

# Annual Meeting Sunday, March 12

**Speaker:** Valerie Burns, Director of Boston Natural Areas Fund: "East Boston Greenway."

**Time:** Sunday, March 12, 2-4 PM.

**Place:** St. John's Episcopal Parish Hall, 222 Bowdoin St., Winthrop.\*

*This meeting is free and open to the public. Join the gathering of Friends and enjoy the speaker, special interest corners, entertainment, photo contest, socializing and refreshments.*

**Photo Contest:** We will announce the winner of the 1995 Belle Isle Photo Contest. Please mail your entries by March 4, or bring them to the meeting by 1:30 PM.

**Annual Elections:** We will present a slate of officers and accept other nominations from the floor. Please call in nominations to Mary Mitchell at (617) 846-2389 after 6 PM.

**\*Directions:** From Revere shore onto Revere Street, Winthrop; right at first set of lights, through second set, sharp left at third set (five-corners). Immediate right onto Bowdoin Street, keeping right at fork to Parish Hall on left.

From East Boston Bennington Street at Orient Heights, take Route 145 to Winthrop, right onto Pleasant Street (still 145), left at Episcopal Church sign onto Buchanan Street which curves right to Parish Hall on left.

The Parish Hall is a low yellow brick building.

## SPRING PROGRAMS

**Signs of Spring Survey:** Sunday, March 26, 10AM-noon.

Explore MDC's Nahant Beach and Rumney Marsh Reservations. Leader: Geoff Wood. Meet at Ward Bathhouse, at the rotary at the north (Lynn) end of Nahant Causeway. Call (617) 727-1397 to reserve a space.

**Sunday morning walks:** 11 AM (10 AM when Daylight Savings starts). Leader: Conal Foley. Please call (617) 846-0786 if you're coming.

**Spring Hawkwatching:** Saturdays & Sundays, April 22 & 23; April 29 & 30; May 6 & 7. Meet on the hill in the middle of the Park; dress warmly and bring a lawnchair. For more information call Soheil Zende (617) 863-2392.



1995 renewal envelopes inside

## Belle Isle News

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Number 45 Spring 1995

### Rumney Marsh ACEC Meeting

On Thursday, January 12, a group of over 30 individuals met at the MDC Eliot House in Revere to discuss the Rumney Marsh Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). As most of you know, ACEC provides extra avenues for environmental protection of the over 1600 acres of salt marsh, mud flats and open water making up Belle Isle and Rumney Marshes.

The purpose of the meeting was to get everyone to meet, share information and begin discussion of current and future plans for this important natural resource. Another goal was to create a communication network between the non-profit groups, government agencies, area businesses and others.

Leslie Luchonik, director of the ACEC Program, led the meeting. After introductions from participants, the discussion turned to issues of maintaining traditional uses of the marsh, organizing clean-ups and marsh restoration efforts, MDC plans and property acquisition. Over 10 groups were represented at the meeting. FBIM was represented by board members John Kilmartin and Karyl Stoia.

One of the goals of the meeting was to create a method of communicating information to the various participants. To this end it was suggested that a quarterly newsletter be developed to compile and distribute important news, information, alerts etc. In addition, the group planned to meet at a later date.

*Karl Pastore*

*MDC North District Supervisor*

*ACEC status for these marshes was won mainly through the efforts of Dan McAuliffe, formerly of Roghan's Point, Revere.*



**Answer to our Bird Puzzler:** The mystery bird depicted on the front page of our last newsletter was an American Avocet.

## Hawkwatching at Belle Isle Marsh Can Be Hazardous to Your Sleep!

**H**awkwatching can be an excellent excuse for lying around outdoors and doing not much of anything but staring at the sky for hours. Sleep comes naturally under such circumstances.

I know. I have personal experience of this sort of "activity." Of course, certain details like taking note of wind direction or temperature every half hour, required for accurate hawkwatch records, interfere with my repose. But most of the time at a spot like Belle Isle where the frequency of hawk flights are low, I have a very good chance of not having my nap interrupted by anything other than my conscience nagging me to gather wind and weather data.

Thus it was with a great sense of anticipation for a nice quiet day of hawkwatching that I arrived at Belle Isle late in the morning of May 25, 1983. I had been up early and at Mount Auburn Cemetery, chasing heaven-knows-what warblers, so I really did need that rest. The following essential items were checked off before I started for my destination—the top of the hill in the middle of Belle Isle Park: binoculars; telescope; bag containing bird books, hawk guides, field note book; backpack containing clipboard, hawkwatch reporting forms and instructions, extra hat, gloves, sweater, sun-visor, rain parka, and thermometer; green bag containing knife and fork, French bread, feta cheese, avocado, honey, Marie's Garlic Dressing, plastic garbage bags, etc.; and reclining folding chair.

The sun was bright and the wind, as usual for this location at this time of year, was stiff and chilly out of the northeast. My friends Craig Jackson and Barbara Gard were gathering invertebrate data down in the marsh at rather a distance. I waved to them, then settled down for a good snooze on the grass.

Over the next half-hour two "firsts" for Belle Isle flew over. I noted them groggily and closed my eyes again. The first was a Blue Jay. Blue Jays, you say, are very common city birds. True enough, but somehow you don't see them much around salt marshes; they like to be around oak woods or in brushy back yards. So I was pretty excited to see one flying over. Next came a Common Loon flying high above. In May you can see loons flying overhead just about anywhere if you care to

crane your neck constantly; still it was a treat to get my first record at Belle Isle.

I dozed off for another half-hour. Then, out of the slit in my eyelids I noticed a large white bird coming over from the southeast. It was sailing majestically and did not appear to be a gull. Through the binoculars I saw that it was all white with black trailing edges to the wings. The head and tail were short, the bill long, heavy and yellow-orange. What looked like large yellow feet were pulled up against the belly-feathers.

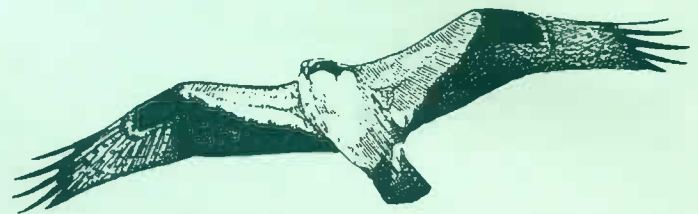
I was initially paralyzed by fear—fear that whatever this was would get away before I had figured out what it was. Then I *knew* it was an American White Pelican; no question about it. I ran over to the edge of the hill and began whistling and screaming at Craig and Barbara like a madman: I wanted them to look up. Craig was funny. He looked up, saw the bird, and yelled back, "Is it a stork?"

Eventually Craig and Barbara dropped their muddy equipment and dug out their binoculars just in time to see the strange beast disappear over the horizon. Later on Craig still wanted to know if it was a Whooping Crane, a Wood Stork, or a Snow Goose. I assured him that nothing but an American White Pelican looked like that.

As the afternoon wore on, a few Sharp-shinned Hawks flew over. Later on, while a group began to gather for an FBIM field trip, a Peregrine and a couple of Ospreys went by. That day of hawkwatching, sad to say, was not conducive to getting any sleep.

*Soheil Zende*

*The author leads the Belle Isle Hawk Watch in spring and fall. (See Spring Programs.) No American White Pelicans have been seen since that day on the hawk watch, nor is there any likelihood of such a bird being seen again in this area. But we can all watch the sky hopefully, can't we?*







*Beachmont in the background; staddle-studded Belle Isle Marsh in the middle ground; narrow-gauge RR and cedar logs in the foreground. Circa 1910. (Photographer unknown. If you have any information regarding this photo please contact the editor.)*

## RANGER'S NOTES

### Marshin' Men: Their Staddles and Gundalows

**D**uring the mere two-week haying season of late summer neap tides, marshin' men worked with scythes to cut the salt-marsh grasses. Each evening they lugged the cut grass to waiting gundalows and floated home on the incoming tide. Alternatively they could scythe about three acres and stack the two- or three-ton harvest on a 12-foot-in-diameter staddle. Sometimes the hay was left there until it could be collected by sleigh when the marsh froze.

I have never seen the remains of the heavy gundalow boats, but I have closely examined staddles on the marshes of Plum Island. They consist of 20 to 30 rot-resistant cedar logs driven vertically into the marsh and sticking out some two feet above it in order to keep the haystacks in place during flood tides. Today, remaining staddles serve as resting posts for sleepy Snowy Owls and Northern Harriers. At Belle Isle some haying continued into at least the 1920s, and the remains of staddles exist to this day. They probably date from before the time when cheap imported hay generally did in the marshin' men, well over a hundred years ago.

Last year I helped build two salt-marsh haystacks on

Plum Island. Marsh hay was once very essential. It was used to feed and bed cattle and also for roof thatch. Running a salt hay farm must have been a breeze: no manuring...no ploughing...no weeding...no worrying about irregular rainfall. High tide brought in the salt water which marsh plants tolerate and utilize.

Salt marsh real estate was once marked by boundary pegs. Later on, ditches were dug to make the field boundaries clear. During this century the digging of millions of ditches in continuous grids for mosquito control has made most salt marshes generally inaccessible, and so very little marshin' goes on. These days a bale costs three or four dollars and can be used for protecting frost-sensitive plants.

*Geoffrey Wood  
MDC Park Ranger*

*Geoff has been making time from his duties at Nahant Beach and Lynn Shore Reservation to visit Belle Isle to cut grass, attend to litter and gain an appreciation of the world of salt marsh.*

### Dredging Update

New survey studies on the feasibility of dewatering Belle Isle dredge spoils on the Winthrop part of the Reservation have been conducted. More details in the next issue.

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

### *East Boston Greenway Project Mitigation Agreements Litigation*

**Q:** *What do all of the above have in common that is most important to Friends of Belle Isle Marsh?*

**A:** *A continuous green belt from Jeffries Point in East Boston to the marsh.*

### **East Boston Greenway Project**

The \$400,000 awarded to help in the planning of a continuous green belt from Piers Park to Belle Isle Marsh was discussed at a meeting on January 26 by Valerie Burns (Boston Natural Areas Fund) and Nancy Kafka (Trust for Public Land) at the Meridian Street Library in East Boston. This money will not go toward acquisition or park construction. Instead, it is earmarked for a range of programs and events to involve the community in planning and advocating for a necklace of parks and parkways.

### **Mitigation**

The issue of the unsigned new MassPort mitigation agreement described in the January newsletter has not been resolved. The February FBIM Board Meeting

included a workshop to clarify the differences between the old and new agreements.

### **Litigation**

The two sides of the lawsuit (see January newsletter) presented their cases to Judge Patrick King on January 5 at Suffolk County Courthouse in Boston. We await a decision.

### **Final Note**

My last wish as President is that a mitigation agreement be signed that will provide funds for land acquisition and construction of a continuous green belt from Jeffries Point to the Marsh.

It is time for MassPort to address the quality-of-life issues that affect the residents of the surrounding communities in an open and honest way.

*Eleanor Casey, President*

### **More Acknowledgements...**

The names of several contributors to *Arts-in-the-Park* were inadvertently left out of our last issue. Among them were volunteers who assisted at the the children's craft table:

Sue Ferrino

Carol Merola

Linda Rainville

Leslie Remis.

More acknowledgements next issue.

Friends of Belle Isle Marsh (FBIM) is a volunteer organization dedicated to the preservation of this marsh. We believe that protection ultimately depends on public awareness of its value and beauty. Our focus, therefore, is mainly educational.

To join: Send dues to our address: \$8 (Family), \$5 (Individual), and \$1 (Seniors/Under 16). FBIM is a registered non-profit corporation. All your contributions are very important to us. Thank you for your continued support.

Please look for your membership renewal envelope inside this issue.

*Friends of Belle Isle Marsh  
P. O. Box 575  
East Boston, MA 02128*

**Address correction requested**

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