

EVENTS

 *Dawn heron censuses:*
Sundays, September 21,
October 12, approx. ½ hour
before sunrise. Meet at Sireen
Reinstein Memorial Boardwalk
at the southeast corner of Belle Isle
Park. More information:
781-863-2392.

East Boston Greenway Council
Meeting: Thursday, October 23,
6:30 PM. East Boston YMCA, 215
Bremen Street, East Boston.

 *Boston Harbor*
TASL census (waterbird count):
Sunday, November 23, 8 AM
- NOON. Call leader for details:
781-863-2392.

Winter Lights Along the Greenway:
Saturday, December 6,
4 - 5:30 PM (rain/snow date:
Sunday, December 7). East Boston
Greenway, near Blue Caboose by
entrance to Greenway at South
Bremen and Marginal Streets. Free
and open to the public. Enjoy the
East Boston Greenway lit up for the
holiday season.

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Belle Isle News

Published by Friends of Belle Isle Marsh
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Piping Plovers, Winthrop and Revere

Piping Plovers invaded beaches in the Belle Isle neighborhood this year in force, got an unexpectedly warm welcome from the communities of Revere and Winthrop, and succeeded in nesting better than anyone had dreamed possible. Urban plovers, as they are called by biologists who frequent more pristine settings such as Monomoy and Duxbury Beach, are a new phenomenon. As such they rated a special mention at the meeting of coastal breeding bird wardens this year. Not only did adults survive, but the two DCR beaches, Revere Beach and Winthrop Beach, had some of the highest chick production rates in the state—which means the highest production rates in the world if you think about how Massachusetts hosts the largest number of breeding Piping Plovers of the total world population.

So how did this come to be? First of all, there are more plovers. Over 20 years ago, the population dipped to 126 breeding pairs in the state. Some of the strictest protection laws in the eastern flyway were enacted, symbolic fencing (that's the twine and stakes), signage and public education efforts were initiated. Protection worked. This year we had over 560 breeding pairs in Massachusetts.

Secondly—it is hard to avoid noticing—plover nests showed up in locations where beaches had “stuff” on them that kept people away. The “stuff” caused a few complaints; some people were even saying the beaches were neglected! But sometimes, for wildlife, the counter-intuitive works



Newly hatched Piping Plover chick is precocial: It runs about and feeds itself almost from the moment it leaves the egg.

best and a little neglect can help. Near the northern end of Revere Beach, dune fencing had been installed for another project in March of 2007. Although much of it washed away in April, the remains and associated debris covered the area and kept people away until the chicks hatched in July of that year. In 2008 in Winthrop, there was no money for “beach management” and prickly weeds had the same effect.

In any case, Piping Plovers got a good toehold before massive funding to clean up the beaches took effect this summer. They were back in mid-April, and there were eggs on the ground by mid-May. The Revere Beach nest was within a few feet of last year's spot, indicating it was likely the same pair. There were two nests on Winthrop Beach as well. All three nests ended up fledging 3 chicks each—well above the state average of

Continued next page

Piping Plovers (cont.)

1.25 chicks per nest in 2007. This high production rate opened some eyes in wildlife circles. As an added bonus, Least Terns, another threatened species, moved into the plover fencing and started building nests. At least 5 tern chicks have fledged from these nests so far.

On Yirrell Beach, after some intense efforts by volunteers and the Town of Winthrop with respect to crowd management for the mid-summer bonfire and beach days, a fourth Piping Plover nest hatched four chicks. The chicks from the Yirrell nest survived until about two weeks of age, but may have succumbed to a combination of heavy rain and predation in the critical time before they grew waterproof feathers. It was a reminder—this isn't supposed to be easy.

So why the high success rate? Some of it was luck. Rainy weekends in June kept beach use low when chicks were small. The tenacious nature of the birds themselves is a factor. They were certainly more acclimated to human presence than what is considered "normal". The quick start in April and the fact that they had not nested on these beaches before meant that predators were not keyed in on the sites. A quick management response with fencing, monitoring, and public education helped protect them from human and dog disturbance, enabling them to hatch chicks from first nest attempts, early in the season. Also, Least Terns (the ones that dive bomb) helped chase predators away from the colony.

Above all, public response was overwhelmingly positive. In Revere, almost everyone knew the drill from last year and locals took ownership. In Winthrop, most people were respectful of the signage and boundaries and seemed interested in learning more. In both communities the plovers got support from a wide cross section of beachgoers.

In both communities, efforts above and beyond the call of duty by

individuals who work for DCR were invaluable. There were concerns about trash accumulation in the enclosures, and about weeds. DCR staff, especially Nick Gove, DCR district beach manager, got a lot of pressure from supervisors and the public to clean things up. Nick put in a tremendous amount of effort trying to balance the needs of the birds and the public. Long time DCR employees Geoff Wood, Pete Luongo and Guy Citro all played critical roles at different times, educating the rest of the Department in the early weeks before policies were put in place, and they used their connections to advantage working with the public as concerns arose.

On Yirrell, Winthrop's town beach, the birds nested right next to the annual bonfire site, so Fire Chief Paul Flanagan ended up with the brunt of the extra work, but efforts of town police, policeman's auxiliary, harbormasters, environmental police, and local residents all were critical in the unprecedented hatch of four healthy chicks. Yirrell proved to be a prime spot for a whole range of both public and clandestine activities. The original enclosure was replaced with a sturdier version, named Fort MacPhail



Photo by John Van de Graaf

in honor of its patron, Winthrop public schools teacher Warren MacPhail. It is worth mentioning that disturbance of threatened and endangered nesting birds is a felony and environmental police has and will continue to investigate and prosecute violators.

Chances are good that plovers will return next year, and they will face challenges. Predators will forage, members of the public will have concerns about how enclosures are managed, and DCR will be pressured to manicure the beaches, which removes food sources and cover. Random acts by humans, dogs, cats, or the weather will destroy nests and chicks. But it is important to focus on the big picture. Urban plovers have huge educational potential. They are small but charismatic and relatively easy to see. They offer members of the public a unique chance to learn about wildlife for themselves.

It may be a happy accident that they did well the last two years, but an educated public is a blessing for these threatened birds. Chicks that grow up acclimated to humans may have advantages in colonizing other high-use beaches.



Public education about plovers, shorebirds and wildlife management in general is a main goal of the cooperating agencies which include Massachusetts Audubon, New England Aquarium, Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, DCR and US Fish and Wildlife Service; all of whom are most grateful to FBIM for affording this space in their publication.

*Susannah Corona
FBIM Shorebird Working Group*



THE CHILDREN'S CORNER

Recently, the news from scientists and farmers alike has been that honey bees are disappearing. Different theories abound. Some say the bees have a virus. Others think they may be weakened by pesticides. Still others feel that cell phone towers may be interrupting the bees' form of communication and they are simply getting lost and cannot return to their hives. Of course I don't know the answer to the mystery, but I do understand the impact of the loss of bees. Having grown up in the western part of the state, with a gentleman farmer for a grandfather, I know bees pollinate fruits and vegetables and without them we will not be able to grow food. My brother, who eventually took over my grandfather's farm, became a beekeeper for a while, hoping the hives would help with newly planted fruit trees. He also hoped to harvest honey as a diversified crop. All went well for a few years, but then the bees disappeared. This is certainly food for thought.

As I walk along the paths at Belle Isle I see bees fluttering from flower to flower. It reminds me of "The Farm" and my special relationship with my grandfather. He was a character and always ready for an adventure. Following are two books filled with information about bees. The third book is a special pick in memory of my grandfather, "Bumpa."



The Honey Makers, by Gail Gibbons, Monroe Junior Books, New York, 1997.

Gail Gibbons has written and illustrated many books about nature for children and several of her books have been reviewed previously in this column. She combines impressive amounts of scientific information with beautiful illustrations to the delight of readers, young and old. In *The Honey Makers* she begins with

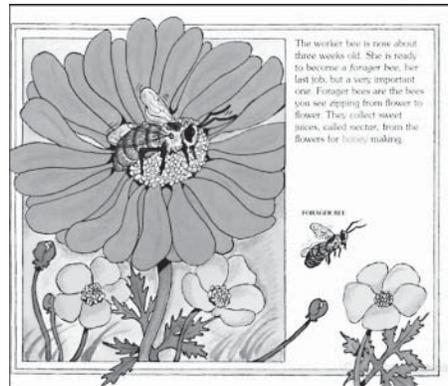
a wonderful description of the life cycle of bees and the production of honey. Did you know that bees that have found nectar return to the hive and do a "dance" to communicate to other bees where the nectar is located? Did you know that bees fan the nectar that is placed in hexagonal cells to reduce the moisture content? When the honey is ready other bees seal the cells with wax. Gail Gibbons goes on to describe how humans have collected honey over time, including modern day techniques. I found this book to be very informative, yet light and enjoyable to read with curious youngsters.



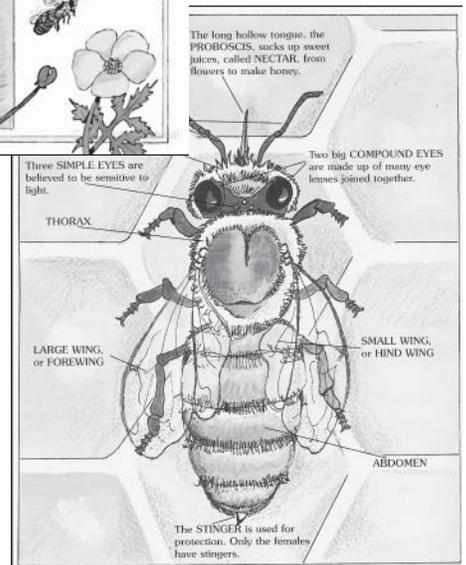
A Taste of Honey, written and illustrated by Nancy Wallace, Winslow Press, Florida, 2001.

Lilly Bear opens a jar of honey, sniffs, touches and asks, "Where does the honey come from?" Papa Bear replies, "From the market." "But before that?" Lilly bear insists.

And so the story of where honey comes from unfolds. Nancy Wallace presents bright and simple illustrations and factual information woven into the fictional tale of honey. There are many side bars with more detailed information and illustrations that children will find fascinating. This is a fun fictional tale that the youngest scientist will enjoy. There is even a board game at the end of the book to enjoy with little readers. Also there are websites that the very curious might want to explore in more detail.



Two illustrations from *The Honey Makers*.



The Bee Tree, written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco, Philomel Books, New York, 1993.

Patricia Polacco is a prolific writer of wonderful children's literature. Many of her books examine the relationship between generations. *The Bee Tree* is the story of a grandpa and a granddaughter who is not so interested in reading. So they forge forward on a fun-filled adventure to find a bee tree. By capturing a few bees from the garden, letting one go free at a time and wildly racing across the countryside, they spend the afternoon in search of the hive. Of course they pick up other followers along the way. They eventually find the hive, build a smoky fire to calm the bees and harvest honey combs for all those participating in the wild chase. This is a great tale to share with a special grandchild.

Mary Mitchell

The Nature of Belle Isle



The Orange and Black

All insects pile up. In a frenzy to reproduce and build up a continuing population, mad about late season blossoms, bugs, bees and butterflies are everywhere picking at flowers, fattening up, laying eggs. Fall weeds are lush under the beating sun. Insects are mesmerized, mesmerizing.

When I arrived at the Marsh the other day, the first thing that struck me was the brilliance of the goldenrod blossoms. What is it about goldenrod that gets it to bloom so late? At some point in the spring and early summer, most flowering weeds send out scent and color to attract attention from insects and birds. But late summer and fall is the season of the goldenrod, and its color dominates.

This day, goldenrods were well attended—by Monarchs.

In the spring Monarch butterflies migrate and breed their way north, following the wave of growing milkweed. Then, it is the care and feeding of their caterpillars that the butterflies aim for. Monarch caterpillars, among the few insects immune to intense toxins in milkweed “milk”, fatten up on milkweed leaves and incidentally pick up an immunity to predators. Nobody who has any sense picks up one of these caterpillars as food. Their flesh is too permeated with the alkaloids in milkweed sap to be palatable to bird or beast.

But in the fall, the Monarch lifecycle is dominated by the needs of the butterflies themselves. Intent on picking up nectar from flowering plants and

moving along their many-thousand-mile migration path to the Mexican mountains where they winter in huge masses, they feed on the abundant goldenrod blossoms. And the immunity from predation that the caterpillars pick up from their milkweed leaf diet carries through to the butterflies. Nobody wants to eat one of these either. The evolution of this beast into one of the most colorful and easily recognizable patterned creatures in nature is no accident: The orange and black of the Monarch advertises its bad taste!

Imitation certainly is the sincerest form of flattery. In the case of the Viceroy butterfly, it helps with survival. Viceroy looks like Monarch and thus escapes predators. It's a case of imitative ostentatious coloration.

But there is more. A bunch of bugs have got into the orange and black act.

There are the Large Milkweed Bug and the Small Milkweed Bug. Both live on milkweed sap and both taste foul. And they are colored elaborately and showily in orange and black. Then there is the Red Milkweed Beetle which, despite its name, is mostly orange with black spots. All these bugs happily live through the summer and overwinter in, on or around milkweed.

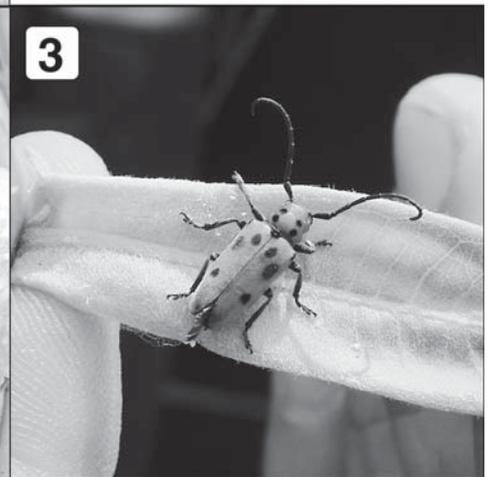
My friend Tim Factor, on seeing some of the photos of orange and black bugs and butterflies that I acquired this summer, informed me that the phenomenon underlying the similarity in coloration of this assembly of organisms is known as Müllerian Mimicry. You use that to protect yourself if you look like someone who tastes nasty and in addition you yourself taste nasty.

If, however, you look like someone who tastes nasty but in fact you taste ok, then you're getting a sort of free ride. That's called Batesian Mimicry, and that is the style used by the Viceroy butterfly.

Soheil Zende

The author, mesmerized by bugs, has begun posting photos of bugs of Belle Isle to:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/sohzenh/BugsLepsOdesofBelleIsle>.



Photos by Soheil Zende

The orange and black contingent: 1. Monarch (Danaus plexippus); 2. Small Milkweed Bug (Lygaeus kalmii); 3. Red Milkweed Beetle (Tetraopes tetrophthalmus)



Armed Men

Conflict sometimes can lead in the strangest directions. In my case it led to a stamp at the post office.

Back in January, I was on my usual path out to the marsh overlook off Lawn and Palermo Streets. Suddenly, I heard the unmistakable sound of a firearm. I was flabbergasted because I live in an urban environment in which the only really loud sound is a foghorn or an airplane. So I walked over to the edge of the embankment and found the source of the shooting. There were duck hunters set up in a blind beneath the Osprey platform at the end of the T train yard. How could they be there shooting at birds? So began my education in conflict.

First there is a bewildering variety of legal jurisdictions over this small piece of land. The City of Boston, the MBTA, the State Police, Homeland Security, Massachusetts Fisheries and Wildlife and others, all seemed to have some finger in the pie. I tried calling the City of Boston Police first. The operator found it hard to understand that I was reporting gunshots from duck hunters within the city. Eventually it turned out the the State Police were the appropriate people to report to, but that wasn't clear at first. It wasn't until it happened several more times that I finally got connected to the right people. In the mean time, I talked to a lot of different people, wrote about the hunters on my blog and even appeared on TV (it was a slow news night). All this was conflict born of my confusion and ignorance.

I had my own problems. I don't hunt but I do understand the impulse to feed your family and put some protein on the table. However, we live in a city

next to an airport, not a game preserve. I can understand trying to obtain a delicacy, but sardine flavored duck meat is not my idea of fine dining. I can even understand trying to improve gun skills through target shooting, but killing ducks is an expensive way to do that. Surely belonging to a gun club can give you access to a trap shooting range. Perhaps it really is just a matter of culture. I grew up in Dorchester where pigeons and sparrows were our idea of wildlife. I didn't grow up in northern Maine where moose meat kept you fed in the middle of a long cold winter. That's another kind of conflict.

The legal system presents all kinds of problems. It is illegal to fire a weapon within the limits of Suffolk County, but a colonial charter grants citizens the right to hunt on tidal land for wildfowl. Surprisingly, a three hundred year old grant by the King of England trumps a modern statute. These hunters were firing at ducks within three hundred yards of the Bennington St. bridge into Winthrop and fifty feet beneath one of the major flight paths into Logan Airport. It's the colonial grant that counts and is the winner of that conflict.

My own little public exposure led to other conflicts. Some people assumed that they knew why I was causing so much trouble. I got some very disturbing emails and a few phone

calls. I started all this trouble because I simply thought that it was very unsafe to be shooting anything near a Dunkin Donut shop and underneath a runway flight path. I am wary of firearms because I was taught by some very impressive Air Force sergeants that weapons are always potentially lethal. My experience was in conflict with the hunters by the Osprey platform. Some people believe that shotguns aren't that dangerous but I still refuse to believe that claim.

I finally found out that the duck hunters have a right to be there shooting ducks. I wonder though that just because you can do something, does that mean that you should?

What about stamps at the Post Office? One of my irate email correspondents explained to me about Duck Stamps. You can buy a stamp that supports a long standing conservation effort to protect and conserve ducks. In fact, Duck Stamp sales have supported the purchase of 5.2 million acres for the National Wildlife Refuges. So instead of a hunting license, I now own a 2008 - 2009 Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp. It's on my bulletin board and maybe you should consider owning one yourself.

George Cumming

The blog OrientSee is at <http://www.georgemacumming.com/>.



Hunters at the Marsh, January 2008

Photo by George Cumming

Bird summer

What an exciting summer for birdwatchers in Winthrop, Revere and East Boston. In addition to our usual shorebirds, Snowy Egrets, Great Blue Herons, Ospreys and other species, up to 9 Manx Shearwaters are being seen regularly in the water off Revere Beach. They fly low over the water, sometimes close to shore and occasionally settle in among swimmer and surfers. In the past they were native to Great Britain and Ireland, though they have been nesting in the western North Atlantic (our shores) since the 1970s. Some Manx Shearwaters live to the age of 50 years.

The big news is our nesting pairs of Piping Plovers, American Oystercatchers and Least Terns at Revere and Winthrop Beaches. Thanks to heroic efforts led by Susannah Corona, many chicks hatched! Susannah's account of her work with nesting Piping Plovers is in this issue of *Belle Isle News*.

Building and rebuilding

The Short Beach project at Belle Isle Reservation on the Winthrop - Revere boundary is moving forward.

We hope to have a new stone dust path and pedestrian bridge over Belle Isle Creek by next spring.

Another project of great interest is the replacement of the Belle Isle Bridge connecting East Boston and Winthrop. There are concerns that the condition of the bridge deck, slab, abutments, piles and bracing are approaching structural deficiency. The rebuilding is expected to take 18 months and will be similar in design to the present structure, not "humped." At a public hearing in June at the Winthrop Senior Center, engineers from Mass Highway presented their plans and promised that local businesses and the water in Belle Isle inlet will not be negatively impacted. We welcome this news and we will be following the progress of this \$5.9

million bridge project.

Legislative news

This year was also a banner year for environmental legislation. Thanks to House Ways and Means Committee Chairman (and long-time FBIM member) Robert A. DeLeo of Winthrop, Rep. Carlo Basile of East Boston, Rep. Kathi-Anne Reinstein of Revere, and our former Rep. and newly-elected Senator Anthony Petrucci for their leadership.

Legislative highlights include:

- **Global Warming Solutions Act** which sets greenhouse gas emissions standards of up to 25% of 1990 levels by 2020. This is an ambitious goal and we must all make major efforts to reach it. There will be new regulations for electrical generation, heating and cooling of buildings, and vehicle emissions.
- **Oceans Act** addresses the pressure from developers for ocean-based projects such as renewable energy facilities including wind-farms, desalinization plants and LNG terminals.
- **Green Communities Act** requires utility companies to offer rebates and other incentives for customers to upgrade lighting, appliances, air-conditioners and more.
- **Green Jobs Bill** establishes the Massachusetts Clean Energy Technology Center to promote and develop the clean energy sector. It will provide job growth grants for community groups, non-profit organizations and businesses and will link these opportunities with vocational schools and colleges to train people for good jobs in the clean energy sector.
- **Environmental Bond Bill** targets



Photo by Barbara Bishop

Kayaker and cars pass each other on Saratoga Street Bridge (Belle Isle Bridge).

investments in open spaces, parks, beaches and recreation facilities.

- The legislature also funded the **Natural Heritage Program** that protects endangered and threatened species including our own Piping Plovers, Least Terns, and American Oystercatchers.

The list of legislative accomplishment goes on. Please take a moment to call or email your state legislator and thank him or her for supporting this unprecedented legislation this year.

Barbara Bishop

President, Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

Would you like to contribute to the FBIM **Endangered Species Fund** to help with nesting bird protection efforts next year? FBIM plans to purchase additional snow fencing, which seemed to help the nesting plovers, and work with DCR to determine the best location for it at Revere and Winthrop Beaches.

Other activities being planned:

- Monday Night Forum on endangered species
- Portable informational display about these birds.
- Second Osprey platform at Belle Isle. Please send contributions to FBIM, PO Box 575, East Boston, MA 02128.



Photo by Barbara Bishop

Nicholas Gove, new Coastal District Manager for the Division of Urban Parks and Recreation, North Region, Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation.

FBIM President Barbara Bishop interviewed Nick Gove. Here is a transcript of the email interview.

BB: What parts of the job are you enjoying most?

Gove: I was fortunate to join DCR during an aggressive renaissance; I am

very grateful for the opportunity. In the Coastal District alone there are numerous capital projects in various stages; including Revere Beach Blvd. Improvements Project; Short Beach Improvements Project; construction of a new concession facility at Constitution Beach; and Nahant Causeway Reconstruction Project, just to name a few. I have really enjoyed working with my fellow staff; the agency is fortunate to have some very talented and dedicated personnel. I have also enjoyed working with the various Friends groups; their volunteer work and commitment is inspiring.

BB: What projects will you be involved with this year or next? Will you be involved with the project at Short Beach (Belle Isle "Zoppo" parcel)?

Gove: As District Manager I provide operational liaison services to DCR's Division of Planning and Engineering

on all the capital projects in the Coastal District. I look forward to working on the Short Beach Improvements Project.

BB: What are your impressions of Belle Isle Reservation so far? What problems or projects can the Friends of Belle Isle work with you in resolving?

Gove: Belle Isle Reservation is a remarkable resource; especially considering its location in a major metropolitan area. I believe Geoff Wood, DCR's Forest and Park Supervisor for the Park, has done astounding work with the property. With proper stewardship this resource will continue to thrive.

I would like to thank the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh for the key role they have played in the stewardship of Belle Isle Reservation. Their continued efforts and cooperation with DCR will help the agency properly manage this property in the future.

Cemetery Erosion

Tides are the lifeblood of coastal wetlands. Full, unrestricted tidal flushing of marshes supports fish, birds and everything else that they support. Roads, culverts that are too small or other infrastructure across tidal creeks may prevent the full tidal range to get up into marshes. These restrictions have a degrading effect, just as if you have a blocked artery or restricted blood vessel to the heart. The solution is to remove the blockage and allow the tides to fully flush the marshes.

Erosion at Winthrop Cemetery causes massive blockage in Belle Isle Creek. Because the flow of salt water into the section of this marsh near Bayou Street, Winthrop, is restricted, marsh grasses are being replaced by invasive, useless plants. Eventually, this could impact homes and streets in the area because excessive tides will not get absorbed into the marsh. On the other hand, the recent work that the cemetery administration did to shore up its edges has resulted in distinct improvements.



Clearly there have been improvements in the interface between Winthrop Cemetery and Belle Isle Creek. Additional improvements and marsh restoration at the creek edges are highly desirable.

Harvest Festival

at Belle Isle Park

October 5, 1 - 3 PM



- “Blanket the Globe” quilt making**
- Horse-drawn hay rides**
- Live band**
- Live raptor demonstration**
- Nature walks**
- Pumpkin patch**
- Refreshments (apple cider and cookies)**
- Snakes of Massachusetts and the World**

Sponsored by: Friends of Belle Isle Marsh
Massachusetts Department of
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Call 617-846-7418
or 617-567-5072
for more information.



Friends of Belle Isle Marsh (FBIM)
membership dues:

- Family \$15
- Individual \$10
- Seniors and Youth (under 16) \$5

FBIM is a registered nonprofit corporation; contributions are tax-deductible. Thank you for your continued support.

FBIM is a volunteer organization dedicated to the preservation of this marsh. We believe that protection ultimately depends on public awareness of the value and beauty of this natural resource. Our focus, therefore, is mainly educational.

For extra newsletters to share or leave on magazine tables at your coffee shop, public library, or boat club, etc., please call 617-567-5072 or email us: friendsofbelleislemarsh@comcast.net

*Our web address:
<http://www.friendsofbelleislemarsh.org>*

This issue was produced by Soheil Zendeh, with help from Barbara Bishop, Daniela Foley, Gail Miller and Christine Zendeh.

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*Friends of Belle Isle Marsh
P. O. Box 575
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