



Belle Isle News

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MWRA PIPELINE ROUTE CHANGE PROPOSED

Impact on Marsh Drainage, Water Flow Feared

This past October, the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh joined ten Winthrop citizens in filing an Appeal of a wetlands Order of Conditions urging the DEP to protect the Marsh during construction of a water main through Chelsea, Revere and Winthrop to the Deer Island Sewage Treatment plant. This pipeline is part of a long-standing MWRA plan which originally called for the construction of gas, electric, and water lines to supply Deer Island.

After further engineering studies and consultations with Winthrop's Conservation Commission, Selectmen, and Water Department, and the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, the MWRA was forced to reevaluate the planned utility route through Winthrop. They then proposed that it run from Short Beach under an existing dirt road through Zoppo's filled marshland behind Revere Street. At the end of this road it would tunnel across a tidal creek to connect to

Kennedy Road, which it would follow out to Revere Street. (See map, page 2.)

FBIM Questions Project Accountability

According to Katie Durham (formerly a member of FBIM's Board and currently its legal advocate) the Friends became concerned when MWRA filed a Notice of Intent with the Winthrop Conservation Commission in summer 1992. Through discussions with the MWRA and at the two public hearings on the Notice of Intent in September it became clear that, while the new route might solve some of the problems of the old, no one was quite sure how it would affect the Marsh. "One of the main issues we raised in our appeal is that there are significant technical issues which had not been addressed," Katie explained. "We want the DEP to assert its jurisdiction and issue a *superseding* Order of

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ALPHABET SOUP: A GLOSSARY

Ten citizens suit: Under Massachusetts environmental law, any ten citizens can initiate an appeal or suit against a state agency or municipality "in the name of public interest."

DEP: Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (absorbed DEQE in 1988), responsible for statewide enforcement of wetland protection.

Notice of Intent: Official notice given a local conservation commission or the DEP that construction or modification is being planned in or around a wetland.

Order of Conditions: The approval issued in response to a *Notice of Intent*, sometimes with modifications.

MWRA: Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (split from MDC in 1988), responsible for water and sewer services for Boston Metropolitan area. Now building an immense sewage treatment plant on Deer Island, off Winthrop.

PROGRAMS

The following programs are free and open to the public. Please meet at the parking lot of Belle Isle Park on Bennington Street, East Boston, between Suffolk Downs and Beachmont T-stations. To pre-register call (617) 727-5350.

Saturday, June 19, 10 AM:

Summer exploration. Leaders: Barbara Gard, Sireen Reinstein. Look for sprouting wildflowers, salt-marsh plants, and small critters. Waterproof footwear a must. Please pre-register.

Sunday, June 27, Noon-3 PM: *Kite Day.*

Monday, July 5, Noon-4 PM:

HarborFest Canoe Program: (See back page for more information on our canoe program.) Please pre-register.

Thursday, July 15, 10 AM and

Thursday, August 12, 3 PM: *Children's explorations.* Parents are requested to attend. Please pre-register.

Sunday morning walks, 9 AM:

Leader: Conal Foley. Please call (617) 846-0786 if you're coming.

Dawn Heron Censuses: See back page for details.

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ON BIRD IDENTIFICATION:

Do As You Say

Three men were shouting at Byron. As I walked over to him, they walked off, stoning him with their eyes.

"Thanks for the flamingo," one man was saying.

"Yeah, now we'll go for the ostrich," another said.

"You stay here," said the third. "We'll come back and tell you if we get it."

"What's all that about?" I asked. "A heron or an egret dropped down into one of those deep tidal creeks out there," said Byron. "I'm still trying to figure it out."

Why had the three men become so angry? Byron set the scene for me and described the action.

Scene I

Byron had been looking at a dark, long-legged bird far away in the marsh, first calling it a Tricolored Heron but then saying maybe it wasn't because it was all by itself and couldn't be compared to another heron for size, so maybe he'd better make sure it wasn't a Great Blue Heron.

Scene I, Action

"Tricolored," said one of the three men.

"The bill does look thin for a Great Blue," said Byron, "but I can't get any of the plumage with the sun in my eyes."

"Tricolored," said another of the three men.

"Could be a look-alike, something like a Western Reef Heron," said Byron, "something that looks like the bird you're expecting, something that you don't consider because you aren't expecting it..."

Scene II

A Great Egret landed in the marsh grass nearby, an all white bird comparable in size to a Great Blue and much taller than Byron's bird.

Scene II, Action

"Well, that dark bird sure is small enough to be a Tricolored," Byron said, "but it looks all dark. I can't see any white on it, not anywhere, not on the throat, not on the flanks. No white would mean no Tricol-

ored, also no Western Reef Heron..."

On he went, "Young Reddish Egret doesn't have any white on it. But this bird is way too small. The bill is too thin and too straight for a Reef Heron, also for a Little Blue, also for a Reddish Egret... How about trying for a black phase Little Egret?"

Byron went into a pocket of his safari jacket and pulled out Heinzel's *Birds of Britain and Europe*. "Let's see," said Byron, "for a black phase Little Egret we need a small dark heron with a thin black bill and gray around the eye instead of yellow and also with black legs. And maybe we need yellow feet like a Snowy Egret. But the grass is too long. We can't see the legs or the feet..."

"Don't need to," said one man, interrupting, "when you're looking at a flamingo."

Byron was going to say that a Little Egret recently appeared in Newfoundland, in white plumage as would normally be expected, and also that a dark phase Western Reef Heron had summered on Nantucket the year before. He decided to say nothing. Wisely, I think.

What did he think his bird might be? "Probably a species I ought to have recognized but didn't because it was in some kind of high breeding plumage I'm not used to. As you know," he added, "these herons and egrets can look incredibly exotic for short periods of time."

I didn't know, but I didn't let on.

I spent the rest of the day studying birds with Byron and getting words of advice on how to do it. Here's what he said.

Word 1. See with your mind, not your eyes.

Word 2. Think of identifying birds as a science where observations are the experiments.

Word 3. Always call a bird something so you've got a hypothesis to work on.

Word 4. Don't confuse probabilities with truth; they're simply what most people are prepared to believe.

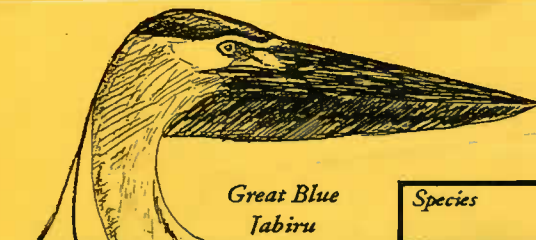
Word 5. Ignore the book if it says that a bird can't be here. Birds don't read; books don't sing; and probabilities don't fly.

Word 6. See for yourself, call it as you see it, tell people about it and *do* listen to people. But *don't* let them talk

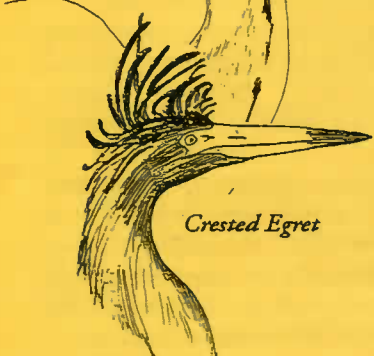
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Blue, Grey, Red, Black and Wretched Herons

Species	Length	Bill	Head; Face	Neck; Foreneck	Legs; Feet	Back; Wings	Also look for	Proves I saw it at Belle Isle	
Great Blue Jabiru (<i>Ardea mycteria</i>) adult: compare Grey Heron	47" 118 cm	yellow, massive from base to tip	white crown, black peruque; white cheek, pinkish nape	pink brown; dull white with black ruffles	dark yellow; dark yellow	blue-grey; two-toned: blue-grey, black-blue	reddish feathers where legs join body	Stately; flies on great wings to the measured bear of eagles.	
immature	47" 118 cm	dark above, yellow below	dark crown, no peruque; white cheek, brownish nape	pale brown; dull white with black edging	darker yellow; darker yellow	similar but duller			
Grey Heron (<i>Ardea cinerea</i>) (native to Europe, Africa, Asia; seen Greenland, Bermuda, Antilles, Trinidad)	adult 36" 90 cm	yellow, large but not massive	white crown, black peruque; white cheek, white nape	snow white; snow white, big black ruffles	dark yellow; dark yellow	two-toned like Great Blue but far paler	white feathers where legs join body	Pale grey, bright white, deep black; no red, no pink.	
first year	36" 90 cm	dark above, yellow below	dark crown, small peruque; grey cheek, grey nape	light grey; white edged with black	darker yellow; darker yellow	more uniformly grey than adult			
Crested Egret (<i>Egretta crax</i>) (coasts of C. America n. to Gulf States; immature on Monomoy 1992)	adult dark phase 30" 76 cm	thick, pointed; pink base black tip	dark red-orange; pale grey about eye	dark red-orange; plumage shaggy	both black, legs long	very dark dull	heavy thick body, neck	feeds with wings held in canopy over water	
immature	30" 76 cm	thick, pointed; mostly dark	dull grey shaded with cinnamon	dull grey shaded with cinnamon	both black, legs long	dull pale blue grey			
Tricolored Starthroat (<i>Helimaster tricolor</i>) non-breeding adult: compare Great Blue, Little Blue	26" 66 cm	yellow and brown, thin to sharp tip	indigo; white chin and throat	indigo; thin messy white stripe down to breast	dark yellow; dark yellow	underwing two-toned: white and indigo	white belly, flanks and rump	Dark above and white below; feeds like a frenzied snake.	
immature	26" 66 cm	same	crown grey, cheek russet	russet; pale stripe	yellow green	russet and grey			
Black-crowned Night-Heron (<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>) adult: compare	25" 64 cm	black; longer,	crown black; cheek, chin	pale grey; white from	yellow, quite	black back, grey wings	oblong head;	Short legs do not extend beyond	
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron immature	25" 64 cm	thinner, sharper	and throat all white	chin on down	short; yellow	contrast in flight	squat posture	rail in flight; only feet show.	
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (<i>Nycticorax violaceus</i>) adult	24" 61 cm	black; shorter, thicker, blunter	crown yellow, cheek white, chin black, throat grey	dark grey; dark grey from chin down	yellow, quite long; yellow	contrast; darker on outer wing than back	round head; erect posture	Long legs do extend beyond the rail in flight.	
immature	24" 61 cm	all dark	grey brown, pale streaks	grey brown, pale spots	yellow green	grey brown			
Gull-billed Heron (<i>Larogreggia caerulea</i>) non-breeding adult: compare Western Reef Heron	24" 61 cm	thick base steel blue, sharp tip black	all red darkened deeply by indigo	all red darkened deeply by indigo	deep indigo; deep indigo	uniform deep indigo		Feeds far more deliberately than Tricolored.	
immature	24" 61 cm	two-toned as in adult	all white	all white	yellow green	white with blue tips			
Tubenosed Heron (<i>Egretta pierodroma</i>) (native to W. Africa; dark form summered Nantucket 1985; since seen Barbados, Peru)	adult dark form: compare Little Blue Heron	22" 56 cm	brownish yellow, thick to heavy tip	deep grey-blue, may show two plumes; chin, throat white	very deep grey-blue; same on foreneck	black; dark brownish yellow	all deep grey-blue	entire face dark about the eye	Charges at prey while Little Blue fishes patiently.



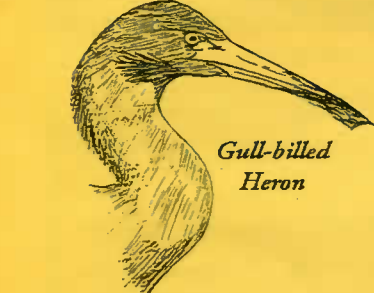
Great Blue Jabiru



Crested Egret



Tricolored Starthroat



Gull-billed Heron



Tubenosed Heron

Heron heads © Denise Cabral

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Do As You Say (Continued)

you out of your bird, whatever they know, just because they have a big need to know more than you.

Word 7. Find out what looks like the species you expect to see, but isn't, and count on finding it whenever you see a big group of birds you think are all the same just because they look like they ought to be.

Word 8. Look for the rare bird, not the common bird, because one of the best ways to learn what things are is by comparing them with what they're not.

Word 9. Always look for what they tell you that you can't see, because if you only look for what you expect, that's probably all you're ever going to see and you'll never know for sure what it is.

Word 10. Rare birds do stand out from common birds once you know what you're looking at. So, if you keep seeing a rarity among other birds, that's a good sign; but, if you're working too hard on a rarity, it probably isn't one.

At the end of the day, Byron told me if I really wanted to learn how to learn I ought to read Plato. I did read several of his dialogues. But I found out that Plato doesn't tell you what he thinks. Instead, he tells you stories about Socrates.

I also found out that Socrates is wasting his time. People agree with everything he says. And several pages later, when he says just the opposite, they agree with that, too. How can Socrates learn anything from people like that?

J. H. Barton

Sources for Table

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[Editor's note: Although anything is, of course, possible, readers of the table (previous page) should be aware that Grey Heron has never been reliably reported in North America; that there is only one record of a Western Reef Heron in North America; and that Reddish Egret is an extreme rarity in the Northeast. The author's enthusiasm for rare bird reports should not blind one to the necessity of eliminating the commoner of our herons—Great Blue, Tricolored, or Little Blue Heron—before suspecting a true vagrant.]

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MWRA Pipeline (Continued)

Conditions."

Our appeal to the DEP outlines the major problems with routing through this portion of the Marsh. Our main concern is disturbance of the creek, which feeds several acres of healthy salt marsh, possibly altering its flushing and flow patterns and its salinity, thus changing the drainage and flood-retention capacity of this eastern area of the Marsh.

"The MWRA argued that they were responsible only for the work they did to the creek bed, and not the marsh around it. Fortunately, our state wetlands laws do not agree with the MWRA," said Katie. "There's a delicate balance among the species in the marsh; a change in the water quality or in any other marsh characteristic can affect that balance. The *Phragmites* on the perimeter of the marsh are a good example. [*Phragmites* are the tall, strawlike, plumed plants that grow in brackish areas.] They're an aggressive alien species with very low wildlife value. Given any kind of competitive edge, such as a change in salinity, they move in, crowding out all the other plants. Belle Isle Marsh should not be an experiment for the MWRA. We feel that the MWRA has to be held more accountable."

Elizabeth Regan

[The second part of this article will report on another layer of complexity added to the project when contaminated soil and groundwater were found along the proposed route.]

Belle Isle News is published quarterly by Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of this marsh. We are staffed entirely by volunteers and funded through generous contributions and dues: \$8 (Family), \$5 (Individual), and \$1 (Seniors/Under 16).

Each and every one of you is important to us. Thank you for your continued support.

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