or confirmed breeding in each of approximately 970 quadrangles superimposed over the state. These terms, possible, probable and confirmed, have meanings that are defined at the outset of the project.

If you see a bird that could possibly breed in the area in your quadrangle in early spring, well, that is a possible breeder, specially if you see it several times and it is singing or displaying. For example, there were many Song Sparrows singing today at the marsh. But it is only the first of April. Song Sparrows do nest around here and it would not be far-fetched to find them nesting at the Marsh. I think at the moment it goes down a "possible" breeder at Belle Isle.

A probable breeder is one which sings persistently from the same perch or close to it for a period and who chases other males away from the territory. I think seeing a Song Sparrow singing persistently in May would elevate it to the status of probable breeder.

Confirmed breeding includes one or more of the following criteria:

- Nest-building
- Incubation
- Adult carrying food or feeding young
- Young following adult and begging

Observations of singing males or paired birds in April, May or June, or behavior cited for confirmed breeding, are generally useful but depend on the habits and peculiarities

of different species and even of different individuals. For example: American Goldfinches do not nest until August, so singing goldfinches in spring don't signify much. Or, another example: Gull and tern juveniles follow their parents and beg for several weeks, often ranging far afield, away from their nesting areas. Even in

the case of waterfowl, I watched last year as a black duck led her string of just hatched babies across Bennington Street, down the road in front of New England Casket Company, into the MBTA yard and finally under the fence into Rosie's Pond. If you arrived 10 minutes after I did, you would swear those babies had hatched at

Belle Isle. But they had not. The nest was apparently on the hill just above Suffolk Downs.

Simon and I are looking for naturalists who are patient enough to stalk breeding birds and confirm them. Are you one of those?

When the Levees Break...

The parcel of land at the center of this photo (with basketball court) is abutting Belle Isle Marsh Reservation, an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) allowed the construction of a single-family house planned with a flow-through foundation. *This was after opposition and an appeal taken by the neighborhood and the FBIM.* FBIM Vice President Gail Miller comments, "The proposed home will not even be 25 feet away from the wetland resource, and will be a tragic eyesore, so totally out of scale in the neighborhood." Coincidentally, across the street another building was allowed to progress, next to Belle Isle's ACEC. Both of these sites were, we believe, speculative real estate projects. Miller says, "The impact



(Photo by Gail Miller)

to the wetlands from this development will perhaps not be realized for quite some time. But surely giving the green light to such a project is not in the best interest of the natural resource." Inch by inch, developments such as this create negative impacts to the wetlands, and regrettably, this is happening at record speed across the country. Some cities, towns, and states, however, have been more proactive in protecting these valuable wetlands.



Cleanup Volunteers!

Students from Revere High School and Winthrop Middle School work together to help clean up the marsh. In background, FBIM members Chris Farnsworth and Erica Foley, both teachers at Winthrop Middle School.

Children's Corner

by Mary Mitchell

Poems

Belle Isle Cry

Blooming dynamic environment
communities.

These are not closed doors,
not to be abandoned,
and just wonder.

What may have been,
what they may possess.

Wind softly blows
through the marshgrass,
gingerly singing
the ecosystem
to sleep,
as quiet as the willow trees weep.

A population
of helpless wildlife
that only has
one marsh.
To keep it alive, only we can band
together.

Belle Isle:
the richest land
in Massachusetts,
near the homes of friends
and family.

Belle Isle:
Boston's utmost salt marsh
that only wants a helping hand.

Carissa Ricupero
8th grade student
Winthrop Middle School
3/11/07

Books

Deep Down Underground by Olivier Dunrea, *Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, 1989.* As I remember, my two boys could spend an entire lovely spring afternoon with a spade and a pile of dirt, just digging to see what lay below. They would have so enjoyed this delightful, cumulative counting tale. "Deep down underground 1 wee moudiewort digs and digs deep down underground." (Moudiewort is the Scottish word for mole.) As the mole moves along, ten little creatures wriggle and slither out of the way. The illustrations depict a busy underground environment filled with rocks, bones, tunnels and roots. This would be a great book to read and then head to the back yard with a spade.

Booby Hatch by Betsy Lewin, *Clarion Books, New York, 1995.*

Betsy Lewin is an accomplished watercolor painter who visited the Galapagos Islands in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Ecuador. She visited the nesting site of the Booby bird, which is on Hood Island. There she sketched the life cycle of one booby chick as he hatched from a lovely white egg and grew from a fuzzy white chick to the distinctive adult bird with bright blue feet that found a mate of his own. Her illustrations are calm and beautiful and a wonderful accompaniment to the accurate information about the booby bird and some of the other animals that are only found on the Galapagos Islands. Enjoy!

Two Terns

(William Wise)

Tess, a tern
Snapped up a flea,
And gave the prize
To Tom, her brother.
Then Tom gave Tess
His clams—all three—
For one good tern
Deserves another.



Bug Match!

Draw a line from the bug name - common and taxonomic - and the bug.

Fly (Diptera)

Tick (Acarina)

Flea (Siphonaptera)

Termite (Isoptera)

Millipede (Diplopoda)

Moth (Lepidoptera)

Praying Mantis (Mantodea)

Damsel Fly (Zygoptera)

All of these bugs live in New England. Have you seen them all? Some are large (moth) and some are very tiny (flea).



Hot Dogs! (or are they cold?)

Ron and Tracy Brigham of Northern Illusions in Warwick, Massachusetts, brought their magnificent huskies to Belle Isle Park on January 28, 2007. Sponsored by the Boston Natural Areas Network, "Mushing the Greenway" was the sixth annual event at Belle Isle Park. The Friends of Belle Isle Marsh would like to thank Dunkin Donuts, Bennington Street, Orient Heights and John Ribero, owner of Jonquille Diner, Furlong Drive, Revere for their very generous donations of coffee and hot chocolate to the more than two hundred people who attended the event.



DID YOU KNOW?

- Did you know huskies can stand temperatures as low as 78 degrees below freezing!?
- In 1925 when a Diphtheria epidemic broke out in Nome Alaska, huskies were used to bring precious, life saving medicine to the people living there. The Iditerod Dog Sled race commemorates this delivery.
- Huskies were used as transport animals on Admiral Byrd's expeditions to the South Pole.
- Huskies are sociable, loving animals that don't make good watch dogs. They are too good natured with everyone! They are also hard working, energetic and good with children.

UPCOMING EVENTS

East Boston Greenway Meetings:

July 26th and August 23rd at 6:30 PM

Contact: Candice Gomes:

phone: 617-542-7696 x16

Email: candice@bostonnatural.org

Location: YMCA-Bremen Street

215 Bremen Street, East Boston, MA 02128

Canoe Belle Isle:

Canoe Belle Isle this summer with Park Ranger Peter Luongo. Canoe experience required. Must be able to swim. Must be 12 years old or older.

>Pre-Registration Required. Call 617-727-1199 x 212 to register. See you there!

> June 3rd, June 17th - 12:30 PM

> July 14th - 11 AM

> August 12th, August 26th 10:30 AM.

Grant for Programming

The Friends of Belle Isle Marsh have been awarded a grant for programming from the East Boston-Chelsea Environmental Fund in the amount of \$12,000. Planned events include a free viewing of "An Inconvenient Truth" in June, and a one-day children's workshop in the marsh in July. Please look for mailers and fliers, and check our website for updated information on these events and more.

2007 Belle Isle Marsh Dawn Heron Censuses

This is the 27th year of Belle Isle heron censuses. Our primary focus has been on "southern herons" (Snowy and Great egrets and Glossy Ibis) as they come in to feed at the marsh when high tide and sunrise occur fairly close together. The meeting place remains the Sireen Reinstein Memorial Boardwalk at the southeast corner of Belle Isle Park, parking on Bennington Street, across the street from Suffolk Downs T station. To participate, just appear at the meeting place a half-hour before sunrise. For more information, call Soheil Zendeheh 783-863-2392.

Friends of Belle Isle Marsh (FBIM) is a volunteer organization dedicated to the preservation of this marsh. We believe that protection ultimately depends on public awareness of the value and beauty of this natural resource. Our focus, therefore, is mainly educational.

To join: Send dues to our post office box: \$15 (Family), \$10 (Individual), and \$5 (Seniors/Under 16). FBIM is a registered non-profit corporation; contributions are tax-deductible. Thank you for your continued support.

For extra newsletters to share or leave on magazine tables at your hairdresser, lodge, or boat club, etc., please call 617-846-8298.

This issue was produced by Laurie Sigmund and Dani Foley. Thanks to contributors Barbara Bishop, Gail Miller, Mary Mitchell, Liz Regan and Soheil Zendeheh.

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