



Belle Isle News

Newsletter of the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

PARK INTERPRETERS



Sarah Elkind, Lisa Vernegaard, Chris Rodstrom

Look for these new faces when you next visit Belle Isle. They are the newly appointed MDC interpretive staff for Belle Isle Marsh Reservation, and they bring with them a wide range of experience.

Lisa Vernegaard, Reservation Supervisor, has extensive experience as a naturalist, including work in the Rocky Mountains and, most recently, in the Boston Harbor Islands. For the past three years Lisa has been at Thompson Island working with elderly, academic and business organizations, and school groups.

Lisa will be working with 2 interpreters: Sarah Elkind and Chris Rodstrom. Sarah has spent the past two summers on Lovells Island in Boston Harbor, and has done extensive research on the history of land-use in the harbor. She brings to Belle Isle a range of outdoor educational experience, from drama workshops to marsh explorations.

Chris Rodstrom comes to Belle Isle from central Massachusetts, where he provided research for the Worcester Conservation Commission on fresh water marsh ecology. Chris's knowledge of ecology and his skill at cartography will be extremely useful in his interpretative work at Belle Isle Marsh.

We welcome Lisa, Sarah, and Chris, and look forward to working with them at the marsh.

ANNUAL MEETING: SUNDAY, MARCH 8

Our featured speaker will be M. R. ("Monty") Montgomery, distinguished natural history columnist for the Boston Globe. So join the gathering of friends and enjoy the speaker, special interest corners, socializing, and refreshments.

TIME: Sunday, March 8, 2 PM
PLACE: Our Lady of Lourdes
Church Hall, 2 Endicott
Avenue, Beachmont (Revere)

This gathering is free and open to the public.

ANNUAL ELECTIONS

The Nominating Committee recommends the following nominations for the Board of Directors:

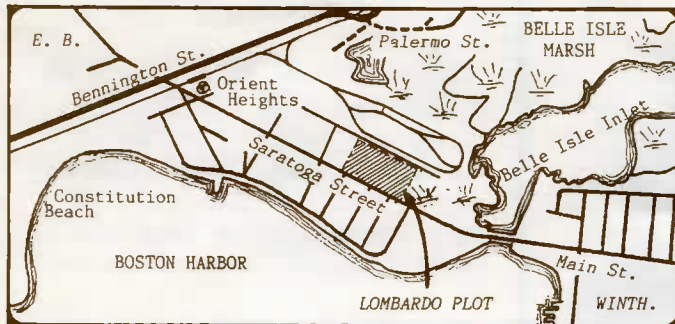
President:	John Kilmartin
Vice President:	Conal Foley
Secretary:	Tim Driscoll
Treasurer:	Ann Lindsey
Members:	Helen Brosnahan
	Jack Dangora
	Mary Mitchell

The election will be held at the Annual Meeting, and other nominations will be accepted from the floor.

The Board of Directors of Friends of Belle Isle Marsh recommends that the funds contributed by generous donors last year toward our "Zoppo legal defense" should be made available for any legal expenses needed to defend the integrity of Belle Isle Marsh. (See "Watchdogs" elsewhere in this issue.) The general membership will be asked to ratify this recommendation at the Annual Meeting.

WATCHDOGS

The wrath of FBIM and local East Boston residents has fallen on Salvatore Lombardo for his plans to expand the Osco Drug building on Saratoga Street, bordering Belle Isle Marsh. Lombardo plans to construct 6070 square feet on the marsh side of the existing structure and to pave an additional 3500 square feet for parking. These two projects would end up closer than 40 feet to the edge of the wetland.



Lombardo land: pushing at the boundaries

An emergency meeting of the FBIM Board of Directors was convened in early January, shortly after the Lombardo plan and Boston Conservation Commission's Order of Conditions to him were disclosed: an appeal of the order was filed with DEQE, effectively stalling and potentially halting the construction.

Our appeal, drawn up by an environmental attorney well-versed in development law, is a statement of our policy to oppose any and all private developments adjacent to the marsh. The appeal argues five points against the decision to allow construction so close to the marsh:

1. The Order of Conditions (OOC) does not address the fact that the construction will disturb a coastal bank.
2. There is an unresolved conflict over where the 100-year flood elevation is located.
3. Coastal Zone Management (CZM) regulations prohibit development within 100 feet of the marsh if the proposed development adversely affects the marsh.

4. Other CZM regulations are not being properly considered in the OOC;
5. The final argument against the order and the development is that reasonable alternatives to the plan exist. Our appeal suggests that the developer should consider adding a second floor and using the rear of the building for parking, thus keeping the development away from marsh boundaries.

On February 2 our attorney filed an additional argument for appeal: He cited a court ruling against a Brewster Conservation Commission OOC because a quorum of the Commission was not present at the hearing which debated the project. In the Lombardo case, only one member of the Boston Conservation Commission (BCC) was present when the developer detailed the proposal. A full vote of the BCC was taken on the issue at a subsequent hearing, but only one member of the Commission had heard the arguments.

Our response to this proposal reaffirms our commitment to opposing any future development proposals on the periphery of Belle Isle Marsh.



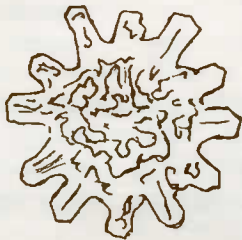
FLOODING

During the storm of January 2 homes were again flooded in the Sales Creek area of Revere. The pumping station on Bennington Street, built to alleviate this problem, can only operate successfully when the pumped-out water can flow downhill to the sea via Belle Isle Creek. During the extreme high tides of this storm, Belle Isle Creek was much higher than Sales Creek, making pumping ineffective, and the station was turned off. This situation demonstrates once again the folly of home construction in tidal areas: eventually residents suffer; public solutions are expensive and limited; in the worst case, emergency services are needed at a time

when they are already strained.

A similar situation could exist in Winthrop in two areas of potential development on the borders of Belle Isle Marsh. On Winthrop Parkway, on the day of the storm, the waves crashing over the seawall made the Zoppo property behind Revere Street inaccessible. The branch of the Creek at the other end of the property undoubtedly overflowed in the area of proposed "emergency exit." On the day after the storm, on Morton Street, the swollen creek was still overflowing the Bonacorso property.

If you are concerned with these proposed developments and their potential for public harm, join our Winthrop Subcommittee by calling Conal Foley (846-0786) or John Kilmartin (846-1480).



Esther Fich

MORE ON SALES CREEK

In *Belle Isle News* for December 1986 we explained that a new "Environmental Mitigation Report" on the Sales Creek Flood Control Project had been submitted to the Secretary of Environmental Affairs, James Hoyte. Hoyte's office requested, and received, comments on the document from the Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management (MCZM) office. Jan Smith in MCZM was the scientist who drafted the comments. He has kindly sent us a copy of the comments, which we will summarize below.

The report assumes that Belle Isle Marsh will not be dredged, and therefore that dredging of Sales Creek would lead to no advantages in flood control: there would be no gradient for the water to flow.

The report recommends cleaning existing culverts and channels, and implementing a regular maintenance and inspection program which would include water quality testing. The estimated cost of this work is \$80,000, not the \$2.2 million already budgeted.

The MCZM comments state:

Some progress has been made toward identifying the sources of pollution . . . , but the document presents no clear evidence that . . . any progress has been achieved [in] . . . reducing the gross bacterial contamination. The City of Revere does not seem to have pursued a vigorous enforcement program; . . . DEQE needs to pursue the City to increase enforcement. Heavy metal contamination in the water column appears to have dissipated in the recent sampling compared to to 1983 sampling. No one seems to worry about why this is so, where it came from, where it went, and it is not clear that this is no longer a problem. . . No recent sampling was performed while the racetrack was in operation; . . . the racetrack is a likely major source of contamination. . . Enforcement actions by the City of Revere and DEQE have been slow and insufficient. . . It seems unlikely that the state will be able to relinquish control of the pump station in the near future.

The MCZM writer concludes by approving the document's work on hydrology, but suggests developing a more detailed and more rigorous program to address water quality problems.

These comments acknowledge that water quality problems in Sales Creek, Belle Isle Inlet and Boston Harbor are everyone's problem. The residents of the Sales Creek watershed whose basements get flooded with human excrement, Winthrop residents whose tidal creeks, beaches, and harbor are grossly contaminated, and environmentalists worried about the hazards to the marsh are all in the same boat.

No multi-million dollar flood control projects can completely protect against the dangers of flooding in low-lying areas, as many residents of Winthrop, Revere, and other coastal communities can attest after the big storms and floods early this winter, but at least we can seek to protect ourselves from the constant hazards of chemical and bacterial pollution in our waterways.

BIRDFINDER

Belle Isle Marsh creates special feelings within me. I feel like an explorer, a watchman, and a hermit.

The title for this column comes from my role as explorer. "Birdfinder" is a play on the title of the book, *The Pathfinder*. I wanted something that implied more than recounting the number and species of birds that had been sighted on the marsh. For me, a trip to the marsh is always more than a bird-watching expedition.

Each time I go out to the marsh, I discover something new. Recently, there were several hundred black ducks in the marsh. The number is not significant in itself. There are always plenty of black ducks out there, dabbling in the reed grass and swimming in the creeks. On this particular morning, the ducks appeared to have set up sentries. One duck stood up, looking around, while the rest of the group was dabbling. There were groups like this all over the marsh. Though this is common behavior for Canada Geese, I had never seen black ducks behave in this fashion.

I have only one explanation: One of the ducks read in the local papers that 18 Snowy Owls had been sighted at Logan Airport. He then passed the word to all the other ducks. They figured that they had better set up their own "Guardian Angels." A hungry Snowy Owl has been known to make a meal out of an unobservant black duck.

This may not be science, but that's the way I see it!

Speaking of scientific observations, I have dubbed the concrete pillars from the old movie screen at Belle Isle "Marsh-henge."

In winter, I stand on one of the Marsh-henge pillars and watch Great Blue Herons trying to avoid the big chill. I counted six of them on New Year's Eve.

In the summer, especially late in the day, I usually find a handful of Black-crowned Night-Herons doing their famous Ed Sullivan imitations. Of course, almost any time of day during the summer and fall is a good time to see Snowy Egrets wading through the

marsh. One or two kestrel falcons keep me company year-round.

Although I go out to the marsh to observe nature, I often have the feeling that nature depends on me to show up and to keep watch. I make my rounds, from Short Beach, along the Winthrop side, to Rosie's Pond, to the Park. I take note of the plants, the animals, the weather, and the tides. This watchman's log becomes a part of me. I know inside me that all is well with my natural haven, placed in the middle of urban confusion. Even the noise from the planes doesn't bother me while I'm on patrol.

If I haven't come across the kestrel in my travels, I often mount a search to find him. I scan every tree I see. Then I hear a cry from a nearby tree saying, "Over here, stupid!" I search high and low; the kestrel is right under my nose. As soon as I look over, off he flies. Some watchman!

Winter is my favorite time of year on the marsh. Now I can be a hermit. Few others venture out into the bitter cold and harsh winds. Consequently, I often have the marsh all to myself. It is my private sanctuary. I can reflect and renew myself. The silence of winter mornings quiets all my stress. There are just me, the ducks, the gulls, the kestrel, the Great Blue Herons, and -- on Christmas morning -- a Short-eared Owl. It was my Christmas present from Mother Nature.

The owl was another reminder of the beauty I have almost at my back door.

As a Birdfinder, I have become a pathfinder. I find my way through life easier. The marsh and its residents have become my teachers.

Leo E. Rogers, Jr.



FLIGHTS OF FANCY

Beware people who tell you all ghosts are the Common Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*, or the *white owl*). They'll soon have you believing that all dragons are the Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*, or the *fiery owl*).

Ghosts

Doubtless, my ancestors saw the Common Barn Owl at spooky times in spooky places -- issuing at dusk from a church tower, a silent form whiter than a Snowy Owl, coursing by night through Celtic and Roman ruins, over Saxon and Norman burying grounds: prime habitats for disembodied spirits. But *T. alba* can easily be told from a white ghost: the owl has big black eyes and a face like a monkey. And a dark ghost you don't see, you hear it -- at a dead calm 3:00 AM in December, by a brush dump in deep evergreen woods on Martha's Vineyard: screeching, hissing; laughing, gloating; a demon playing on an oboe, praying evil to befall you, lyrically laying a curse upon you.

Dragons

The Short-eared Owl upstarts from a roost in tall grass, its long wings brown and black like tortoiseshell or polished agate, translucent in

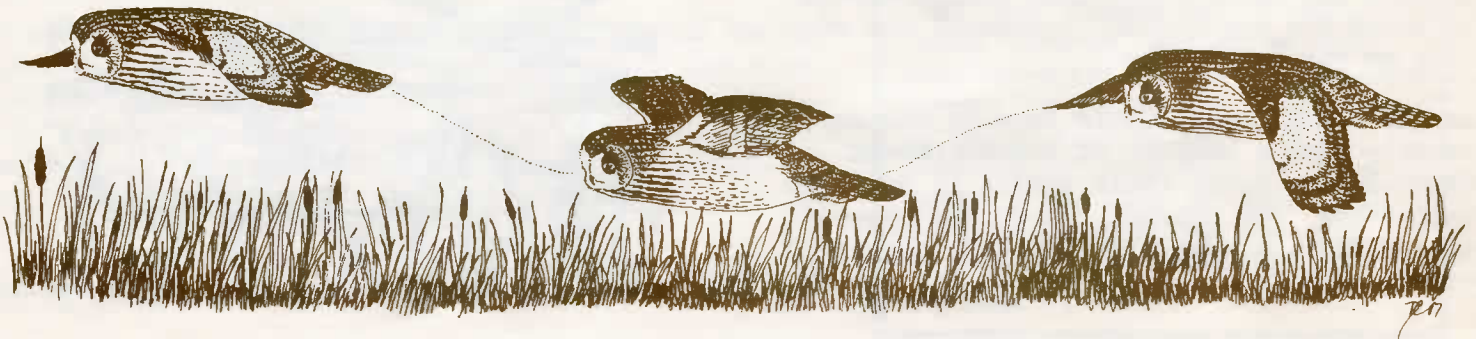
strong sunlight. The owl bats at the air. It drops back quickly to the ground. Or it quarters the marsh or the field closely, like a Northern Harrier, its yellow eyes intent on voles. Or it flies away low to the crests of dunes with the stiff wingbeats of a giant Io moth.

The dragons fly like the great moth that took Doctor Doolittle to the far side of the moon. In summer they soar over hot barrier beaches, tawny among the gulls. In winter they fly high over Boston Harbor, airily dismissing the trailing strings of crows.

Look high above you to see them, where you don't expect to see them: That's where you'll see them.

And don't let anyone tell you that they don't live here and can't get here -- that they'd starve trying to cross open ocean from places where they do live. For several years, I've known about a dragon that followed a ship to Boston from the Bay of Biscay between France and Spain. Now I know what it was eating. Short-eared Owls nesting near the old lighthouse at the south end of Monomoy Island, near Chatham on Cape Cod, have been found to prey on Wilson's Storm-Petrels and Leach's Storm-Petrels, the latter a highly pelagic species rarely seen from land.

J. H. Barton



FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE

The following field trips have been scheduled to start at 1 PM. Please meet in the parking lot of Belle Isle Marsh Reservation off Bennington Street, East Boston (half-way between Suffolk Downs and Beachmont MBTA Stations). Dress warmly and wear waterproof footwear.

Saturday, March 7
Saturday, March 21

These field trips will start at 2 PM:

Sunday, April 12
Sunday April 26
Saturday, May 2
Sunday, May 17
Saturday, May 30
Sunday, June 6
Saturday, June 20

In order to properly monitor the spring bird migration at Belle Isle Marsh, we have scheduled additional early morning field trip on every Sunday in May: 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th, 31st. These trips will start at 7 AM.

Field trips are free and open to the public. Please call the following trip leaders for further information.

David Desmond 324-7527
Soheil Zendehe 628-8990

DATES FOR THE 1987 DAWN HERON CENSUSES

Date	Sunrise	High Tide
MAY 31	5:10	2:15
JUN 7	5:10	8:00
JUN 21	5:05	8:15
JUL 5	5:15	6:30
JUL 19	5:25	7:00
AUG 2	5:35	5:00
AUG 16	5:50	5:30
AUG 30	6:05	3:45
SEP 13	6:20	4:00
OCT 4	6:45	9:15
OCT 18	7:00	9:00

Please meet one-half hour before sunrise. Come to Palermo Street, East Boston, right by the big wooden Belle Isle Reservation sign. For more information, call Soheil Zendehe at 628-8990.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Printing and mailing this newsletter, as well as all other activities of Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, is financed by membership dues and donations from generous members. Membership dues are as follows:

Individual: \$3
Family: \$5
Seniors: \$1
Under 16: \$1

Please join today. Any amount you can contribute above and beyond membership dues will be highly appreciated.

This newsletter is produced by Tim Driscoll, Esther Fich, and Soheil Zendehe. Short-eared Owls by Denise Braunhardt. Linoleum print by Julie Roberts. Snowflakes by John Chaltas.

Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

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