



Belle Isle News

Newsletter of the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

No. 28 September 1990

BOOK REVIEW

Changes in the Land - Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England by William Cronon. Hill and Wang, New York, 1983.

Imagine two snapshots of New England: one is dated 1600 and the other 1800. Note the differences. In the later scene 75% of the forests are missing. Gone also are lynx, wolves, deer, beavers, passenger pigeons, turkeys, and a number of plant species. Streams and rivers existing in 1600 have vanished, and formerly dry land is flooded. The later scene shows additions: roads, fences, permanent towns, tilled fields and herds of domestic animals, plus cats, dogs, rats and house mice not present in the earlier picture. In the 1800 scene less than one in seven of the native people appearing in 1600 still remain.

Cronon's object is to document ecological changes that occurred in New England during the colonial period and to offer explanations for them. He cautions readers to avoid the assumption that all environmental changes were caused by the arrival of English settlers. Rather, his thesis is that human inhabitants of New England, both Indian and English, interacted with the environment in vastly distinct ways, and that the nature of these relationships coincided with ecological changes in the environment in the 200 years following the first English settlement.

Pre-colonial Indians of northern New England were hunter-gatherers, moving seasonally as game required. Having no permanent settlements and a low population density, their impact on the land was minimal. Southern New England Indians however, as agriculturists, were less mobile than their northern kin, and their population density was higher. As a result, their impact on the land was greater. Their growing fields were used repeatedly until the soil lost fertility and new fields were planted. Fire was used to clear the land, but only brush and trees



Passenger Pigeon

susceptible to burning were taken. Crops were planted among trees. Some land became overused. After a few years, firewood in the immediate vicinity of villages became scarce and inhabitants were forced to relocate. Wood scarcity was so common that at least one southern New England Indian concluded that lack of firewood in Europe must have been the English settlers' motive for coming to New England.

Despite these differences, New England natives shared important concepts which had a direct effect on the environment. The most significant was that of property ownership. Exclusive land ownership was unknown and personal property was limited. Accumulation of surplus wealth was not practiced and commercial trade did not exist. Possessions not needed were used as gifts to establish societal relationships, or in limited trade with neighboring villages. Only those natural resources that were needed currently were taken. Indians avoided waste, says Cronon, not to conserve resources, but because it was not an inherent part of their process of making a livelihood.

NEWS UPDATES

● Another successful cleanup was held on June 9 along Palermo Street, adjacent to Rosie's Pond. Fifty tires, seventy bags of trash, a forty foot rug, a stove, and countless other debris were found in the marsh. In addition, the immediate area behind the parking lot of the New England Casket Company was found to harbor days of lunch refuse and half-pint liquor bottles. We can only assume the employees of the Casket Company are using the upland section of the marsh to discard their waste, since there does not appear to be a barrel on the company's property. This situation was complained about to the City of Boston's Inspectional Services Unit. As of July 21, 1990, a violation notice was issued to New England Casket Company for loose trash at the rear of the property. We intend to spend some time resolving these ongoing litter violations and will continue to monitor the situation. Many thanks to the small band of volunteers who worked so diligently with Robin Snyder and other MDC personnel to clean this area.

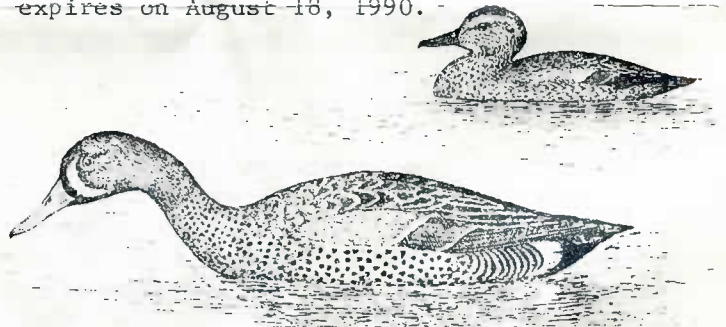
● The Belle Isle Marsh Reservations Unit office will be moving to One Eliot Circle, Revere, 02151. The telephone, 727-5350, will remain the same. Please call the office if you would like to assist the Unit in establishing its permanent home.

● Osco/Lombardo's Saratoga Realty Trust. In a move very disappointing to the Friends, the Department of Environmental Protection, (D.E.P.) has allowed the Saratoga Realty Trust (Lombardo), to go forward on its 1986 proposal to build a two-story addition to the Osco store, located on Saratoga Street in East Boston. Originally setting forth strong conditions for the protection of Belle Isle Marsh, the D.E.P. reversed itself, indicating that temporary construction fencing could be placed at the very edge of the marsh if the Metropolitan District Commission would agree to allow construction apparatus and a fence to be placed on its property. Saratoga Realty claimed that it could not build its addition within the forty feet of property that it owned without the need to maneuver on the MDC property. While we are disappointed that the MDC complied with Saratoga's request, we are hopeful that the project will be closely monitored by the Department of Environmental Protection, the MDC, and the Boston Conservation Commission, as mandated by the D.E.P. in its superceding order. Our legal representation by Attorney Ned Lawson of Boston did much to ensure a careful review of this proposal.



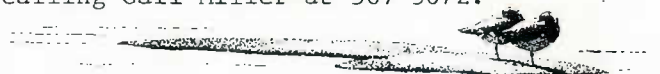
● For the second year the Town of Winthrop has allowed fireworks to be released from Snake Island off Winthrop on the Fourth of July. On July 15, 1990, the following birds were found to be nesting or feeding on Snake Island: over 200 adult terns, with 17-18 terns nesting in position, with several nests showing 2-3 tern eggs, plus two tern chicks and one immature tern; Oystercatchers; Hudsonian Godwit; Black-bellied Plovers; Sandpipers; Killdeer; Laughing Gulls; Ring-billed Gulls; Herring Gulls. We will be urging the Town of Winthrop to revise its position and seek another, more suitable location, with less impact on wildlife, from which to release fireworks in the future.

● Bonacorso Hazardous Waste Violation. As of this issue, the legal division of the Department of Environmental Protection is considering appropriate action to be taken as a result of the spillage of Methyl Methacrylate discovered by Winthrop Fire Chief Charles Flanagan on the Bonacorso site, Morton Street in Winthrop, on August 18, 1988. A determination is expected by early fall, since the statute of limitations expires on August 18, 1990.



● Thank you, Robin. The Friends would like to thank Robin Snyder, MDC Park Supervisor, for planting a bed of wildflowers on the side of the hill within Belle Isle Marsh Park. It is her continued efforts at beautifying this park that make her such a special environmentalist and Friend.

● We still have FBIM T-shirts for sale. In our last issue we forgot to include the Extra-Large size. Our remaining colors and sizes are: Medium in aqua and hot pink; Large in mint green, lilac and hot pink; Extra-Large in light blue, watermelon, hot pink, lilac and mint green. We also have Small in tan selling for \$5 each. All the rest are \$10 each and can be purchased by calling Gail Miller at 567-5072.



EIGHT YEARS OF BELLE ISLE MARSH CENSUSES

Counts of Snowy Egrets, Great Egrets, Glossy Ibis at around sunrise

For the eighth consecutive summer, intrepid censusers have been arriving at Rosie's Pond before dawn on Sundays to count the arriving Snowy Egrets. We do not necessarily sacrifice Sunday breakfast or brunch. In fact, we are often back home long before our loved ones notice our absence. Most censuses start by 5 A.M. (20 minutes to a half-hour before sunrise) and are over by 7 A.M. The herons arrive and are counted within twenty minutes or so of sunrise. That's before the planes at Logan have woken up. It is PEACEFUL.

In the graphs below I summarize the Belle Isle heron counts for the last seven seasons. Most counts from May and June barely exceed ten to twenty birds. At this time herons are nest building, egg-laying, incubating, and hatching young on the harbor islands. One parent from each pair may fly as far as Belle Isle to feed by day, but most stay close to home. By the middle of July in most years a steep climb in the counts of herons is noticeable. As young herons hatch and grow the parents have to forage increasingly farther from home to bring back enough to feed them. Toward the end of July and the first week of August there is a major peak of heron numbers as both parents and young begin to fly to favored feeding spots. The numbers then dip as "post-breeding dispersal" takes herons in all compass directions. This is the season when many young herons from further south appear here and much further up the coast toward Canada.

The second, and in many years, larger peak in heron numbers begins toward the end of August and culminates in mid-September. This is the southward migration of herons. Staging areas such as Plum Island can host up to a thousand Snowy Egrets at this time. Our own peaks of close to 200 birds at this date in several different years makes early September heron-watching the most exciting of the season. By mid-October most herons have departed for warmer climes further south, although Great Blue Herons and a few Black-crowned Night Herons can be seen into the winter months most years.

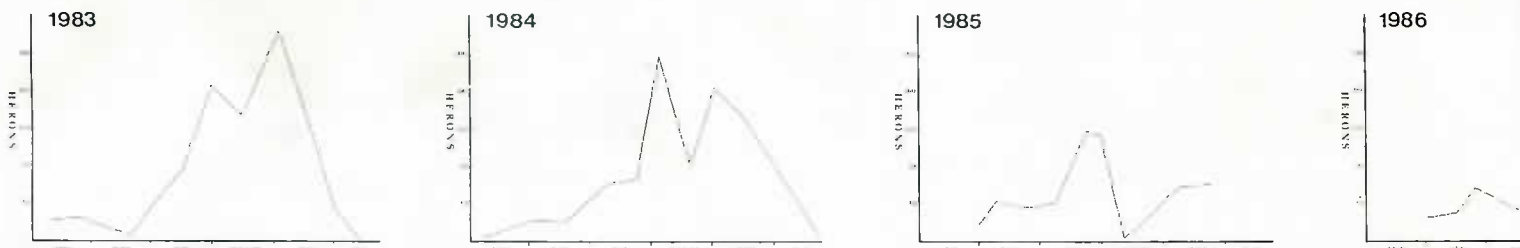
The graphs also show that some of the highest counts we have had occurred in 1983 and 1984. The 1988 counts were very low, whereas 1989 counts nearly rival some of the early years. We think the fluctuation in heron numbers counted at Belle Isle over the years corresponds to the numbers of breeding herons on the harbor islands. (More on this in a future article). The table below shows the number of breeding herons counted on the islands in 1989, primarily at Middle Brewster Island:

Snowy Egrets	200 pairs
Black-crowned Night Herons	200 pairs
Glossy Ibis	12 pairs

(Information courtesy of Professor Jeremy Hatch, U Mass, Boston).

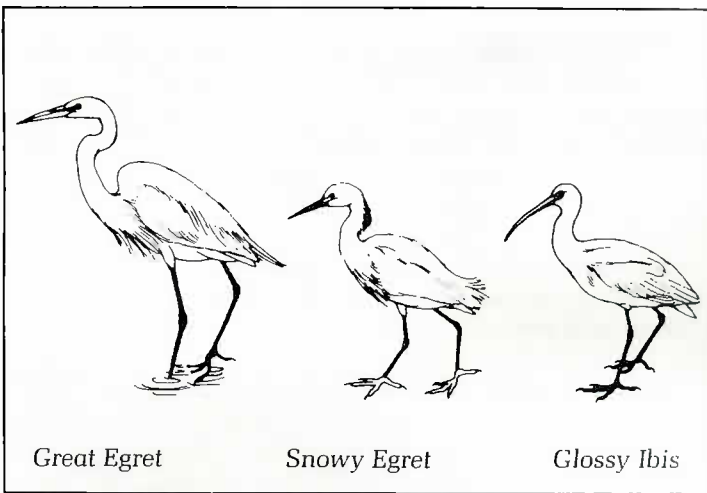
I should explain that the graphs show counts of "southern" herons only. In practice, this means mostly Snowy Egret totals, with a handful of Great Egret and Glossy Ibis counts thrown in. Although we count Great Blue Herons, Green-backed (formerly Green) Herons, and Black-crowned Night-Herons, their totals don't get mixed in with the others. My reasoning on this is as follows: we are counting the birds that traditionally nest and roost on the Boston Harbor Islands and fly to marshes in the city by day to feed. In Massachusetts Great Blue Herons breed in wooded, inland swamps and only come to the coast in the summer as stragglers. To my knowledge, they don't have a regular roost on any of the islands. Green-backed Herons breed singly in lots of scattered localities, probably right in the Belle Isle neighborhood. Their pattern of movement does not blend into the island-nester's pattern. Black-crowned Night-Herons, though they nest on the harbor islands, have a different schedule than the others. Being NIGHT herons, they often are out foraging after dark. On most days they just seem to move around randomly early in the morning. The ibis and the two species of egret, on the other hand, seem to have a very specific roost pattern: they sleep on the harbor islands and at dawn fly over to various marshes around the city to feed.

DAWN HERON CENSUSES AT BELLE ISLE MARSH 1983-1989



HIGH TIDINGS

If you know the time of high tide in Boston, and you want to know the exact time of high tide at Belle Isle Inlet, simply add 20 minutes to the Boston high tide time. Example: on September 23, the scheduled afternoon for the Belle Isle Canoe Trip, high tide in Boston will be at 2:41 P.M. Add 20 minutes and that puts high tide at Belle Isle Inlet at exactly 3:01 P.M. (This information was taken from Coastal Zone Management's 1990 High Tide Table for Boston Harbor).



To be sure, there were some highly publicized heron sightings last summer that didn't make it into these tallies: the adult Little Blue Herons, the Tricolored Herons, the American Bitterns, and the Least Bittern, all seen last summer and fall at the marsh, just didn't fly in in the morning and get counted. What can I say? This is a scientific survey, not a bird count!

To participate in this survey, all you need to do is appear at Rosie's Pond (at Palermo Street, East Boston, right by the big wooden Belle Isle Reservation sign) a half-hour before sunrise on any of the Sundays listed below. For more information, please call Soheil Zendehe at 863-2392.

SOHEIL ZENDEH

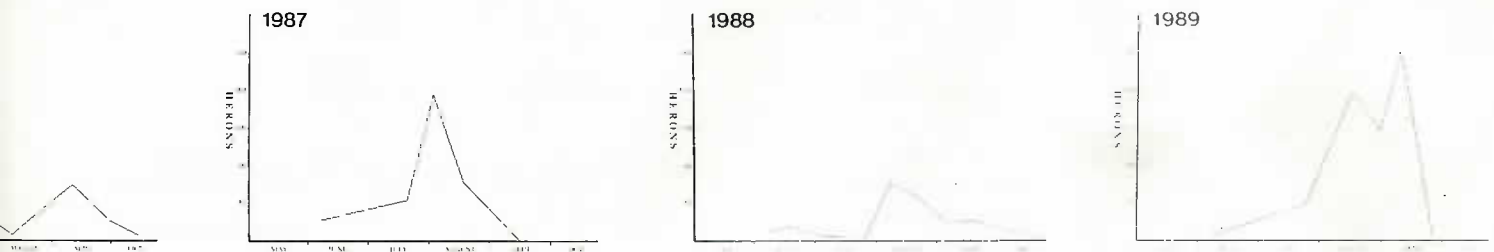
1990 DAWN HERON CENSUS DATES



DATE	SUNRISE	HIGH TIDE
AUG 26	6:03	3:45
SEP 2	6:10	10:00
SEP 16	6:25	9:45
SEP 30	6:40	8:30
OCT 14	6:56	8:45

MASSACHUSETTS BIRDERS MOBILIZE

In an effort to help protect threatened birds and their habitats in the Western Hemisphere, Massachusetts birders have mobilized and created the MBO/Mass. Birders' Forum, a network of the Manomet Bird Observatory. A December 1989 symposium on migrant birds asserted that certain populations of birds are declining. Eager to gain more information, available only through field research, it was discovered that researchers in Latin America are seriously ill-equipped because binoculars, scopes and banding supplies are either not available or are prohibitively expensive in their countries. Luis Naranjo of Colombia pointed out that "Migrant birds do not recognize political borders. To save these species we must begin to have a similar perspective of the hemisphere". The plight of Latin American field biologists has sparked the founding of this new network, as well as a used equipment drive and fund-raising effort. If you are able to donate any used equipment, or would like to learn more, contact the Forum through Tod Highsmith at MBO/Mass. Birders' Forum, Manomet Bird Observatory, P.O. Box 936, Manomet, Massachusetts, 02345, or call (508) 224-6521.





Europeans' relationship to the New England environment was markedly different. Fundamental to this relationship was their view of natural resources as commodities representing potential wealth. The earliest European explorers described the region in terms of marketable products. Their intent was to discover sources of products for European consumption which could be sold at a profit. The English concept of private ownership, coupled with their value of wealth accumulation, transformed their subsistence economy to one of surplus production for local and international trade. This implied that English needs were far different from Indian needs. The English required resources both for immediate use and to satisfy seemingly insatiable foreign market demands.

It followed that English settlers claimed exclusive right to exploit both the land and its inhabitants. In fact, colonial law held that settlers were not entitled to ownership unless they "improved" the land with clearing and cultivation. Since New England resources were seen as limitless, it was not thought necessary to conserve them.

The effects on the land were obvious. Acres deforested by burning became infertile with constant cultivation. Animal species dependent on forests lost their habitats or were hunted to local extinction. The inexhaustible European market for furs was satisfied at the cost of extinguishing whole animal species. Heavy lumbering depleted species of trees. Floods occurred where trees had previously absorbed rain and snow runoff. Conversely, streams, rivers and marshes disappeared. The landscape was irrevocably altered.

These changes were most apparent to the region's native people. Whereas they initially accommodated European demand for furs by increased trapping, they found that the transfer of land to English ownership eventually precluded satisfying even basic needs. Restricted to reservations, Indians were unable to relocate to fertile land and the soil they cultivated became exhausted. Disease introduced by the Europeans prevented native people from resisting these incursions. By 1800, entire villages had been destroyed, and with them, Indian social and political

structures. Eventually, Indians were unable to stop the progress of English land acquisition.

Cronon's work is a well-documented and fluently written history of the changes in New England's ecology during the colonial period. Perhaps it is more important as a paradigm for our current use of natural resources. Almost 200 years after the colonial period we still use finite natural resources with little or no effective plan for their conservation. Could Cronon's description of the English settlers as "people of plenty... people of waste" apply equally to present day Americans? Have we not yet deduced "the difference between yield and loot"? The implication of Changes in the Land is that the basis of effective conservation is the adjustment of our perception of what we need to maintain livelihoods. If we accept William Cronon's observations, hopefully such a reassessment has not come too late.

CATHERINE J. CAIN



HANNAH

The flock of white energy
on the snow-dusted frozen pond
absorbs you.

Gone

like Stewart, Wendall and the men
who walked and worked these fields.

Your travelling spirit,
flying,
will create more spirits
and more places to be.

Gurgling, bubbling, whispering geese
cry,

Night settles over the winter sky.

BARBARA GARD

CALENDAR EVENTS



- * VOLUNTEER FOR WGBH, Saturday, August 25, at the WGBH studios 3:00 to 7:00 P.M. The Friends of Belle Isle Marsh will provide volunteers to cover the phones during this summer telethon and WGBH will provide a studio tour, short orientation and refreshments. FBIM will provide transportation. Please contact Katie Durham at 262-2535.
- * MARSH WALKS will be given every Sunday from September through November. Meet at 10:00 A.M. in the parking lot at Belle Isle Marsh. Bring binoculars and wear waterproof footwear. Call Conal Foley at 846-0786 to check the schedule.
- * CLEANUP AT BELLE ISLE on September 15, Saturday from 9:00 to 12 noon. Meet at the Belle Isle parking lot on Bennington Street. Wear waterproof footwear. Garbage bags and refreshments will be provided.
- * CANOE BELLE ISLE on Sunday, September 23 from 12 noon to 4:00 P.M. Meet in the Belle Isle parking lot. This is a very popular event so please check with the Reservations Office at 727-5350 to reserve your place.
- * HALLOWEEN EVENT on Saturday, October 27, from dusk to 7:00 P.M. Come in costume to Belle Isle Marsh, walk our spooky trail and get an assortment of tricks and treats. Prizes will be awarded for best costumes. For more information call the Reservations Office (727-5350) or Gail Miller (567-5072).

This newsletter was produced by Carlene Meeker with the assistance of Soheil Zende, Gail Miller, Catherine J. Cain, Barbara Gard and Eleanor Casey. It was printed on recycled paper by Delta Printing of Lynn, Massachusetts. Heron drawings and charts were drawn by Carlene Meeker based on information from Soheil Zende and the Peterson Field Guide.

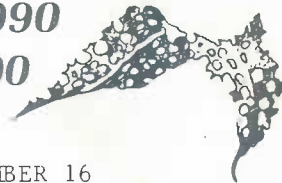


Belle Isle News is published four times per year by the **Friends of Belle Isle Marsh**, a non-profit environmental activist organization dedicated to the protection and preservation of Belle Isle Marsh. We are staffed entirely by volunteers and funded only through generous contributions. Membership dues are \$8.00 per Family; \$5.00 Individual \$1.00 for Seniors and Youths (under 16). If you would like to become a member, or can volunteer your time or services, please contact Gail Miller at (617) 567-5072 for more information.

ARTS IN THE PARK

September 9, 1990

Sunday 12 - 5:00



RAINDATE: SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

The ARTS IN THE PARK Festival will be held on Sunday, September 9, 1990, from 12 noon to 5:00 P.M. at beautiful Belle Isle Park. RAINDATE will be Sunday, September 16, 1990. Join the MetroParks staff and the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh for our Fourth Annual Celebration. Great dancing music will be provided by WILDEST DREAMS, a versatile, six-member band playing African, Calypso, Reggae and Soul. We'll have artwork displays by amateur and professional artists, our very popular pony rides for children, chalk drawing, face painting, mask making and make-your-own rubber stamps, plus a trash-to-art contest. Master of Ceremonies will be JOEL COTE of Revere, who owns a disc jockey company "Ultimate Music". September 9 is also GRANDPARENTS DAY, so remember to bring your whole family and a picnic lunch, or enjoy our refreshments, fruit and cookies. Nature walks and a raffle will also be held. If you are an artist and would like to display your work, please call Gail Miller at 567-5072. Arts in the Park is funded in part by the MDC, the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, and the Boston Arts Lottery.

Friends of Belle Isle Marsh
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