

EVENTS

All programs are free and open to the public.



Campfire at Constitution Beach. Saturday, March 12, 6 - 8 PM. Meet at Constitution Beach parking lot. *Shake off cabin fever and join us for fresh air, a warm fire, toasted marshmallows, hot chocolate, and good company.* Cosponsored by East Boston YMCA.

East Boston Greenway Council meeting. Thursday, March 24, 6:30 PM. East Boston YMCA, 215 Bremen Street, East Boston. *All are welcome. For more information contact Candice Cook at 617-542-7696 x 16 or email candice@bostonnatural.org.*



Birding Belle Isle and vicinity. Saturday, March 26, 9 AM - NOON. Meet at Belle Isle Marsh main parking lot off Bennington Street, East Boston. *We will be searching for snipe at Belle Isle and waterfowl at the Oasis. Bring your binoculars. Beginners welcome.*

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Belle Isle News

Published by Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

Number 85



March 2011

Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

Annual Meeting

Sunday, March 13, 2 - 4 PM

St. John's Episcopal Church Hall
222 Bowdoin St., Winthrop, MA

Guest speakers:

Dr Paul Kirshen
Dr Ellen Douglas

**Climate Change and Sea Level Rise in Boston:
Everything You Need to Know**

Also at the Annual Meeting:

Elections for Board of Directors
Social hour
Refreshments

This event is free and open to the public.



Heather McClure, FBIM Treasurer Extraordinaire
16 January 1953 - 9 January 2011

The Friends of Belle Isle Marsh family recently experienced another very great loss with the passing of our friend and treasurer, Heather McClure. Despite battling cancer for over two years, Heather could be seen everywhere the organization sponsored an event, whether it was the fall festival, the Annual Meeting or one of our speaker forums.

Heather was responsible for bringing the Friends into the modern

world by implementing an electronic bookkeeping system. Before Heather, we took pencil to paper to record all of our many financial transactions in a checkbook. The Friends have several sources of revenue including membership dues, grants, donations and funds set aside for the Reinstein Boardwalk. All accounts were meticulously managed by Heather. She was just a crackerjack for our

Continued on page 2



American Eel
Anguilla rostrata

A Visit from an Old Friend

Recently, I was paid an unexpected visit from an old friend that I hadn't seen in about 30 years. The occasion was a sampling trip to Martha's Vineyard. I was trying a new underwater camera in Stonewall Pond, a small salt water body that is connected to Menemsha Pond on the western tip of the island. I was swimming along, following one of the now numerous blue crabs scampering along the bottom. As I paused for a moment near a large rock, a long slender shape emerged from under the rock. The snakelike dark body swam right up to my mask and hung in the water staring into my mask for about 15 seconds. Now as a diver, you generally expect most marine life to be afraid of you and try to swim away from you, so for an instant it was a little perplexing to have something appear to seek me out. After this initial surprise, I realized that this was a 3-foot long American Eel. Its tiny eyes inspected my mask and beard carefully before it swam back under its rock.

American Eels are among the most studied animals on the planet, yet one of the least understood. It took scientists many years to find the hidden spawning grounds out in the Sargasso Sea. It also took scientists many years to understand

the *catadromous* lifestyle of the eel. (This means that it lives in freshwater and goes to saltwater to spawn). Recent research has cast some doubt on this widely accepted life history fact.

Apparently, not all eels are catadromous. It has been discovered that some individuals seem perfectly content to live their lives out in marine or estuarine waters. The catadromous life style appears to be a choice, not a physiological need. Thus, eels have recently been reclassified as facultative catadromous. Apparently, they go where the food is. There is something oddly comforting in the knowledge that even one of the most studied species has some secrets that we still are learning.

Before this unexpected visit on Martha's Vineyard, I had only two prior experiences with American Eels. As a young boy of 6 or 7, my father and I caught an eel while fishing behind the Elks Club in Winthrop. At some point in history, my Italian ancestors decided that eels were a delicacy. Thus, it was with great pride that my father and I brought home the eel. My father cut off the head and instructed me to bring the fish downstairs to my grandmother who was to prepare it for dinner. But someone forgot to tell the eel that it was dead. As I carried this headless fish down the stairs, it started to wriggle quite vigorously, causing a certain young man to drop the fish and start screaming. My grandmother heard the screaming and came out to see what she thought was a snake wriggling on the

ground and her grandson in hysterics. She grabbed her broom and started clubbing the eel and then stamped it with her foot. At this point, my father came down the stairs to find out what the racket was all about. He watched in horror as his mother repeatedly stamped the beautiful fish that he had just caught. Such was life in an Italian family.

My next encounter with an American Eel was less dramatic but ended far better for the fish. As a teenager, I spent a lot of time snorkeling in the tide pools at the base of the Winthrop water tower hill. One summer, an American Eel took up residence in one of the pools. For the better part of that entire summer, I went to that pool and, without fail, the eel emerged from hiding and swam up to check me out. Exploring that tide pool became an almost daily ritual for me that summer, and the ritual was incomplete without a visit from my wriggly friend. I don't remember if these frequent visits ended because I started back at school or the eel left for a different part of the ocean. I do remember the disappointment of returning to that tide pool for many years and never seeing another eel again. I'm pretty sure that the eel on the Vineyard is not the same animal that was in the tide pool in Winthrop 30 years earlier, but it was still nice to make the reacquaintance.

Phil Colarusso

Phil Colarusso has been at the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) since 1989, spending about half of that time under water.

Heather McClure (continued) organization!

Anyone who knew Heather always found her helpful, friendly and smiling at our events....maybe it was because she was handling the money! She especially enjoyed greeting our long-time supporters and newcomers to the Friends at the fall festival, always at the table passing out snacks and taking in new memberships.

Heather, originally from Owls Head,

Maine, made her home in Winthrop Highlands overlooking our natural resource, Belle Isle Marsh Reservation. Perhaps that was the reason she was inspired to join the Friends. Prior to joining the Friends, she had been an active volunteer at WCAT, the Winthrop community cable station, where she learned video production. For many years she enjoyed producing programs and won several awards. One of her pet projects with WCAT was the

squash raffle where she sold the most tickets every year. No one on earth will be able to surpass her enthusiasm, organizational skills for the annual raffle or record-breaking ticket sales. Heather was Maine's loss and Winthrop's gain.

Heather passed away on January 9th, one week shy of her 58th birthday. As a friend and FBIM volunteer, she truly left a mark in the environmentalist community and she will be missed by us all.



January Afternoon

Heavy snow brought change to the marsh. Trees are bent over and snapped. Shrubs and bushes are pancaked beneath the weight. This winter even the reeds surrendered and are flattened. In summer, the reeds are nearly impassible and impossibly strong. They have the strength of numbers and do not bend to anyone trying to force their way through. Now heavy wet snow has flattened the reeds and suddenly a different marsh appears. Not quite meadow but now there's open space. It's now very clear how much wildlife is out there. Snow tracks are everywhere. Rabbit, coyote, deer and birds have been all over the place. I never realized how many animals must be out there hidden by the reeds. Of course, I've seen them in other seasons but now their tracks tell me that there are more than I would have thought.

Deep snow, thigh deep snow, meant sweaty hot work. Bulldozing is fine atop a large Cat front-loader but with my wet blue jeans and my measured muscle power it was just no fun. The snow sucked at my boots and each hidden dip seemed a glacier crevasse that I stumbled into and fell face down into. Moving just fifty feet felt like fifty yards. Gasping for air, I had to stop and wait. And wait. And wait. Finally I pushed on to the path twenty feet away where the snow was only eighteen inches deep and I vowed to stay away from the deep end where the drifts lay. All that work, just to see where mice and catbirds can go all year round.

It's winter and that means quiet, the sort of quiet in which your own breath is loud. At the Overlook tower, I slipped into a zen state by accident. My eyes were clouded by the gray glare of snow



Photo by George Cumming

Homeless remains

and sky and as the next plane landed at Logan, the whole world calmed down and I went some place else. Marsh meditation at work and by accident.

Hidden secrets are revealed after the snow. I found a stash of clothing off the path. Some one had been living rough out there. With winter and the cold, they simply abandoned it all. Pants and shirts hanging from branches as if drying on a clothes line. A bright red sports shirt decorated with Japanese comic book figures. A young guy had been living out in the thicket while we were home beneath a roof with food and family. It was a very sad discovery. I wonder where he is and what's he doing.

Today in spite of the deep snow and the work of wading through it, I was drawn by hope. Yesterday, an eagle had been spotted at Belle Isle Marsh. It was feeding on a dead goose. I hoped to see

it. I've seen eagles up in Maine on the Allagash but never so close to home. I tried to look everywhere at once but unlike an owl, my neck turns only so far. Finally, I gave up.

Just then I saw something—maybe, just maybe? But no, it was only a Cooper's Hawk. Then, I realized something was wrong. I was disappointed by a Cooper's Hawk. I was a little ashamed. This bird, no eagle, was in front of me and she was gorgeous. I had nearly overlooked a real gift in my hunt for something bigger.

That's true of Belle Isle itself. There is real beauty here to be savored. There's no need to look any further (although I must admit an eagle would have been very, very cool).

George Cumming

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

The Nature of Belle Isle



Season of the Eagle

Fish falling from the sky! That's what happened when a group of the Friends traveled to the Merrimac River to look for Bald Eagles. A young eagle caught a fish in the river, flew over and perched in a dead snag above Mary Mitchell's car and promptly dropped it with a thwack on her car roof.

But we didn't really have to go to Newburyport to find Bald Eagles this winter. My friend Matt Garvey, watched

a subadult eagle pick up a dead or near-dead Canada Goose in Belle Isle Creek, then drop it. Matt got videos of the event. I'm including some of Matt's own description and images of the eagle incident here.

After reading about Matt's sighting, I went out looking for my own eagle and found one: An adult Bald Eagle perched in a bare tree in plain view along the southern edge of Rumney Marsh, Revere.

I reported this and told people how to find the spot where the eagle was seen that day; apparently my story was picked up in Tink Martin's column in the *Winthrop Transcript* and a lot of people read it. Another friend sent me a link to the front page of the *Lynn Item* with a clear photo of a Bald Eagle sitting in a tree along Lincoln Avenue in Saugus.

There were a minimum of 107 eagles tallied in the Commonwealth in January, with 102 at Quabbin

Reservoir alone. There may be a dozen or three at the Merrimac River. We have one or more on the Mystic Lakes in Arlington-Medford. Last week, on a survey of Boston Harbor birds, there were six eagle sightings. What is going on with eagles? The truth is, Bald Eagles are doing very well. There are now 26 known nesting sites for Bald Eagle in Massachusetts. Their numbers are expanding in Maine and eastern Canada.

Yet 60 years ago Bald Eagles were on the US (and continental) endangered species list. They were being poisoned and their numbers reduced through reproductive failure due to the use of highly toxic pesticides. Peregrine Falcons, Ospreys and other birds of prey, as well as a great deal of other wildlife was also under toxic pressure. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, pointed clearly to the toxic chemicals put in the environment

Continued on page 5

Matt Garvey writes:

On January 29, I was heading back towards Boston from the Winthrop ferry terminal, where I had enjoyed superb close-up views of the juvenile Greater White-fronted Goose James Taylor had found a couple weeks prior at Belle Isle. As usual, I was rushing to get back to family and some Saturday chores, but nonetheless debating whether I had time for one more quick birding stop. I was specifically considering whether or not I could make a go for the adult Bald Eagles that had been reported recently from Rumney Marsh.

I was wrestling with this choice when I hit the light at Pleasant and Main. Looking out from this point straight past the end of Pleasant Street, I noticed a large bird on the ice floes that had recently come to dominate Belle Isle Creek. Recognizing it as an eagle but wary because I had eagles already on my mind, I called an audible and proceeded straight to the end of Pleasant Street, where one gets a pretty spectacular view of the creek and Belle Isle Reservation.

No doubt about it, subadult Bald Eagle, my personal first for Belle Isle! It was fairly close, so I got out my video camera, and also set up my 'scope to try my hand at some digiscoping.

This attracted a couple of locals, and I was glad to get them 'scope views of a nice "backyard" bird. The eagle itself provided some amusement as it struggled with lifting a dead Canada Goose from the ice. I caught two sorties in which



Digiscoped photo by Matt Garvey

Subadult Bald Eagle on Belle Isle Creek ice.

"How do you eat a goose?"

the eagle swooped down and grabbed the goose with its huge bright yellow feet, only to drop the goose within a second. Perhaps it was too frozen.

Apparently the eagle never had success, as when I returned to the same spot the next day, there was no ice and no eagle, but still a goose carcass, by this point washed up on the shore at Belle Isle.

The Nature of Belle Isle *(continued)*
through the overwhelming and widespread use of pesticides as a primary cause of the decline in wildlife health and abundance. A movement for the strict control of these substances eventually caused the banning of the sale of DDT and other chlorinated pesticides in this country. 60 years later we don't know what to do with all the eagles!

Let us not forget that there were other pressures on eagles and birds of prey, such as shooting and habitat destruction. These still persist, but nowhere on the scale of what was happening during the middle of the 20th century.

What About Bees?

We managed to do the right thing for a lot of wildlife, including eagles, by banning certain classes of pesticides. But new poisons

pop up out of the chemical industry constantly and there are always people willing to spend money (especially other people's money in the form of taxes) to combat "pests." The pests are mosquitos, fire ants, termites, even dragonflies! Companies want to make money and they'll sell you anything you can be scared into buying. They think they can scare you about dragonflies. Dragonflies? Really?

And so, now bee populations are crashing. There are plenty of potential culprits and it is probably a multi-causal phenomenon, but there is almost no doubt that some of the latest generation of high-tech pesticides will turn out to be part of the problem. One pesticide used to treat corn and canola seeds, clothianidin, works its way into plant pollen and nectar—exactly the food that attracts honey bees. No independent researcher has done a serious long-term study of the effects of this clothianidin,

and the study used by the EPA to approve its use on crops was done—you guessed it—by the company, Bayer CropScience, the same company that produces clothianidin. Convenient, eh?

It will most likely take a lot more than banning clothianidin to help bring back the bee populations. Meanwhile, there is real fear in the agricultural world about the bee population crash. According to Credo / Working Assets, "Pollination by honey bees is key in cultivating the crops that produce a full one-third of our food." So work continues on understanding the causes and cures for bee colony collapse disorder.

But please understand, a lot of the denizens of our world, from eagles to bees and including us, have been and are under severe threats from chemical pollution. And the problem can be solved by public action to ban pesticides. Ask the eagles.

Soheil Zendeh

Richard Honan of Winthrop writes:

I'm currently building a 14 foot Cape Cod Oystering Skiff known as a Sharpie. It is a small sailboat that was used as a working boat to harvest oysters in the shallow waters of Cape Cod. We just completed constructing the hull and are starting the process of installing the seats, rub rails and centerboard. We are aiming to launch or christen the *Lillian Gertrude* on June 19th. It is named for my mother who passed away last October at the age of ninety-nine.

Richard's canoe exploration of Belle Isle Creek will be featured in our June issue.



Photos by Richard Honan

Richard's family, including grandchildren, pitch in for the boat building.



Photo by Barbara Bishop

Geoff Wood and the marsh exploration crew, January 15

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Last year was another good year for our organization and for the Marsh. The main events were the groundbreaking for the new park near Short Beach and the passage of legislation naming the Kilmartin Walkway after our friend and member John F. Kilmartin. Hundreds of people participated in programs at Belle Isle Marsh Reservation throughout the year, thanks to the Department of Conservation and Recreation and Belle Isle Site Supervisor Geoff Wood. Belle Isle continues to be a peaceful place to enjoy the natural environment in our busy urban world.

Events Past and Future

We had a busy year with our successful Monday night forum series, the spring cleanup, artists

on the beach, salt marsh exploration, tidal pool exploration, stargazing and the puppet show. This year's harvest festival brought more than 800 people to the park for horse-drawn hayrides, pumpkin decorating, live animals, live music, good friends and more. There is progress to see on both the East Boston and Winthrop Greenways. Our thanks to hundreds of hardworking volunteers and the Boston Foundation, the East Boston Foundation, the Winthrop Marketplace, Elliot Whittier Insurance Services, Clean Harbors, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, Mayor Thomas Menino, the East Boston Savings Bank, Capitol Waste and Century 21 Mario Real Estate.

This year we will see the completion of the Kilmartin Walkway and pedestrian bridge at the new Short Beach site. We will investigate opportunities for salt marsh restoration.

We will work to help protect the endangered and threatened birds in the marsh and on our local beaches. We hope to create new partnerships with several local schools and youth organizations which will bring more young people to the park.

Bacterial Testing

Thanks to Patrick Herron, PhD, of the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA) for his thorough bacterial assessment of Belle Isle Inlet. He conducted wet weather monitoring on August 25, 2010 and found that the *Enterococcus* level at a test site near the Beachmont School in Revere was 198,630 / 100 ml. The Mass DEP Water Quality Standards are 104 *Enterococcus* / 100 ml for swimming and 350 *Enterococcus* / 100 ml for boating. Further tests in November confirmed the earlier results. These extremely high levels of bacterial contamination were caused by a 6-inch sewer pipe that was tied in to a stormwater pipe. Revere has corrected the problem.

The Departed

We lost two vital members of the Friends: Heather McClure served as our treasurer for several years, bringing our record keeping into the 21st century; John Kilmartin helped obtain funding to clean up the former Winthrop dump site and turn it into a spectacular place to view the wildlife of Belle Isle. We will find a way to keep their memories alive, possibly with a memorial event or bench with a name plaque. Your suggestions are always welcome.



We depend on your membership and your generous donations to maintain our programs and reach out to the public. Please use the enclosed envelope to send us your annual dues. Or better yet, bring it in person to our Annual Meeting, March 13.

See you in the Park!

*Barbara Bishop
President, Friends of Belle Isle Marsh*

Dear Friends:

The Nominations Committee invites you to submit the names of candidates for the FBIM Board of Directors and committee chairs. You may nominate yourself. Please fill out this form and submit by

March 1 to:

Mary Mitchell, Chair
Nominations Committee
121 Bartlett Road
Winthrop, MA 02152

or write friendsofbelleislemarsh@comcast.net.

Friends of Belle Isle Marsh Nominations to the Board

nominee:

address:

phone: (home)

(work)

email:

position:

comments:

THE CHILDREN'S CORNER

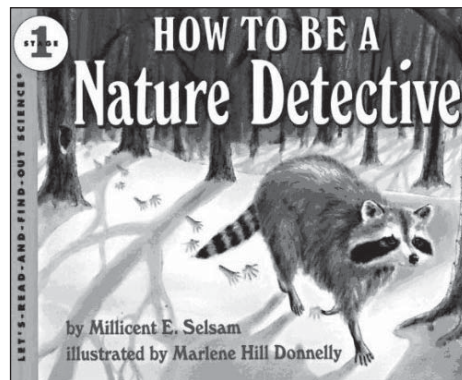
Taking a Closer Look at Nature

It isn't difficult to find signs of nature everywhere, even here in an urban setting. One only needs to take a closer look in the back yard, on the sidewalk, or in the local park. Of course, a trip to Belle Isle is a great way to start. Join a ranger on one of the nature walks at Belle Isle or at the beaches. These books will help you get started.

How To Be A Nature Detective, by Millicent E. Selsam, illustrated by Marlene Hill Donnelly, Harper Collins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10022, 1995.

This is a beautifully illustrated book that helps children formulate questions about their environment. It honors their assumptions. We adults are often too quick to give children the answer instead of letting them discover it for themselves. A "nature detective" can find tracks and clues that answer the questions: Who was here? Where did they go? Why were they here? Tracks can be found almost anywhere; in the mud, sand, dust or even on a sidewalk. The book asks children to look at the clues in detail. It asks lots of questions.

For example; "What kind of paw



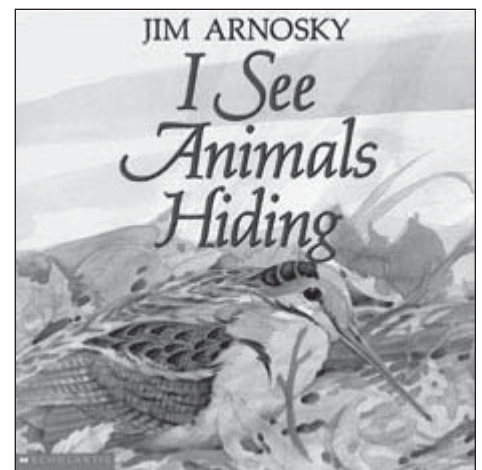
prints does a rabbit make? You can see that a rabbit has little front paws and big hind paws." Using this information, the child can look at the picture and identify the rabbit prints on the page. The book is filled with similar examples that are located in one's kitchen, wooded areas, the beach and so forth. Get this book and become a "Nature Detective."

I See Animals Hiding, by Jim Arnosky, Scholastic, Inc., 555 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012, 1995.

Jim Arnosky is an award-winning illustrator and author of children's books. He spends much of his time outside studying animal habitats in Vermont where he lives. Wild animals are shy and will hide to feel safe.

They may hide within the trees or lie down to blend in with their habitat. Their coloring often helps provide camouflage. It may even change through the seasons. The book beautifully illustrates many examples. Trout are camouflaged by color and shape to blend in with river stones. Snowy Owls turn white in the winter. And a deer's coat turns gray in the winter so they better match the leafless tree trunks. This book is informative and has soft thoughtful illustrations; a great book to read before heading out to find animals hiding all around us.

Mary Mitchell



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>

Also, look for us on Facebook.

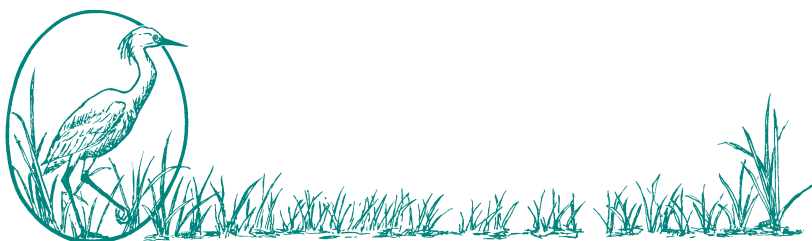
This issue was produced by Soheil Zende with help from Barbara Bishop, Daniela Foley, Gail Miller and Christine Zende.

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*Friends of Belle Isle Marsh
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Events (continued from page 1)



Birding Belle Isle and vicinity. Saturday, April 2,

9 AM - NOON. Meet at Belle Isle Marsh main parking lot off Bennington Street, East Boston. *We will be searching for early spring migrants in the woodlands in and around Belle Isle. Bring your binoculars. Beginners welcome.*



Migrant Madness at Breakheart Reservation,

lecture and video. Friday, May 6, 7 - 8:30 PM. Meet at Christopher P. Dunne Visitors Center, 177 Forest Street, Saugus. *David Brown shares his videotape of many of the colorful warblers that can be seen here during the spring.*



Migrant Madness at Breakheart Reservation, field

trip. Saturday, May 7, 10 AM - 12 NOON. Meet at Christopher P. Dunne Visitors Center, 177 Forest Street, Saugus. *Leader: David Brown. Wear sturdy footwear. About 2 miles will be covered at a slow pace. Bring water, binoculars, and field guides if you have them.*

Annual Mystic River Herring Run and Paddle. Sunday, May 15, all day.

Sponsored by Mystic River Watershed Association. *Call 781-316-3438 for more information.*

Conference on River Monitoring and Climate Change in Massachusetts.

Wednesday, Thursday, May 18 - 19. Sponsored by Massachusetts Rivers Alliance. *Call 857-445-0208 or see www.massriversalliance.org.*



Canoe Belle Isle Creek. Saturday, May

28, 8:30 - 10:30 AM. Meet at Belle Isle Marsh main parking lot off Bennington Street, East Boston. *Pre-registration required; call 781-485-2803 x 109. Participants must be at least 10 years old and be able to swim. Children under 18 must be accompanied by an adult.*

Calling all Junior Rangers: Become a Junior Ranger during school

vacation! April break, Wednesday - Saturday, April 20 - 23, 10 AM - 12 NOON daily. Geared toward ages 8 - 12; friends and siblings welcome. Attention Scouts: You may earn Merit Badges too! Complete 8 activities and earn your Junior Ranger patch. Come every day, or just join us 1 time. Materials will be provided. *Pre-registration required. Call Lynn Hildenbrand at 781-231-1203 for meeting locations and registration.*

