



Belle Isle News

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SAVE THE DATES!

* Annual Meeting
Sunday, March 9th
1:00 - 3:00 pm

*Clean Up
Saturday, April 12th
9:00 am - 12:00 pm

President's Notes

With the busiest season in the FBIM's calendar over, we're breathing a collective sigh of relief at the successful conclusion of two major events: one an old favorite and an annual event – the Harvest Festival – and one a new event for us, Art in Na-

nure, a children's art workshop in Belle Isle.

The Harvest Festival, held on September 29, saw glorious Indian summer weather and our largest turnout ever. (People, not butterflies: the Monarchs were MIA that Sunday – too cold?)

Mindful of the old saying about pictures and words, I won't spend 1,000 words, but instead refer you to the photo layout on page 4 for snapshots of the day. The Art in Nature workshop, on October 14, was something of an experiment for us. We are very aware of the fact that Belle Isle Marsh will not survive unless there is a next generation of people in the community to follow in the footsteps of those who love, enjoy and protect the marsh. So we are always looking for opportunities

to reach out to that next generation and grab those "teachable moments." Hence the idea for a children's event in Belle Isle Marsh, co-sponsored with DCR, that would go beyond entertainment to provide a real encounter with nature.

FBIM presented a three-hour program that combined a meadow walk with DCR ranger Matt Nash, a trek through the marsh and its creeks with DCR site supervisor Geoff Wood, and creek-side presenta-



Richard Honan, grandson Christopher and Rugs Honan canoe through the marsh

tion by FBIM volunteer Jack Markley of Beachmont. Then children and their parents were invited to translate their experiences onto paper, as artist Cindy Snodgrass led the group in exploring the use of paint, carved stamps of fish, frogs and snakes, natural materials and collaged photographs, to create a finished work on paper. That all sounds much more solemn and organized than it actually was – children, parents, artists and

(Continued on page 7)

The Nature of Belle Isle



Ospreys are Here!

by Soheil Zende

This breeding season we finally confirmed that Osprey not only nest at Belle Isle, but actually raise and fledge their young. Here are my notes on the events as they unfolded, plus a few other observations.

July 22

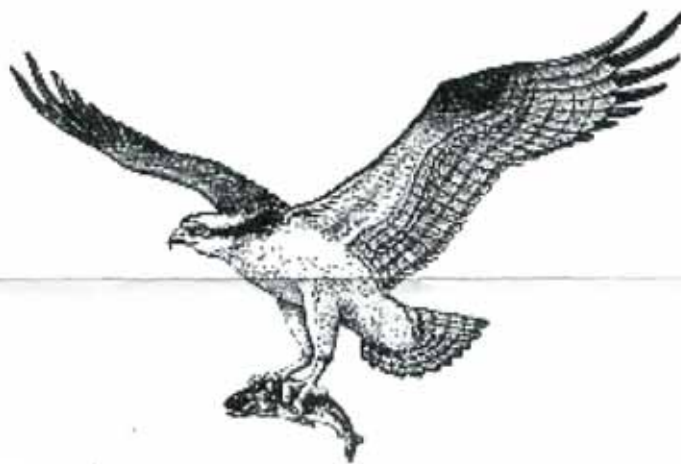
What happened today was best described by Joe Pike. I had called his home and explained to Renee that I was at that moment watching an adult Osprey feeding a baby on the nest platform by the T yard. Joe called back about an hour later and said that he rushed over to the T yard to witness the "blessed event."

We put up the first Osprey pole in the Marsh in March of 1985. Within a month, that pole had been snapped and toppled into the Marsh—presumably by vandals. Within a couple of years another, sturdier pole was erected by the MBTA next to their property at the Orient Heights repair yard. Over the many subsequent years, we noticed barely any interest in that pole from passing Ospreys. Sometimes, in winter, a Snowy Owl would perch there.

One year, we thought perhaps the Ospreys needed an enticement in the form of a rudimentary nest. Conal Foley climbed up the pole—can you imagine!—and threw sticks and branches up there. Nothing helped.

Meanwhile, Ospreys increased at

a rapid rate along the south New England coast, Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. The population in the Parker River marshes (Newburyport) also began increasing. Soon, there were successful nesting pairs at Squantum (Muswetuset Hummock) and Rumney Marsh (Oak Island). The Oak Island birds started nesting and producing young 11 years ago.



Last year, for the first time, Ospreys attempted nesting at the Belle Isle platform. I didn't say "a pair of Ospreys attempted nesting" for a reason: There were three of them. Geoff Wood says two were males because they each tried to copulate with the same, presumed, female. Whether either succeeded or not we could not be sure, but so far as I know, no young were ever seen in the nest last year. I thought an adult was feeding young at one point, but I never actually saw the young. I assumed then that they were play-acting, but there is a chance that the young hatched but never got to a size where they could be seen from below. In any case, it is almost certain

that no young fledged from this nest last year.

This year, everything was back to normal: The usual contingent of 3 Ospreys, lots of courting and screaming and flying about and a long bout of incubation. June came and went. Much of July went by. At Rumney Marsh, on July 1, I saw half-grown chicks in the nest. But nothing seemed to be happening to "our"

birds at Belle Isle. Last week I thought I saw that same "fake" feeding behavior that the adult displayed last year. I simply assumed that if there were young in the nest, they should be very visible by July 15. They were not.

Today, I rushed over to the marsh, late for the heron census. Arriving at 7, I routinely put the scope on the Osprey nest, just to check on it—and there was a chick with an adult. Another adult was sitting on a pole a little distance away.

It's been a long time since anything happening at the Marsh excited me quite so much. To dream of something for 21 years and then just have it unfold in front of me—it's a "blessed event" indeed.

I tried calling local folks whose cell numbers I had. I only got hold of a few, but most went over there right away and checked on the babies. I say babies (plural): After spending almost an hour watching the nest with the scope I finally saw a second

chick tottering around the nest. This one looked considerably smaller than the first one I saw. In the 2 - 2½ hours that I watched, one parent or another brought two fish to the nest.

August 26

Relief! I now know that at least one of the Ospreys that fledged here is still alive. It lands on the platform, terrorizes the shorebirds and generally is looking very much at home. Initially, I thought it was an adult. It certainly is full-sized, flies about normally and, at first glance, has the characteristic Osprey black-and-white plumage. But a close look with telescope made it obvious that, rather than the adult's clean blackish-brown on the wings and mantle, this bird has rows of fine speckles, giving it a faintly checkered appearance. There were no other Ospreys around today than this individual. Think of it as a toddler!

Today, I met up with Belle Isle old-timer Father Richard Cressman. Rich was a priest in East Boston and birded Belle Isle a decade or more ago. Many of his observations form the basis for the current Reservation bird list. He was the first to document Acadian Flycatcher for the Park, and the first to confirm that Baltimore Orioles nested in the trees around the parking lot. Rich, of the Silesian Order of priests and educators, was transferred to Columbus, Ohio, about 5 years ago, but has stayed in touch throughout and finally, when he was in town for a few days, we managed to meet up for some hours of birding today. I pointed out Western Sandpipers to him and he pointed out that cottonwood trees are sap-laden and attract flying swarms of insects. Last year I had seen Cedar Waxwings flycatching through an insect swarm near the top of this very cottonwood. This year, a host of Tree Swallows appeared out of nowhere and began buzzing around

the same tree. I wasn't close enough, this time, to see the insect swarm, but the event had the unmistakable flavor of a tree swallow feeding frenzy.

Very early in the morning, before I met Rich, I nearly blundered into a widely set spider web when walking along the Geoff Wood Trail. At first I kept searching for the spider in the middle of the web suspended above the path, but there was no sign of it there. Then I found it, on the side of the path, attached to a juicy-looking pupa. This looked like the chrysalis of a relatively large moth or butterfly, though I need help figuring out what species. But in any case this particular individual will not be leaving that chrysalis. The spider, which looked to me like a variety of garden spider with its striped and hairy legs, was happily sucking it dry. Somehow, I never thought of a moth or butterfly chrysalis as spider food, but it is so logical! If you are a spider and you can find one of these, you're in heaven. After all, the thing is already wrapped in silk, ready for your delectation. What a deal!

September 23

The oddest thing I found today was non-avian. It wasn't even a life form, but certainly gave evidence of life. As we approached the Boardwalk from the marsh, I noticed a small pile of bricks and rocks on top of a plastic container. I lifted them off and opened the container, which contained an assortment of objects such as nail clipper, good luck charm in the form of a monkey, a playing card, a pen, and a ziplock bag with a small notebook. I opened the notebook and it appeared to contain dated log entries starting around the beginning of July 2007. There was also a printed sheet in the bag explaining the purpose of the box and its contents.

The item I found is apparently part of a game (hence my assertion that it was evidence of life). Geocaching players hide container like this at various places and leave clues to their whereabouts at the web site www.geocaching.com. The main clue is a set of GPS coordinates. Anyone with a GPS unit can then attempt to find the item. The rules are that you may take something from the box but then must leave something else in exchange. As the box was quite small (about 6 x 6 inches, and 2 inches tall, one of the smaller-size ziplock food storage containers) there isn't a whole lot of room to leave items or exchange gifts.

I found the box totally by accident, of course. Immediately and for a moment I had an odd sense of disconnect. Belle Isle was no longer Belle Isle—my Belle Isle, where I have spent so much time over the past 30 years. It was all of a sudden part of the globe. It was located on someone's global positioning system map and device, seemingly without any reference to its history or the people who go there or the wildlife there.

But of course, that perception changed as soon as I looked in the logbook. There, people who had come to discover hidden treasure had obviously also discovered Belle Isle. Delight and wonder at the place came through on the notes people had made. It was simple stuff. "Nice place," said one. "Glad I found it." Indeed. I'm glad I found it!

OSPREY FACT!!

The osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) is a large raptor that feeds exclusively on live fish. They can be found on every continent except Antarctica!

Harvest Fest!

September 29, 2007



Left - Rick Roth of Cape Ann Vernal Pool Association with his traveling exhibit: The Snakes of Massachusetts and the World. Right - Musical group Made in the Shade. Front man Mike Peipman is playing the digreee doo, an Australian instrument.



left -Visiting the New England Aquarium Tidepool Exhibit.



left -Pumpkin decorating

Art in Nature Workshop!

October 14, 2007



Cindy Snodgrass, far left, poses with some volunteers and participants.



Young artists use various media to express their vision.

Below: Cindy Snodgrass and park ranger Matt Nash. Right: Suzanne Ryan and Daniel Sigmund



Geoff Wood leads a nature walk - in search of artistic inspiration

Bob Sheppard

by Richard Honan

After Bob had passed away on June 30th, 2007, I pondered what I might say about one of my best friends. What was he to me? Maybe a story about an experience that we shared. The idea of using the dictionary popped into my head. And there it was, on page 238, of the Webster's dictionary, "friend" : pal, schoolmate, companion, brother, buddy and classmate. Bob and I had been all of those and more, he was someone who would share the last of his Kelly's onion rings or french fries, someone who on a hot day would give you one of their last two icy cold Bud Lites. I know as a friend he would have warned me about the ill effects of drinking Mudslides. I guess we could have been brothers . I don't know if he would have been a Honan or I would have been a Sheppard. I guess we'll have to save that debate for another time.



Then I remembered reading the story in this month's CPYC Windjammer. Sue Hardy and I wrote about sailing and exploring the waterways and marshes of the Belle Isle Creek. It reminded me of the first time that I had attempted that journey up Belle Isle Creek. On a late summer day, about three years ago, Bob and I had launched two of my newly built 8'00" Nutshell sailing prams and sailed from the Cottage Park Yacht Club, along Court Road down to the Belle Isle Bridge. I'll tell you, in Bobby's C&C 34 sailboat, we had sailed much more dangerous journeys, with high winds and large seas, but this trip had "special adventure" written all over it.

For as long as we had lived in neighboring Winthrop, we had never explored this little part of our world. Sometimes it's amazing what catches the fancy of two grown men. It was like we were children again, like Tom Sawyer and Huck

Finn off to exploring the wilds of Belle Isle Marsh. We sailed to the bridge where we dropped our sails and masts. From there we allowed the incoming tide to carry us under the bridge and into the marsh, where we raised our sails again to continue our adventure.

We sailed most of the afternoon meandering small channels, finally making it all the way up to Bennington Street. We then turned around and sailed back to the Beachmont Yacht Club. We dropped our sails and walked up the gangway to the small bar that sat overlooking the marsh, where we sat celebrated our epic journey and shared a couple of cold Bud Lites.

From the raised deck of the club house, we sat there and savored the day and enjoyed our beers. We could look out toward the Belle Isle Bridge and see Winthrop and

retrace our travels. Now as I sit here and treasure the moments that made that day so special. I now look back and again retrace the journey of not only that day, but of all of the good times I shared with Bob. I know that I am one lucky guy to have had a friend like him.

A couple of weeks ago, I launched and Christened two new boats with the help of Father Don Milligan of Saint John's Episcopal Church. He read a little verse that I liked very much. I had included this verse in a short note that I sent to Bob and Janis just before he passed away.

There are sailing ships, wood ships and ships that sail the sea, but the best ships are friend ships, may they always be.

Richard D. Honan

CHILDREN'S CORNER

Snowflakes are swirling though the grey sky for the first time this season. And as with each year, I am so excited to see the large fluffy crystals blowing and twirling and landing softly on the grass. By February I get tired of this scene like every adult, but right now, today, I am transported back to my childhood. I loved walking down the farm road on a snowy afternoon. I loved to look at the snow on the roof of the barn next door and on the two huge pine trees that stood at either side of the doors. I really loved riding my sled down the neighborhood hill, but especially on a snowy afternoon. With winter coming I have picked two lovely Caldecott Medal books to review. I hope that you can cuddle up on a snowy afternoon with a special little one and enjoy these great stories.

Snowflake Bentley, *Jacqueline Briggs Martin, illustrated by Mary Azarian, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1998.*

Snowflake Bentley is a Caldecott Medal winner and is a beautifully written and illustrated biography of an inspiring Vermont resident who lived in the early 1800s. Young William Bentley loved all forms of nature, but was very passionate about observing snowflakes that fell around his home and surrounding farmlands. As a child Willie studied these icy crystals under a microscope. He would then draw the beauti-



ful shapes. He found that most snowflakes have six points and that no two snowflakes are the same. When Willie was seventeen, his parents gave him a powerful camera so he could photograph snowflakes. Many of his photos are still enjoyed today and can be found in his book called *Snow Crystal*. Mary Azarian's beautiful woodblock prints are lovely and give the reader a feeling of the era of William Bentley life. Some pages have snowflake decorated borders that also include additional facts for the older reader or for the adult that might be inspired to augment the information for young listeners.

The Snowy Day, *Ezra Jack Keats, Viking Press, New York, 1962.*

The *Snowy Day* was awarded the 1963 Caldecott Medal for the Most Distinguished Picture Book of the Year. And in my opinion, it would qualify for such an award forty-three years later. It has simple, colorful, collage and ink drawings that depict the joys of a snowy day through the eyes of a young child, Peter. The story line, of course, follows the illustrations perfectly. "Crunch, crunch, crunch, his feet sank into the snow. He walked with his toes pointing out, like this: He walked with his toes pointing in, like that:" Peter goes about a leisurely morning in his neighborhood, enjoying the wonders of the first snowfall as millions of young boys and girls have through all time. This is a great book to read to young children, but I guarantee the reader will enjoy it as much as a child!

CHILDREN'S CORNER

Make your own edible crystals:

What You Need:

1 ½ cups of sugar	Food coloring
½ cup boiling water	A clean piece of string
A spoon for stirring	A pencil
An empty cup	A clean paper clip

What to Do:

Bring the water to a boil in a pan. Remove the pan from the heat. Add the sugar to the boiling water and stir until dissolved. Pour the solution into the cup. (A pyrex measuring cup works well.) Stir in 3 drops of food coloring. Tie one end of a piece of string around the center of the pencil. Tie the other end to the paper clip. Place the pencil across the top of the cup so that the string and paper clip dangle in the water. Set aside for a few days, but check it daily. Don't touch or shake!

Your colorful crystals can now be eaten. Yum! If you liked this experiment go to the library and check out the book, **Crystals and Crystal Gardens You Can Grow**, by Jean Stancl, Franklin Watts, New York, 1990.

President's Notes

(Continued from page 1)

helpers milled around for a couple of hours happily swapping scissors, glue, brushes, a rainbow of paints, and each others' work, so that each piece ended up as a group effort. Cindy Snodgrass, formerly artist-in-residence at MIT, focuses her work on environmental themes, particularly the idea of water as a scarce and finite resource; in working with the children, she encouraged them to explore the idea of water both as subject matter and as a medium – and to think of the connections between the water they were looking at and painting, the water they were painting with, and the cups of water they were drinking from. For a sampling of the artwork produced that day, check out the back of the glass-encased bulletin board alongside the parking lot at Belle Isle Park; the DCR has put three of the masterpieces on display, by Excel Academy students. And speaking of reaching out to the next generation, we are very pleased to be working with the very patient, good-natured, and Excellent student volunteers from Excel Academy of East Boston, who staffed both the Harvest Festival and the Art in Nature workshop. Thanks to Excel's principal, Scott Given,

and Director of Resource Development Katie Dankleff. And, finally, a huge thank you to our donors and sponsors, who made these events possible: to the East Boston – Chelsea Environmental Fund, whose \$12,000 grant funded our 2007 programming, to Clean Harbors Inc. (and its CEO, former MDC Commissioner Bill Geary), to the East Boston Foundation – a longtime supporter, to East Boston Savings Bank for its continued support, and to Marc Wallerice and Winthrop Marketplace for the generous donation of pumpkins and apples for the Harvest Festival.

Lyn

UPCOMING EVENTS

CAN YOU CANOE?

FBIM has received upgraded canoeing and paddling equipment, which was donated by Boston Natural Areas Network. The donation included 6 Old Towne Canadian-style canoes for use at Belle Isle. Ranger Geoff Wood is storing them with the new trailer purchased by the DCR.

FBIM congratulates Susannah Corona, member and NE Aquarium assistant curator, for the honor of having an organism named after her. Susannah discovered the microscopic, sightless mollusk now called the *Phreatodrobia corona* while working as a park ranger in Texas in 1984.

* Saturday, March 29, 2008: 9am - 11am Explore Belle Isle Reedbed by canoe. Help the park ranger install a tree swallow box. Preregistration required. 617.727.5350

* Sunday, March 9, Annual Meeting, 1-3pm at St. John's Episcopal Church Hall on Bowdoin St. in Winthrop. Guest speaker TBA. Please remember your membership dues at that time, or use the dues envelope included in this newsletter.

* Saturday, April 12, 9am - 12pm, Belle Isle Clean-Up. Meet at the Rite Aid parking lot on Saratoga Street in East Boston.

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.

www.friendsofbelleislemarsh.org

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