

## EVENTS

All programs are free and open to the public:



**TASL Harbor bird census.**

Sunday, January 9, 8 AM - NOON.

Call leader for details: 781-863-2392.



**Oceanside campfire, Revere Beach.** Saturday, January 15, 6 - 8 PM. Meet at: 410 Revere Beach Boulevard, across from Kelly's Roast Beef.

**Español expreso** (Spanish for English speakers). Saturdays, February 5, 19 and March 5 11 AM - 1 PM. Call 781-485-2804 ext. 105 or email Matthew. Nash@state.ma.us to preregister.



**TASL Harbor bird census.**

Sunday, February 6, 8 AM - NOON.

Call leader for details: 781-863-2392.

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# Belle Isle News

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## Harvest Festival more photos on page 4



Photo by Barbara Bishop

Touch tank creatures courtesy of Salem State University



### John Kilmartin, Friend of the Marsh (5 August 1930 - 9 September 2010)

*In September Friends of Belle Isle Marsh lost one of our original and most community-conscious members, Winthrop's John Kilmartin. John was born in County Roscommon, Ireland, and came to live in this country in 1953. Conal Foley wrote the following tribute to his long-time friend and colleague.*

John's accomplishments remind us of how the power of one can help bring positive results. His and our concern for community entitlements were also those of Governor John Winthrop.

Belle Isle Marsh and its creeks make up a rich marine resource but had long been under assault by urban and

suburban sprawl in East Boston, Revere and Winthrop. Over the years, trashing and dumping as well as sewage and waste runoff had steadily diminished this public resource. John noted that Winthrop's new Belle Isle Cemetery cap over its former dump needed better implementation to prevent further erosion into Belle Isle Creek. His weekend excursions on bike and foot revealed the serious exposure of the old dump, especially after heavy rains. Photos of the leaching at the unsecured dump eventually reached the Commonwealth's Department of Environmental Protection. After

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*Karyl Stoia at bridge under construction. As described in a previous issue (Belle Isle News September 2010), the bridge is part of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) project to upgrade the access road to Winthrop, improve access to Short Beach and provide a foot bridge across a section of marsh creek.*

*Photo by Barbara Bishop*

### Visit to Belle Isle Reservation Pedestrian Bridge Project

Someday soon you will be able to walk from Piers Park on the East

Boston waterfront, through the new Bremen Street Park, along the marsh near Wood Island, along Constitution Beach, over to Belle Isle Reservation,

along Morton Street, around Belle Isle Cemetery, across Argyle Street Creek via this bridge, and finally arrive at Short Beach.

In mid-November, Karyl Stoia and I walked over to see the construction at high tide. If you want to go, park along Revere Street in Winthrop, walk down Bayou Street and take a right at the dirt road. The construction site is at the end of that dirt road.

At high tide the structure is high enough to allow a kayak to fit under the bridge, as we requested.

*Barbara Bishop*

### John Kilmartin (continued)

confirming that John's allegations were based in reality, the Commonwealth ordered the Town of Winthrop to remedy the situation. The Town then did what it had to in order to protect and help bring the creek and marsh back to its normal rich productive life.



The connection to Governor John Winthrop? Some 370 years ago the Governor ordered communities bordering the Charles River—Boston, Cambridge, Watertown—to be sure, in any dam building enterprise, to leave open passage and repassage for the rich seasonal fish runs from the sea.

Winthrop knew that fish ladders and the like were no substitute for open passage, given the tremendous fish runs from the sea to colonist and Indian communities miles inland. Not one, not even the remotest community or smallest creek, should be denied nature's rich entitlement of these inland



*Photo by John Kilmartin*

*Trash spilling from underneath Winthrop's Belle Isle Cemetery into Belle Isle Creek. Winthrop's dump was closed in the 1970s, capped in the 1980s and became a cemetery in the 1990s.*

migrations from the sea, considering that they provided food (fish) which broke the fast of winter, and also were used as fertilizer to manure community

fields and gardens.

John Winthrop salutes John Kilmartin, as do we all.

*Conal Foley*



Photo by Karin Leonard / Marine Photobank  
*Blue Shark*

### Fins to the Left, Fins to the Right and You're the Only Bait in Town (Apologies to Jimmy Buffet)

At social gatherings, when people find out that I'm a marine biologist and a diver, they almost always ask: "Have you ever seen a shark?" Over the years, I have been extremely fortunate to have had numerous opportunities to observe sharks up close, including a Caribbean Reef Shark that nibbled on my fin (but that is a story for another day). As soon as my wife hears me asked this question, she exits the room as quickly as possible. She's heard all of these stories countless times and she realizes it is not going to be a short conversation.

When a close friend of mine was turning 40, he decided that we needed to celebrate by doing a shark cage dive. I didn't need any convincing, so one September day we headed for Point Judith, Rhode Island. Early that morning we left port aboard the appropriately named *Snappa* with 6 other divers. My buddy and I had chatted with the captain before we left and I told him I was a biologist. This turned out to be a major blunder, as the captain decided that my biological training made me uniquely qualified to be the "chum guy". Sharks have incredibly sensitive olfactory organs, though I was pretty sure that people all the way to Boston could smell the rotting fish goo that I was shoveling over the side. Shark olfactory organs are located in their nostrils which are solely dedicated to detecting odors and have nothing to do with their breathing. Sharks gulp water through their mouths as they swim, which is then passed over their gills, allowing them to absorb oxygen and breathe. They can smell blood in the parts-per-million range (think one drop of liquid in a full bathtub).

After 3 hours of steaming and about an hour of chumming, the captain stopped the boat and unloaded the cage. There were more than a few gulps as the divers watched forlornly as the cage drifted away from the boat. The captain

informed us that each diver and their buddy would get only 30 minutes in the cage and that the clock would run with or without sharks present. He told us that the cage needed to be entered from the side, so divers would swim about 30 feet from the boat to the cage. He gave us wooden billy clubs to carry to "protect" ourselves. I didn't remember reading that part in the brochure.

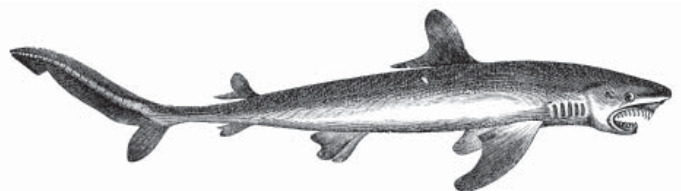
As soon as he finished his briefing, the first shark showed up. My buddy and I quickly donned our gear and jumped in. We swam to the cage and then promptly realized we left our billy clubs on the boat. Once in the cage, we had an incredible opportunity to admire these animals in their own environment. Over the course of the day, we saw about a dozen individual sharks, all of them Blue Sharks (*Prionace glauca*). They ranged from 6 to 11 feet in length. Seeing an 11 foot long animal close up, especially one with lots of sharp teeth, certainly is enough to take your breath away. However, the most stunning thing to me was the vividness of the color of these animals. They are an amazing cobalt blue, which my photographs just never seemed to capture.

The other amazing feature is the absolute grace and effortlessness that these animals exhibit as they move through the water. Blue sharks are an open ocean species, so they are constantly swimming. They have evolved a tapered body shape and elongated pectoral fins that make their swimming motion very efficient. Their powerful tails provide propulsion and their pectoral fins act similar to airplane wings. They provide lift and allow the shark to glide, maneuver and quickly change direction. Blue sharks generally feed on schooling fish and squid, but they are opportunistic feeders who will feed on injured marine mammals and seabirds.

Our 30 minutes passed in a blink and we needed to return to the boat. There was a shark between us and the boat which held our billy clubs. We waited until the shark turned his back to us and we swam the fastest 30 feet in our lives. After we had safely returned to the boat, the captain informed us that he generally has one person a year get "nibbled," the most common injury occurring in the gluteus maximus as divers climb the ladder. I guess that's why we signed the liability waiver.

Later on, my buddy and I were reflecting on the entire day and talked about the decision of when to leave the cage and make the break for the boat. After watching these elegant sleek animals for 30 minutes, we both realized that we could not outswim one of them. Apparently, we were just trying to outswim each other, leaving the slower of the two of us as shark bait.

*Phil Colarusso*



# Harvest Festival, October 3

Photos by Barbara Bishop unless indicated otherwise



*The parade starts*



*The children join*



*Made in the Shade*



*Peggy Connolly and apprentice artists*



*Pumpkin decorating*



*Nancy Kilmartin, daughter Anne-Marie and granddaughter Graine*

More than 600 people came out on a bright autumn day for this year's Harvest Festival. The event featured horse-drawn hayrides, live animals, pumpkin decorating, information tables and more. The band *Made in the Shade* with Dan Fox provided great music and led a children's parade around the main area of the Festival. Thanks to Marc Wallerice of the Winthrop Marketplace for his most generous donation of pumpkins for our Festival.



*Those Mike Oliver stories again!*



*Oysters*



*Art table*



*Creature teacher's skunk*



*Erica Foley, Ellie Farnsworth*



*The ever-popular hay rides*

*Photo by Soheil Zende*

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

This has been a great year for our organization! We are seeing progress with DCR's work on the Winthrop Greenway and pedestrian bridge connection to the new park at Short Beach. The Greenway has been a work in progress for many years and it will be a tribute to all the community people who never gave up working, despite many obstacles, to see this dream come true.



Our friend John Kilmartin will be missed. John leaves his wife Nancy, his children and grandchildren, and his many friends who truly appreciate John's efforts for a cleaner and healthier environment. John, you are in our hearts.



Photo by Barbara Bishop

Isabelle & Herb Guttell

Our stalwart Friends Isabelle and Herb Guttell move to Milton this winter.

Isabelle, a teacher at the Willis School for many years, served as Secretary of the Board of FBIM, brought order to our meetings and taught us to serve decaf in

the evening. Isabelle and Herb Guttell and Siren and Harold Reinstein were the best of friends and the best advocates for educational programs at Belle Isle.

Multi-talented Herb exhibited his kinetic sculpture masterpieces at many past Harvest Fairs. His sculptures include magnificent weather vanes of moving sailing ships. Herb is a genius at turning scrap into works of art.



Thank you to all our dues-paying members and supporters. With your support we are able to bring all of our programs to you. Our business supporters include Capitol Waste, Century 21 Mario Real Estate, Clean Harbors, Elliot Whittier Insurance Services, Kelly's Roast Beef, Boston Foundation, East Boston Foundation, East Boston Savings Bank, Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay and Winthrop Marketplace.

Congratulations to DCR Commissioner Rick Sullivan who was named Secretary of Environmental Affairs by Governor Deval Patrick.

Thanks to DCR and the staff who work so hard all year to keep the Park a great resource for all to enjoy.

Barbara Bishop,  
President, Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

## MONDAY NIGHT FORUMS



Photo by Barbara Bishop

October 18: Birds on the beach forum at Winthrop Senior Center. (Left to right: Eleanor Casey, Heather Warchalowski, Susannah Corona, Soheil Zende.) Susannah and Heather worked on Winthrop, Yirrell and Revere Beaches over the past several summers in an effort to ease the interactions among beach-goers, dogs and rare and nesting species of birds such as Piping Plover and Least Tern. As beach-goers become aware of their new neighbors and their struggles to survive and reproduce, some of the tension around the signage and symbolic fencing dissipates and the neighborhood begins to take pride in the newcomers. But there are plenty of challenges.



Photo by Barbara Bishop

November 15: Forum at Winthrop Elks Club. (Left to right: Karyl Stoia, Conal Foley, Christopher Klein, Edie Raymond, John Floyd.) Christopher Klein, author of *Discovering The Boston Harbor Islands: A Guide to the City's Hidden Shores*, spoke about myths and legends of the Boston Harbor Islands. Most people in the audience didn't know that Bostonians raised funds to have the Statue of Liberty erected in Boston Harbor. Perhaps competition with Boston was the spark that New Yorkers needed to raise the necessary funds for Lady Liberty.

## Greenway Negotiations

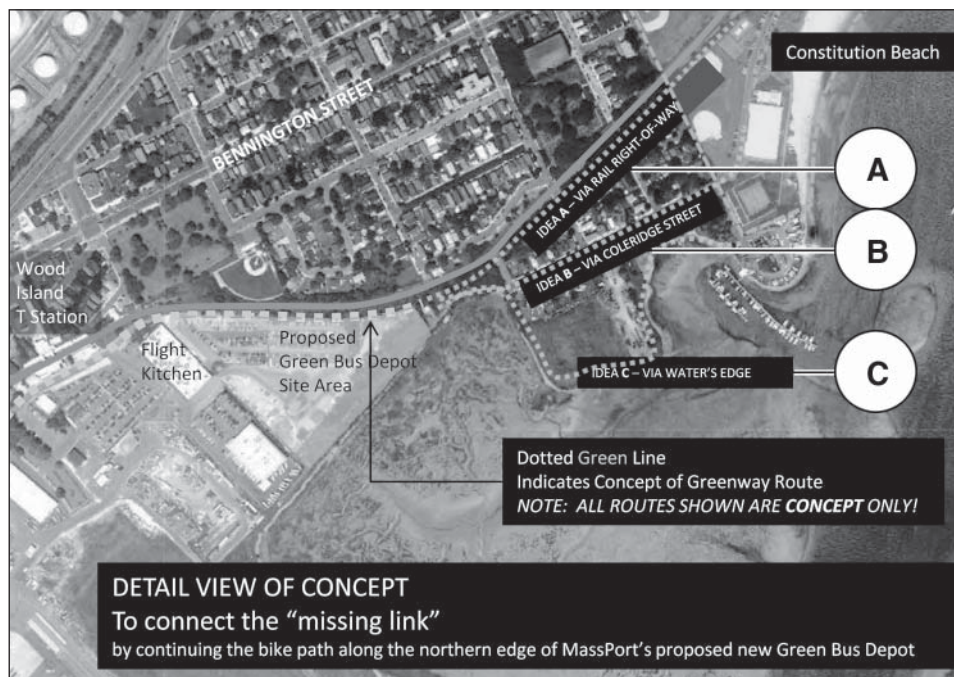
Airport Impact Relief, Inc. (AIR, Inc.), East Boston Greenway Council, Boston Natural Areas Network (BNAN), Friends of Belle Isle Marsh (FBIM) and numerous other community organizations are teaming up to promote a pedestrian and bike path greenway that would connect Jeffries Point and Belle Isle Marsh Reservation on opposite ends of East Boston.

Plans for a mixed use recreational path that would eventually connect at one end, Jeffries Point, all the way to Belle Isle Marsh in one safe continuous stretch linking multiple public open spaces along the way, were delayed for over a decade because MassPort refused to construct an edge buffer in the airport north service area. They cite lack of community support for the project based largely upon a few residents' opposition.

Edge buffer parks are open space amenities envisioned and funded over 20 years ago in a community agreement between AIR, Inc., FBIM and MassPort to provide environmental mitigation for the negative impacts of airport operations. The completion of the buffer in the north service area is vital, given its location in the middle of East Boston.

Current advocacy work on this issue involves an extensive community process to increase understanding of our objectives through a series of open community meetings. Thus far Gretchen Schneider of BNAN, Gail Miller of FBIM and Chris Marchi of AIR, Inc. have presented greenway options to the Orient Heights, Jeffries Point, Piers PAC and Eagle Hill civic associations and the Harborview neighborhood abutting the proposed routes.

The Greenway extension project, as we call it, began in earnest in August with a community-wide volunteer effort to assess needs, attitudes and opinions related to local open space resources through the volunteer-designed East Boston Parks Survey. Among other



Google map

*Aerial view shows three options (A, B, C) for the Greenway outlet path once it leaves the airport vicinity and approaches Constitution Beach.*

interesting findings, this survey revealed overwhelming community support for extending the Greenway

We have personally called every known abutter in the Harborview neighborhood to invite discussion and comment and we are ready to start looking at routing options. The extension is divided into two sections:

- The edge buffer runs through airport property from behind Wood Island T Station to the beginning of Coleridge Street three blocks from Constitution Beach.
- The outlet path covers the three blocks to the beach.

In the airport portion, one option is to run the path along the Blue Line train tracks between the airport side of the tracks and the Green Bus Depot. The other option is to follow the route proposed in the original plan, but refused by Massport due to national security concerns, running west down Neptune Road then turning north and following the edge of the Wood Island Bay Marsh. Other international airports currently allow bike and pedestrian

access in similar situations at even closer proximity to runways. Also, neighbors prefer to keep the path away from their area.

The outlet path can follow along the waterfront, follow Coleridge Street or travel down the abandoned MWRA right-of-way (see aerial photo above). We have received significant, positive feedback from abutters where MassPort indicates community opposition existed.

With strong support from our elected officials, community groups, residents and now abutters, we're hopeful that we will accomplish this important advancement and reconnect East Boston through a far reaching and accessible network of parks which could eventually reach as far as Belle Isle Marsh and beyond into Winthrop and Revere.

*Christopher Marchi*

*A father and lifelong resident and community activist in East Boston, Chris is the newly elected Vice President of AIR, Inc., an East Boston organization currently working on behalf of the residents of East Boston to complete a greenway buffer along Logan Airport's perimeter.*

Friends of Belle Isle Marsh  
(FBIM) membership dues:

- Family \$15
- Individual \$10
- 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**

*Our web address:*

**<http://www.friendsofbelleislemarsh.org>**

*This issue was produced by Soheil Zende  
with help from Barbara Bishop, Daniela Foley,  
Gail Miller and Christine Zende.*

SZ10

*Friends of Belle Isle Marsh*

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## Events (continued from page 1)

 **Winter tracking. Saturday, February 12, 9 AM - NOON.** Search Belle Isle for mammal tracks and signs. *Meet at: Belle Isle main parking lot, off Bennington St., East Boston.*

 **Oceanside campfire, Nahant Beach. Saturday, February 12, 6 - 8 PM.** *Meet at: Parking lot near Tide's Restaurant on Nahant Causeway.*

 **Oceanside campfire, Constitution Beach. Saturday, March 12, 6 - 8 PM.** *Meet at: Constitution Beach parking lot, beachside of bathhouse. For more information, call DCR North Region Park Rangers 781-485-2803 ext. 109.*


 **Birding Belle Isle & vicinity. Saturday, March 26, 9 AM - NOON.** Beginners welcome; please bring binoculars. *Meet at: Belle Isle Marsh main parking area, off Bennington St., East Boston.*

 **Birding Belle Isle & vicinity Part II. Saturday, April 2, 9 AM - NOON.** Beginners welcome; please bring binoculars. *Meet at: Belle Isle Marsh main parking area, off Bennington St., East Boston.*





*The following coastal awareness programs are suitable for children ages 5 through 11 with adult chaperones.*

### December school vacation week:

 **Terrific turtles. Thursday, December 30, 2 - 3 PM.** Children will learn about the turtles that visit the coast of Massachusetts and some of the problems that they face. *Call 781-485-2804 ext. 105 or email [Matthew.Nash@state.ma.us](mailto:Matthew.Nash@state.ma.us) to preregister.*

### February school vacation week:

 **Beach discovery. Wednesday, February 23, 11 AM - NOON.** Children will explore signs of life along the beach and learn ways to help keep the area beautiful and safe for wildlife and people. *Meet at: Reinstein Bandstand, Revere Beach Blvd. Cross streets are Shirley Ave and Beach St. Call 781-485-2804 ext. 105 or email [Matthew.Nash@state.ma.us](mailto:Matthew.Nash@state.ma.us).*

 **Shore bird discovery. Thursday, February 24h, 11 AM - NOON.** Children will learn about birds that visit our beaches and how the DCR protects rare shorebirds. *Meet at: Reinstein Bandstand, Revere Beach Blvd. Cross streets are Shirley Ave and Beach St. Call 781-485-2804 ext. 105 or email [Matthew.Nash@state.ma.us](mailto:Matthew.Nash@state.ma.us).*

