

## EVENTS

Programs listed below are free and open to the public. Sponsors include Boston Natural Areas Network (BNAN), Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and Friends of Belle Isle Marsh (FBIM).



### **Endangered species forum:**

**Monday, March 9.** Learn about Piping Plovers, Least Terns, American Oystercatchers and other endangered or threatened species nesting on Revere and Winthrop Beaches. Check FBIM website [www.friendsofbelleislemarsh.org](http://www.friendsofbelleislemarsh.org) for place and time.

**Annual Meeting, Friends of Belle Isle Marsh: Sunday, March 15.** See page 6 for details.



### **Early spring bird walk:**

**Saturday, March 28, 9 AM to NOON at Belle Isle Park.** Led by DCR Park Supervisor Geoff Wood. Free and open to the public. Bring binoculars or call BNAN at 617-542-7696 to reserve a pair. Field trip reservations not required.



### **Reed Bed Exploration:**

**Saturday, April 11, 10 AM at Belle Isle Marsh.** Led by DCR Park Supervisor Geoff Wood. Canoe trip. Reservations required. Call DCR at 617-727-5350 or write [matthew.nash@state.ma.us](mailto:matthew.nash@state.ma.us).



### **Spring hawk watching at Belle**

**Isle Park: Sundays starting March 29, 8 AM at Siren Reinstein Boardwalk.** Led by Soheil Zende. Call leader at 617-763-5637 to make sure hawk watch is on.

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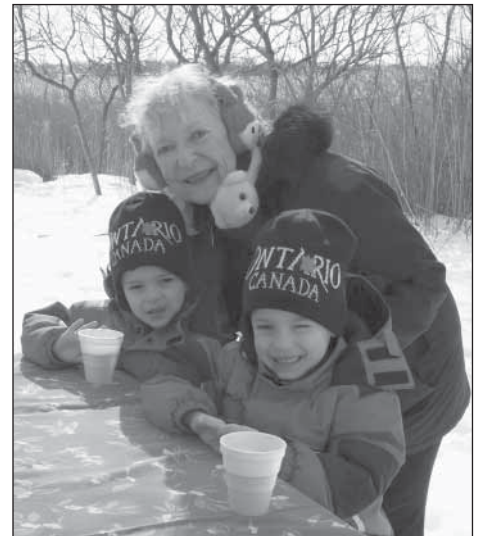
**Annual Meeting** 📅 March 15  
for details, see page 6

# Belle Isle News

Published by Friends of Belle Isle Marsh  
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## Mushing the Greenway

Boston Natural Areas Network sponsored Mushing the Greenway on February 1<sup>st</sup>. Northern Exposure Outfitters and their trained sled dogs gave visitors rides in the snow. Photos by Barbara Bishop and Soheil Zende.



# THE CHILDREN'S CORNER

## Earth Day: April 18

I remember the first Earth Day. I was a senior in high school and quite involved with a nature club at school. I can't remember everything we did that day, but I remember making signs about the need for clean air and water. At the time the Connecticut River was polluted and salmon were no longer swimming in its waters. We were also concerned about littering.

Today's young children are so much more knowledgeable about the need to protect our earth. In my kindergarten class, we recycle bottles and paper. We have a program to recycle coats and a book swap program. Each year the kindergarten classes organize a playground clean-up to celebrate Earth Day. They are excited about wind turbines and they see the need to save the whales. I have great hope for the future, for when these little ones grow up they are going to demand more!

*Let's Celebrate Earth Day* by Connie and Peter Roop, illustrated by Gwen Connelly, The Millbrook Press, Brookfield, CT 06804, 2001.

The first Earth Day was celebrated on April 22, 1970. Senator Gaylord Nelson from Wisconsin felt the best way to save our planet was to teach people how to preserve and protect our earth and all that inhabit it. Gaylord Nelson was concerned and wanted to be part of the solution. So he invented Earth Day! Did it have an impact? Well in 1970 the first Clean Air Act was passed into law. In 1972 the Clean Water Act passed, followed by the Endangered Species Act in 1973. All of these laws have helped our planet. Read on in this book and find riddles, information about endangered species and invasive plants and animals. There is information about recycling and renewable energies. There is even a composting project that young children might enjoy. It asks them to recycle their lunches.

*Where Does The Garbage Go?* by Paul Showers, illustrated by Randy Chewning, Harper Collins Publishers, revised edition in 1994.

This child-friendly book takes a child through the history of garbage removal. It talks about how we used to just throw everything into the garbage cans and away it would go. But where was that? To the ocean? To dumps? The book continues with a visit to a modern landfill. It shows a pie graph of what kinds of things make up the garbage in a typical landfill. Did you know that half of a landfill is filled with paper products? The reader is then challenged to recycle.

*Every Day is Earth Day* by Kathy Ross, illustrated by Sharon Lane Holm, Millbrook Press, Brookfield, CT 06804, 1995.

There are many fun craft ideas included in this book that children may want to do on Earth Day or any day.

*Mary Mitchell*

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Attendance at winter activities at Belle Isle Park and our local beaches has been excellent. Thanks to Valerie Burns and Candice Cook of Boston Natural Areas Network (BNAN). They organized Mushing the Greenway, Belle Isle's premier winter event which was enjoyed by several hundred people. Also, thanks to Geoff Wood and Matt Nash for offering outstanding winter programs, including winter wildlife tracking, nature photography and their new program, Español Expreso.

We are sponsoring three Monday Night Forums this winter and spring on urban coyotes, endangered species and climate change. See the Events listings in this issue and on our website [www.friendsofbelleislemarsh.org](http://www.friendsofbelleislemarsh.org). Our events are free and open to the public.

Winter can be a beautiful time of year for outdoor enthusiasts, but this winter's economic downturn is changing the reality for many local people. Thousands of people have already lost their jobs and others grimly await the bad economic news. Cities and towns and the state are all in the same situation—revenue is down, services are down. The number of families in need of food and fuel assistance is rising sharply. Families that are looking for free entertainment can enjoy our parks and beaches. Take a winter nature walk at Belle Isle or on the beach. Cross country ski at Belle Isle Park. Sit or stand perfectly still and you'll see sights and hear sounds that you've never heard before. George Cumming's website [www.georgemacumming.com](http://www.georgemacumming.com) is one

of my favorite places to see, through his eyes, what a magnificent park we have right here in our community.

One simple step we can all take to save money and save resources is to winterize our homes or apartments. Weather-stripping can help, following manufacturer's directions for maintaining your furnace can also help, and turning down the thermostat a degree or two can save you money. In the "old days," refrigerators were the largest consumers of electricity in homes, but now the prize goes to large screen televisions. Your video equipment even uses juice when it's not turned on. You can save energy by simply plugging your equipment into a power strip and turning the power strip off when the equipment is not in use.

*Continued next page*

## CORRESPONDENCE

*In response to the The Nature of Belle Isle column on climate change (see Belle Isle News December 2008), a reader writes:*

Mr Zende, Using the lack of ice at the marsh, or a very hot or very cold day as examples of global warming is cherry picking. You are only fooling yourself and the people around you. Even as you use these events as examples, other parts of the US or the world experience temperatures that cancel out your observations.

With that said, I commend you on bringing up a subject of such importance. The fact is that there is only a 10% chance humans are *not* responsible for climate change.

The temperature rise from 1850 to about 1975 is considered the effect of natural climate change. Temperature rise from 1975 to the present is where humans come into play, 1998 being the warmest year on record. Average global temperatures have not gone up since 1998. Does this mean there is no problem? Of course not! But using hype to promote conservation can cause a Chicken Little syndrome. If you

exaggerate the problem and people find out the facts, that discredits all the work you have done to educate them.

If US residents cut back to greenhouse gas amounts of 1990, we would only delay global warming by 3 years. We are not the problem we once were. This does not mean we shouldn't conserve. I do, and feel everyone should do what they can. At this time Americans are still responsible for 25% of the CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere whereas our population is only 4% of the total global population. The real future problem is developing nations. We have set a very high standard of living and countries with growing economies strive to reach it. Nations like China and India are growing rapidly yet lack the money to do so in a clean way. China alone is building 1 coal burning power plant a week to keep up with energy demands.

These nations cannot afford clean technology or clean power. This is where we come in. We have to set the example, even if we won't make a huge difference in total greenhouse gases. We as a nation, being overall wealthy, can invest and develop technology everyone

will benefit from. Whether it is wind, solar or clean coal power plants, we can afford to be green as a nation.

If you want to make a difference, don't look into solar panels or geothermal heat. I say conserve: the best way to save energy is to *not use it*. For example, use compact fluorescent light bulbs which consume 75% less energy than standard tungsten wire bulbs. Open your shades and turn your lights off. Over-insulate your home to lower heating costs. Walk or ride a bike if you can.

Thanks again for the informative article and I encourage you to continue to spread the word.

**Nick Czerula**

*Soheil Zende replies: As Mr Czerula warns correctly, this winter's extreme cold weather and heavy snowfall in New England has made hash of all talk of global warming. But the fundamental facts of global climate change, which includes extremes of weather patterns and rising average temperatures, remain. Look for the FBIM climate change Monday Night Forum, time and place to be announced on the FBIM website.*

## President's Report *(continued)*

**O**ur new Endangered Species Fund will help fund a new Osprey platform. Thanks to Geoff Wood, Belle Isle Marsh's DCR Site Supervisor, and Jack Markley who are planning to construct new homes for our resident Ospreys. If you would like to contribute to the fund, bring your donation to the Annual Meeting (see page 6), or send it to our mailing address and thanks for your support.



**T**he former Viking Oil Company at 120 Banks Street in Winthrop still has one abandoned oil truck on site. Winthrop Fire Captain Ned Hazlett assures us it will be removed by the owner of the property.

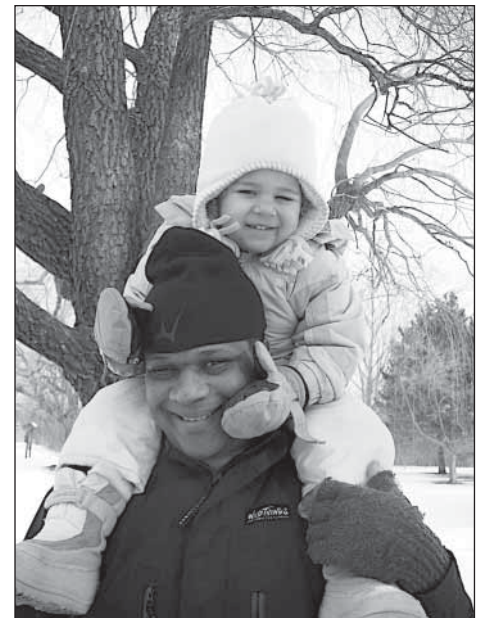
As of press time, DCR's Short Beach

restoration plans are still on track. That plan includes replacing the crumbling sea wall and creating a stone dust path on the former Zoppo property. Funding for some DCR projects may come from the Federal Economic Stimulus package.



**W**e are happy to announce a new member of the FBIM family. Board member Erica Foley and her husband Chris Farnsworth welcomed Eloise (Ellie) Hudson Farnsworth to the world on January. Ellie joins her cousins Cormac and Fiona MacPhail as youth members of FBIM. Congratulations.

**Barbara Bishop**  
**President**  
**Friends of Belle Isle Marsh**



*Photo by Candice Cook*  
**Enjoying a snowy day at Belle Isle Park**



## Belle Isle Sounds

I recently became a guitar. I was walking on the flats between the Overlook and the Boardwalk and like most members of my curious tribe, I was festooned. Yes, I had a garland of straps around my neck: binoculars, camera and two small bags containing bird seed and other goodies, all of this hanging around my upper body. I had my back to the wind and all of a sudden a deep thrumming sounded through me. The wind was literally plucking the various straps and my back had become a sounding board. It was a strange visceral experience.



Early at dawn, I stood on the Boardwalk when nearly fifty herons and ibis dropped in. At first there was the unexpected sound of so many wings close by and then the cacophony of these social birds, bickering and sounding off. Usually you never get this close and so the noise was pure surprise.



One summer morning, I was hoping to see a heron or two from the Boardwalk. Two guys started talking and I turned to shush them but no one was there.

I looked all over. I even walked back to the park to find the noisy pair but still no one was there. I returned

to the end of the Boardwalk, looking for herons once again but still those two guys kept up their inane conversation.

Finally, with binoculars, I spotted them nearly 800 yards away working at some job in the Winthrop cemetery. It was a shock because I could clearly hear them as if they were beside me.



Another spring day, I listened to a very loud chicken banging around in a stand of *Phragmites*. It was amazing because surely there couldn't be any domestic fowl in the marsh. I slowly edged around the stand and there he was.

A male pheasant in all his glory was getting his news out to all the receptive female pheasants in a one mile area.



I was walking along the path to the Overlook when a strange celestial sound descended upon my ears. There were no birds, no traffic, just empty sky. It wasn't the music of the spheres but wing tip vortices. A plane had passed by three minutes before and landed but it was air coiled up tightly in the plane's wake that made the otherworldly whooshing.



Photo by George Cumming

*The sound of a heron landing*

Again out on the path to the Overlook, a very angry Black-crowned Night-Heron scolded me for disturbing its rest. I actually looked for a place to hide. That was a seriously angry bird.



Another warm July day by Palermo St. I was looking across the south flats. I was startled by a very protective Osprey. It repeatedly buzzed me while loudly challenging my presence. The platform is nearly 400 yards away at that point but I was clearly too close.



In the marsh there's always the noise of the city, cars, planes, trains, fog horns and public announcements from the T and Suffolk Downs. Sometimes though, after a snow storm or at 4:30 on an August morning, there's nothing to hear but soft grass swaying or snow flakes dropping.

*George Cumming*

George Cumming's blog **OrientSee** is at <http://www.georgemacumming.com/>.

## The Nature of Belle Isle



### Spring Hawk Watching

The dreaded east wind! Once it kicks up at the coast, it's the kiss of death for hawk watching.

I began hawk watches at Belle Isle in the 1980s. I had no idea whether this was a hawk migration corridor or not, but I figured that since I spent a lot of time there anyway, I might as well keep an eye on the sky and see what was passing. And plenty passed—usually in the spring, occasionally in the fall. One spring, in 1983, an American White Pelican flew over!

Hawk watchers are primarily interested in migrating hawks. Usually, hawks are highly dispersed over an area—they have to spread out in order to find adequate forage. But during migration seasons it is possible to see many more hawks at one time and place. Often hawks follow each other across the sky because the conditions—wind and thermals—that one hawk follows are attractive to others as well. So if you pick your day and your hour, you might see a stream of hawks going by. I've had days like that at Belle Isle. On May 5, 1991 I saw 68 Sharp-shinned Hawks stream across the sky at Belle Isle. There were other great days too back then: 50 on May 4, 1986; 28 on May 2, 1987; 49 on April 26, 1988; and 43 on April 29, 1989. Also, on April 26, 1988: 46 Broadwinged Hawks.

I've had fewer big flight days like those since the early 1990s. Maybe that is because for a few years I spent less time at the Marsh. But there are other factors too. The Broadwinged Hawk

flight I observed in 1988 is quite rare on the coast. Broadwings are usually arboreal birds that stay inland and migrate inland. Sharp-shins are coastal migrants, however, especially juveniles. But the population of Sharp-shins has crashed sharply in the past decade; by contrast, Cooper's Hawk populations are way up.

Also, Peregrine numbers are way up but American Kestrels are way down.



As a result of these changes in raptor populations, it is possible to hawk watch at Belle Isle regularly through several springs and several falls and not see any sort of steady movement of hawks. But it is also possible to have several Peregrine and Cooper's Hawk sightings in a few hours. One day, last fall, I saw three species of falcon (Peregrine, Merlin, American Kestrel) perched in the big cottonwood to the south of the park, glaring at each other.

Here is a spring hawk movement pattern I noticed many years ago:

I arrived at Belle Isle Park early on a warm May morning. Being somewhat drowsy, partly from the heat and partly because I had been up since 5 AM chasing migrating warblers at Mt Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, I lay down on the grassy meadow for a brief snooze. After a while, a slight breeze disturbed me and I opened my eyes and watched a Sharp-shinned Hawk move across above me from southeast to northwest—away from the Winthrop shore and inland toward Chelsea and



Photo by Soheil Zende

Juvenile Red-tailed Hawk

Revere. As I watched it disappear over my right shoulder, I realized another one was following it. Within a few minutes, 20 Sharpies flew over me on exactly the same path. As I got up to watch this flight, I noticed that it was no longer a warm morning. An increasingly stiff east breeze had kicked up, plunging temperatures by 5° or more.

The flight of Sharpies ceased abruptly, more or less the way it had started. I watched for a long time but nothing else came over, as the day grew chillier.

Any resident of these coastal communities knows about the sea-breeze. It kicks up in the morning, sometimes as early as 10 am, and almost immediately turns a balmy morning into a chilly (or "brisk") day. In the summer it's a god-send, but in the spring it can be a damned nuisance.

Here is how I conjecture it affects hawk movement in our area. On a balmy spring morning, the wind in New England is usually out of the southwest. Hawks ride this across southern New England until they hit the South Shore coast, perhaps around Scituate or Cohasset. Then they head north and northeast along the coast.

Arriving at edge of the metropolitan area along the south shore, a hawk is likely to fly along the Nantasket and Hull peninsula until it can hopscotch along the Harbor Islands and either hit land again at Deer Island in Winthrop or at Nahant. Then it heads northeast again. However, if the wind shift to the east catches it just as it is crossing the Harbor, it immediately loses interest in flying into that cold wind and heads west or northwest to get away from the coast. Thus comes about that flight path over Belle Isle, leading the birds away from Winthrop shore and into inland Revere or even further inland.

Let's see if we can find those east breeze beaters this spring.

**Soheil Zende**

*Informal spring hawk watching at Belle Isle begins on Sunday, March 29. See the Events listings on page 1.*

Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

# Annual Meeting



**Sunday, March 15, 2 - 4 PM**  
**St John's Episcopal Church Hall**  
**222 Bowdoin St., Winthrop, MA**

Guest speaker:

**Matt Ayer, aquatic biologist**

*Matt will talk about smelt restoration project  
in our waterways.*

*Also at the Annual Meeting:*

**Annual elections for Board of Directors and Committee Chairs**

**Social hour**

**Refreshments**

*This event is free and open to the public.*

Friends of Belle Isle Marsh (FBIM)  
membership dues:

- Family \$15
- Individual \$8
- Seniors and Youth (under 16) \$5

*FBIM is a registered nonprofit corporation;  
contributions are tax-deductible. Thank  
you for your continued support.*

*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.*

*For extra newsletters to share or leave on  
tables at your coffee shop, public library  
or boat club, etc., call 617-567-5072 or  
email:*

[friendsofbelleislemarsh@comcast.net](mailto:friendsofbelleislemarsh@comcast.net)

*Our web address:*

<http://www.friendsofbelleislemarsh.org>

*This issue was produced by Soheil Zende  
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Gail Miller and Christine Zende.*

SZ09

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