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President's Notes

With the deluge of bad news that falls on us daily, it seems, the average citizen can feel overwhelmed and helpless to do anything to change the course of great events. This is certainly true for those of us who volunteer at the local level to preserve the environment; but, as fictional self-help guru Stuart Smalley would say, "stinkin' thinkin'" never solved anything.

Well, if ever I am tempted to wallow in despair, aside from my friends giving me a good swift kick in the stern, the surest cure will be to remember the sights and sounds of our celebration on September 30 of the twentieth anniversary of the creation of Belle Isle Park. Governor Michael Dukakis, who as Governor gave the original dedication speech at the opening of Belle Isle Park 20 years ago, returned to deliver a rousing call to action to an appreciative crowd. Angrily denouncing the disintegration of the urban parks system over the last decade, he called for a renewed commitment to save our parks and open spaces and restore them to their former glory, when Massachusetts once had the "world class park system" that post-Dukakis administrations liked to talk about while they were busy underfunding it.

Governor and Mrs. Dukakis (she with a just-



(Photo courtesy of Gail Miller)

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Images of the 20th Anniversary Celebration. Clockwise from upper left: Willie MacPhail, Lucy and William Ferullo, Steward of the Marsh Geoff Wood, Becky and Bob Holmes, FBIM Co-founder Soheil Zende, Former Governor Michael Dukakis, FBIM Co-founder Kermit Norris. (Photos courtesy of Gail Miller)

published book), still vigorous and still passionately involved in public life, stand as a corrective to defeatist thinking. Their presence at the celebration, and just as importantly, the sight of so many past and present friends of Belle Isle Marsh, was a visual reminder of the fact that Belle Isle Reservation simply would not exist if it were not for the power of a few dedicated individuals to effect change. Kermit Norris, the first president and one of the founders of the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, gave a thoughtful and moving speech about how a small group of people came together to save Belle Isle from becoming a fuel tank farm, and touched on the wider issues of how important, and how fragile, is our connection to the physical world around us.

Favorite snapshots of the day: the two fifth-grade poets, Renata Fiandaca and Michaela Pepi-Lewis, of the

(continued on page 2)

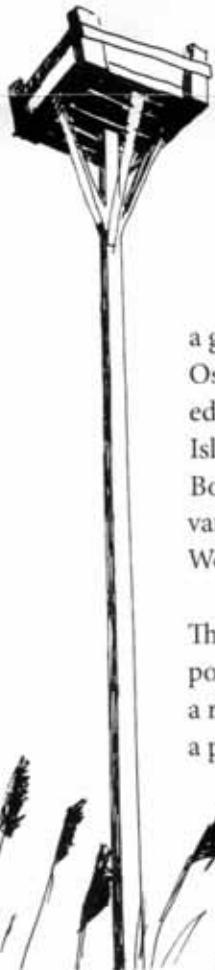
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Arthur T. Cummings Elementary School in Winthrop bravely taking the microphone to read their poems about Belle Isle before the large audience; the sight of Soheil Zende, resplendent in a suit, reminiscing with Kermit and fellow founder of the Friends of Belle Isle Craig Jackson; the reunion of Governor Dukakis and his MDC Commissioner, Bill Geary, Secretary of Transportation Fred Salvucci, his aide and former MBTA Administrator, Joe Aiello, and Dukakis-appointee to the Massport Board John Vitagliano. And of course, the smiling faces of the many friends and Friends who came to celebrate. We had a tent, we had a cake, we had flags, we had sunshine (for a little while, at least). A great 20th Anniversary was had by all!

Lyg



Top Left: Michael Pepi-Lewis reads her poem "My Backyard"
Top Right: Renata Fiandaca reads her poem "Exploring Belle Isle Marsh". (Photos courtesy of Gail Miller)



21 Years!

It was 21 years ago that a group of Friends put up the first Osprey nesting platform, at the edge of the bermed area in Belle Isle Park, not far from the current Boardwalk. That first platform was vandalized and broken within a year, but a short time later, a second, stronger pole was put up by Geoff Wood and the MBTA at the edge of the Orient Heights T yard.

There the pole sat all these years, barely if ever receiving but a glance from a passing Osprey. This year, beginning in early May, one, then two Ospreys began paying attention to each other near the pole. It's now obvious that they were using it for a nesting site, although we are not sure of their success, as a report from Logan Airport during the summer indicated that one of the adults may have been struck by a passing plane.

We remain optimistic for next year! Who said we couldn't wait?

Osprey Identification Tips:

Length: 22 inches Wingspan: 54 inches
Flies on flat wings with distinct kink at elbow
Wings taper to a rounded tip
Short hooked beak, white cap
Dark brown eyeline broadening behind eye
Dark brown nape, back and upperwings
Wings from below: flight feathers white barred with black, undersecondary coverts white and underprimary coverts black producing rectangular black mark at wrist
White chin, throat, breast and belly
Brown tail has a number of white bands
Hovers and then plunges into water after fish

Regal Monarchs of the Marsh by Andrew Birch

When people think of migration at Belle Isle, they recall flocks of ducks, maybe starlings and black-birds or even large groups of herons and egrets out in the marsh. Every year, however, another migratory flight moves through the area: the remarkable migration of monarch butterflies. Most butterfly enthusiasts agree that this year's migration along the east coast was one of the best in decades.

Usually this migration is barely noticeable in Massachusetts, even though each fall millions of monarchs in the northern United States and southern Canada begin to travel south. For many years, the ultimate destination of the monarchs was unknown. Then, in 1937, the entomologist E.A. Urquhart began placing tags on monarch wings to unravel the mystery of their remarkable migration. His results were astounding. Monarch butterflies from throughout much of North America travel to over-wintering grounds in the volcanic mountains of central Mexico, the exact location of which were not discovered until 1975. Some monarchs were found to embark on fall migrations of more than 1800 miles and total migrations of over 3000 miles.

Aside from their use of flight, the migration of monarchs is actually more similar to the migration of salmon than it is to that of birds. They make the journey only once and then die after laying their eggs in the spring. Another common misconception about monarch migration is that the same butterflies that leave Massachusetts will eventually return to Massachusetts. In fact, the butterflies that leave Massachusetts spend the winter in northern Mexico and then in the middle of March, travel north and east only as far as necessary to find fresh milkweed plants on which to lay their eggs.

The eggs hatch into caterpillars, enter chrysalises, and emerge as adults that eventually return to the same regions in which their parents were born. Many of the butterflies eventually arrive back in New England in late April and early May. The monarchs that migrate south later that year are the great or even great-great-grandchildren of the previous year's migrating monarchs.

More recently, it has been determined that while

monarchs migrate to Mexico from both the Eastern and Midwestern regions of the United States, the eastern route is the more hazardous of the two, with many more butterflies perishing before reaching their over-wintering grounds.

Monarchs migrating through Massachusetts can be seen fluttering along in loose lines along the coast, but as the air cools at night, they gather to rest in large groups at favorable sites. Then, in the morning, the sun warms the monarchs' bodies, giving them the energy to fly to the nearest nectaring sites and then to eventually resume their long flight for another day. Amazingly, monarchs actually gain weight during this long migration! For most monarchs, the nectar that nourishes them as they travel through New England comes from the goldenrod and asters that bloom throughout. The meadow at Belle Isle Marsh, with all its fall flowers, provides one of these essential refueling sites.

This fall, the monarch migration through eastern Massachusetts was truly spectacular. Multiple conglomerations of thousands of resting monarchs were sighted in the state – including one of over 13,000 butterflies at one site in

Dartmouth, MA, and another at Belle Isle Marsh involving thousands of monarch butterflies. While encouraging, the impressive numbers of migrating monarchs this year does not necessarily foretell a more permanent recovery of monarch populations in the region, due to the exceptional difficulty of the eastern migratory route and unusually dry conditions throughout portions of their southward journey. Nevertheless, this fall, butterfly enthusiasts and other visitors to Belle Isle were treated to one of nature's great spectacles; one that many hope will be repeated in years to come.

If you would like more information on monarch migration or butterflies in general check out the following sites, which were consulted in the writing of this article: massbutterflies.org, monarchwatch.org, and journey-north.org.

Andrew Birch is property manager at the Mass Audubon Boston Nature Center and moderator of the online Massachusetts butterfly reporting listserv - MassLep.



(Photo courtesy of Soheil Zendeh)

The Nature of Belle Isle

Wolves in the Grass by Soheil Zendeh



I usually turn boards over when I walk across the Marsh, hoping to find amphipods, voles or anything else that hides under boards. In early July, under one board there were 3 or 4 large wolf spiders carrying egg sacks. These sacks were at least 1/3 the total length of the critter. Most skittered away, but one was slow and I got photos of it.

Wolf spiders, family Lycosidae, are in the order Araneae (spiders), class Arachnida (arachnids), phylum Arthropoda (arthropods). The arthropods include crustaceans, insects, spiders and related creatures. Class Arachnida includes daddy-long-legs, scorpions, horseshoe crabs and spiders. The family name Lycosidae, derived from the Greek word for wolf (lycos), refers to the hunting method these spiders are reputed to use, of ambushing and running down prey. They do not build webs in the traditional sense. Perhaps the name also alludes to their grey color. There are approximately 100 genera and more than 3000 species of wolf spiders world wide.

A couple of weeks later, I saw three or four spiders with egg sacks, but this time they were all dug into holes in the moist marsh mud. Though they seemed reluctant to move, most scuttled out of sight, but one stayed long enough so, again, I got a picture. It shows her legs as she tries to bury further into the mud. Apparently, they dig down into the mud to keep their eggs moist.

The female wolf spider lays eggs in her round or oval, often cream-coloured, egg cocoon, which she carries attached to her spinnerets. She carries it until the eggs hatch. She then tears open the egg sac and the newly hatched spiderlings climb onto her back and are

carried about until their second molt.

Finally, by the end of July, wolf spider babies began to hatch out of one of the egg sacks. Up to now the egg sack looked full and rounded. But now it looked somewhat deflated, while mama's body looked deformed. Under high magnification it's obvi-



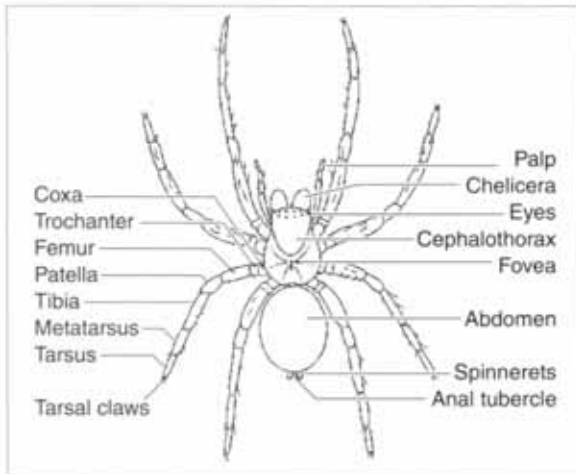
(Photo courtesy of Soheil Zendeh)

ous she is covered with tiny spiders. I don't know how many more were in that sack. She disappeared while I was fumbling around with my camera. There were other mamas with egg sacks, but I focused on this one and the others scuttled away.

Another week and the wolf spiders were well advanced in hatching their young. The big mother I photographed the previous week was still around and had many young on her as well as remnants of her egg sack. One other mother seemed to be hatching her young. One sack was lying by itself under the board. These mothers seem to dig out a space under the board and then spin an incomplete web around their heads, so the abdomen and egg sack stick out into the air.

Many species of wolf spiders hunt during the day, but some are nocturnal. When at rest they usually are found under stones or debris on the ground. They have good vision and their sense of touch is highly developed. Despite their name, wolf spiders do not always run down their prey. Some use the sit-and-wait strategy. Prey is grabbed with the chelicerae and a basket is formed around the prey with the legs before it is bitten by the chelicerae. The special kinship many of us feel for a spider is perhaps a sense of solidarity with another predator. It spins a web or waits in stealth for its prey to come to it. It paralyzes its victim, often a young insect, and then waits for its internal organs to liquefy before ingesting. Many people feel that spiders are among the most beneficial creatures on earth.

By September, the spiders were no longer carrying egg sacks. There were small spiders running around-the babies growing up. There were also a lot of small isopods (flattened pill bug types), looking like perfect prey for the spiders. But under a different board a wolf spider was carrying an egg sack. She was in a slight depression in the mud and it was lined with a fine mesh web. I had seen something like this where the other spiders nested, but this was a perfect bowl-shaped web. There was also a wolf spider with egg sack under the same board as the snakes. Ah! Snakes in the marsh - that is a whole other story. This spider egg sack looked fresh. I'm curious how long their reproductive season lasts.



Naturalist FYI

"To place spiders to species one has to examine the genitalia, for which one needs a dissecting low power microscope. The genitalia are the hard plates on the undersides of female abdomen and the first modified leg-like appendage of the male."

-Herbert Levy, Professor emeritus, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University

BIFCO Restoration Complete

by Gail Miller

After many years of neglect, a 1-acre parcel formerly known as BIFCO (Belle Isle Fishing Club) has finally been restored to wetland. It is located at Belle Isle Inlet between East Boston and Winthrop (along the former Narrow Gauge Railroad line). The entrance to the path can be found behind Brooks Pharmacy on Saratoga Street.

Due to the significant efforts of the City of Boston's Urban Wild park project manager, Paul Sutton, this area of Belle Isle will now be accessible to the public to enjoy and could also serve as a potential site for kayak and canoe launches in the future.

The Boston Natural Area Network president, Valerie Burns, and former

employee Lauri Webster, along with the Friends of Belle Isle's Vice President Gail Miller, started the restoration effort. Many long hours were spent working with the MBTA, a partner in this venture, the consultant DMJM, federal agency NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) and local officials from the City of Boston. Much of the money for the project came as mitigation from the Big Dig.

Fortunately for the public, this area was taken by the City of Boston for non-payment of taxes. The public can benefit by adding this stop to their foot travels. Future plans include a pedestrian and bicycle bridge over the inlet to join the East Boston and Winthrop Greenways.

Plans are also underway to name this area the Alphonse 'Benji' D'Amico Path. Please consult our newsletter and website for upcoming programming at the site in the near future.



Gail Miller, Vice President of the Friends of Belle Isle speaks at the BIFCO Dedication while John Catena of NOAA, Bob Varney of the EPA, Jim Hunt, City of Boston Environmental Department and Boston Mayor Thomas Menino look on. (Photo courtesy of Barbara Bishop)

Children's Corner

by Mary Mitchell

The day of our 20th anniversary celebration I was struck, as I am every time I visit the marsh, with its unparalleled beauty. The wide open space, the beauty of the hill rising up to the sky, the monarch butterflies fluttering from milkweed to goldenrod, are such gorgeous experiences I wish more people would visit and enjoy the park environment. Talk to your friends and introduce them to our park. If you have young ones, make investigating outdoor spaces part of their everyday experiences. As a kindergarten teacher, I am surprised at how few children have an appreciation of nature right outside their doors and within their own community. If you need help finding ways to introduce young children to the outdoor world, find these or other resource books to give you ideas and the vocabulary you might need to answer many questions.

Marshes and Swamps, by Gail Gibbons, Holiday House, New York, 1998.

Gail Gibbons writes many nonfiction books for young children. I believe I reviewed her book about monarch butterflies last fall. She fills her books with wonderful, accurate drawings and information, which should help any adult answer even the most curious child's questions. This book explains what marshes and swamps are and how they differ. She explains the differences between fresh and salt water ecosystems and, of course, gives many examples of animal life within these environments. There is even a map showing where some of the largest wetlands are in the United States, and Gibbons encourages us all to visit.

Words to Find:

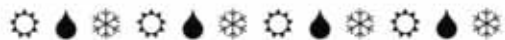
Marsh, Algae, Spider, Snake, Seeds, Monarchs

WORD SCRAMBLE

M	A	R	S	H	B	R	I
L	O	S	N	A	K	E	T
S	C	N	I	H	F	A	D
P	A	R	A	U	T	N	S
I	E	C	L	R	Z	A	E
D	O	S	G	A	C	R	E
E	O	H	A	W	I	H	D
R	A	R	E	F	B	O	S

Hug a Tree (and other things to do outdoors with young children), by Robert Rockwell, Elizabeth Sherwood, and Robert Williams, Gryphon House Inc., Maryland, 1996 (twelfth printing).

This is a great guide for teachers or parents or maybe even grandparents who are young at heart. There is information to help kids talk about their experiences and record information that they have gathered. There are some activities that help children slow down and really use their powers of observation. There are wonderful "lesson plans" that draw upon aesthetics, observations, and classification. "Hug a tree," "Let your nose do the walking," "The texture collector," or "Where do things go at night?" are just a few of the many ideas included in Hug a Tree. It's a fun guide that will make you feel like an Outdoor Expert!



Children play in the sand of the newly opened BIFCO area. (Photo courtesy of Laurie Sigmund)

Grow a Sock

Collecting seeds and nuts is a natural activity in the fall. However, a collector often overlooks many seeds because they are small or hard to recognize. An entertaining way to collect some hard to find seeds is to take a sock walk. Previously unnoticed seeds will be easily collected and as a bonus, one method of seed dispersal will become obvious.

What to do:

1. Dress each child in a thigh-high pair of socks.
2. Go for a walk through a densely vegetated area. An empty lot overgrown with weeds would be excellent.
3. Return to home or class and look at the socks! Then take them off.
4. Wet the entire sock, and place it in a cake pan placed on a slant. (see illustration right) Fill the lower portion of the pan with water so that the sock remains wet.
- 5 Put the pan in a warm place and watch the seeds sprout.

- Plants with fur carried seeds need animals to make sure they are widely spread. Do you think the plants do something to help animals in return (provide food, shelter)?.

Things you can use:

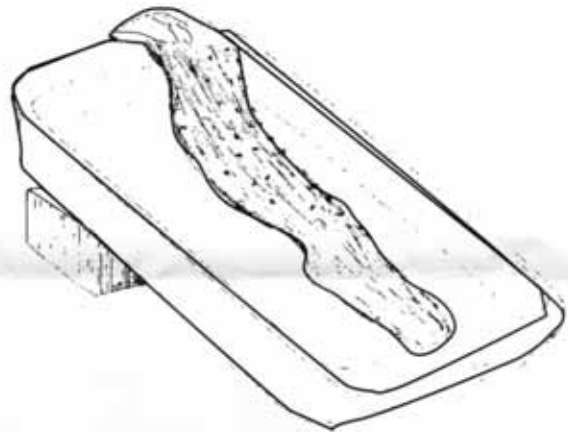
- long socks with fuzzy outer surfaces to which seeds will stick (ie. adult knee socks)

Words you can use:

- * dispersal
- * seed
- * germinate
- * plant names as appropriate

Want to do more?

- Pull the seeds off the socks. Sort and place them into cups by species. Allow them to dry. Divide each cup of seeds in half. Place one half in a freezer for 2 weeks. This is to simulate winter. Some plants won't grow without freezing. Next, plant seeds from both halves in "Seedbed in a Bag".
- Take walks at different seasons. Which seeds are harder to remove? Do some hurt you? Can animals help seeds find new places to grow? Yes! Glue samples of seeds on cards to develop a seed collection. Repot sprouts and grow them to full size.
- What other ways does nature have of spreading seeds around (e.g. winged seeds - by wind, berry seeds - by birds)?



Calling All Kids!

Belle Isle News wants to publish your work! If you have artwork, poetry, games, short stories or reports that you'd like to see published, send them to:

Laurie Sigmund
c/o Friends of Belle Isle Marsh
110 Loring Road
Winthrop, MA 02152

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday December 21st, 2006 , 6:30 pm
East Boston Greenway Council Meeting
Contact: BNAN 617-542-7696
Location: YMCA-Bremen Street
215 Bremen Street, East Boston, MA 02128

Programs At Belle Isle:

Saturday, February 17, 2007, 9 am
Tracking Winter Wildlife at Belle Isle
Saturday, March 24, 2007, 9 am
Birding Belle Isle and vicinity
Sunday, April 1, 2007, noon
Install tree swallow boxes and tubes.
Exploring the reedbed by canoe.
Preregistration required for this event.
All programs meet at the Belle Isle parking lot off
Bennington Street in East Boston
For information, call 617-727-5350

Thanks!

Thanks to the generous sponsors of the 20th anniversary celebration:
East Boston Foundation
East Boston Savings Bank
Gina Rafferty - IMG Gallery
Joe Aiello - AECOM
Sandra Jonek Schiff - Old World Flags
John Marcy - General Contractor
John Markley
As always, thanks to our site supervisors
Geoff Wood and Matt Nash.

Membership Update

Many folks rely on our autumn Harvest Festival as an opportunity to renew their FBIM membership, but the festival was cancelled due to rain this year. Please take a moment to renew today!

Dues are as follows: Individual = \$10, Family = \$15, and Seniors & Youth under 16 = \$5. We are a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, so your dues are tax-deductible. Thank you for your continued support.

Friends of Belle Isle Marsh is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection and restoration of the marsh. We believe that the future of the marsh depends on public awareness of the value and beauty of this natural resource. Our focus, therefore, is mainly educational.

To join: Send dues to our post office box: \$15 (Family), \$10 (Individual), and \$5 (Seniors/Under 16). FBIM is a registered non-profit corporation; contributions are tax-deductible. Thank you for your continued support.

For extra newsletters to share or leave on magazine tables at your hairdresser, lodge, or boat club, etc., please call 617-846-8298.

This issue was produced by Laurie Sigmund and Dani Foley. Thanks to contributors Andrew Birch, Barbara Bishop, Gail Miller, Mary Mitchell, Liz Regan and Soheil Zende.



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