

EVENTS

All programs are free and open to the public.

 **Birding Belle Isle and vicinity. Saturday, March 27, 9 AM - NOON.** We will be searching for snipe at Belle Isle and waterfowl at the Oasis. *Meet at: Belle Isle Marsh parking area off Bennington Street, East Boston. Bring your binoculars. Beginners welcome.*

 **Birding Belle Isle and vicinity. Saturday, April 10, 9 AM - NOON.** We will be searching for spring migrants in the woodlands in and around Belle Isle. *Meet at Belle Isle Marsh parking area off Bennington Street, East Boston. Bring your binoculars. Beginners welcome.*

The following programs during April school vacation week are suitable for children ages 5 through 11 with adult chaperones.

Spring has Sprung. Wednesday, April 21, 11 AM - NOON. Enjoy the sights and sounds of spring at Belle Isle. *Meet at Belle Isle Marsh parking area off Bennington Street, East Boston.*

Tide pool Exploration. Thursday, April 22, 11 AM - NOON. Come along for an hour of ocean discovery as we investigate the tidal pools of Red Rock. *Meet at Red Rock Park, Lynn Shore Drive, Lynn.*

*For additional information, contact DCR Visitor Services Supervisor Matthew Nash.
Email: Matthew.Nash@state.ma.us.
Phone: 781-485-2804 ext. 105.*

ANNUAL MEETING, MARCH 14

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Belle Isle News



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Orient See



A Winter's Walk

Expectations. You'll usually only see what you expect to see. Trees, grass, birds, clouds. Blah, blah, blah, the same old stuff. Stop and look a little closer and you'll realize that sparrow has a bicolored beak: An American Tree Sparrow, not just a little flying blob of fluff. That blob of leaves up in the winter bare tree is really a squirrel nest, a drey. That fantastical animal creeping along the marsh is alas just another black plastic bag or is it? Actually it was just a bag but it could have been something altogether more exciting.

For some reason, a lot of people assume that the world really is dead in January. No birds, no leaves, just ice and snow. Who goes out to look at nothing? A January thaw made my walk easier than usual today (just two pairs of socks, not three). By the casket company, I

found another tree that seems to be a practice site for woodpeckers drilling holes. No nest was made, just a lot of holes. Why all the effort for nothing?

Next, I found a Mullein flower; well, not really a flower but a floret of green leaves tucked into the feet of a snow pile. It was a surprise intrusion of growth into winter's grip. There's lots of peppery chive growing green everywhere. The plants aren't dead, just laying low. Over the nearby tree tops, I was totally surprised to see a single male Red-winged Blackbird. The redwings usually don't show up for a few more weeks, but the red wing patch was unmistakable. There he was and it's January.

The path out to the Overlook was very quiet without the airport din. The thicket seemed full of small birds chirping who wouldn't expose themselves for my camera but made plenty of gentle sound. I always hope to see an owl along the path this time of year but no luck today. There's shell litter on the ground from the seeds that the birds have been feeding on. I was surprised that I didn't find any coyote tracks but the old snow is very hard and only boots seem to leave any trace for now.

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PRESIDENT'S NOTES

We had a busy year last year and 2010 is shaping up to be even busier. Our Monday Night Forum series is very popular. We will continue to sponsor the Forums on topics of interest to our members. Your suggestions are welcome.

Our featured speaker at this year's Annual Meeting on March 14 is Winthrop native and long-time FBIM member Phil Colarusso. Phil's talk is on Eelgrass—it's not just for eels anymore.

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Winthrop Beach walkers, New Year's day. Photo by Barbara Bishop



A Winter's Walk (continued)

Across the flats, a congress of crows were busy gleaning through the *Spartina*, feeding and arguing with each other like a senate full of politicians. They're full of motion and noise but seem to achieve little before they noisily move on. The creek was full of ducks but the morning glare made it hard to identify what was swimming out there.

The park seemed empty but I saw a flicker perched on a thorn bush as if it were a sparrow. This woodpecker is a true rival to the glory of the male pheasant. Both birds are magnificent creations of gold and red and black bars. It's the look of a medieval European king perched on a throne. Remember that this is January, a month of nothing to see. Yet today I saw an avian king out on his throne-perch.

Out towards the parking lot, there were three different kinds of sparrows, robins, a mockingbird and a hungry hawk up on a telephone pole waiting for his Sunday brunch. There's plenty of action around. That doesn't even include the dogs with their attendant humans.

The best surprise of the day was watching a Downy Woodpecker feeding in the *Phragmites* reeds as if they were tree trunks. It perched on a stem and then drilled its beak into the thin reed. I wonder how much food it can find in the dry canes, but it's there, so there must be something worth the effort.

It's January and it's cold but that's not all it is. Even though it looked like a drab wet March day, it was anything but. I envy the people who have been out even more than me. You have to wait and watch before you can really see. It takes time and patience to see the patterns beneath our own eyes. The more you watch, the more you see. Some people have been doing that for decades and I wonder at all the things that they see that I miss. Expectations more than good vision affect our sight. Winter is actually alive and full of things to enjoy.

George Cumming

George Cumming's blog **OrientSee** is at www.georgemacumming.com/.

THE CHILDREN'S CORNER

I laughed out loud at the library when I picked up the book *Squish!* On the cover is a little child dressed in boots and rain gear, ready for a wetland walk. Twenty four years ago when I took my son Chris, at eighteen months, for a tour of Belle Isle Marsh, it was a different story. I was a new Board member of the friends group. Craig Jackson had offered to give me a tour. Barbara Bishop promised to film the stroll for the Winthrop cable station.

Of course as a young mother, the pressure was on me. Christopher had to be dressed just right for his film debut. So he wore his spiffy overalls and brand new sneakers. Off we went.

It was a great afternoon. Chris could spot a sea pickle better than the adults by the end of the day. However, we emerged from the squishy, messy marsh both covered in "Marsh Muck." The new sneakers were tossed out into the trash that night.

Wetlands are great places to explore with children. There is so much to discover But if you go... wear rubber boots.

Squish! A Wetland Walk, by Nancy Luenn, illustrated by Ronald Himler, Atheneum, Macmillan Publishing Company, 866 Third Ave, New York, N.Y. 10022.

The fresh water wetlands, illustrated so beautifully in this book, are a place for looking, listening, smelling

and discovering. The reader strolls through the wetland with a father and child, being introduced to its many inhabitants. The author also weaves in facts about the environmental impacts of a wetland. The illustrations are lovely water colors that perfectly depict a rainy day at the edge of the water. A wetland is home to many, "but for us it's a marvelous muddy adventure. Squish!"



If you visit the library there is no shortage of nonfiction books about the ocean. Following are two for young readers.

Along the Seashore, by Rod Theodorou, Reed Educational and Professional Publishing, 100 N. LaSalle, Suite 1010, Chicago, IL. 60602.

This is one of the best explanations of the different levels of a beach I have found; starting at the dunes, leading through tide pools, splash zones, all the way to deep water.

Beautiful photographs and drawings accompany the text. The book is loaded with information curious children will want to know.

Marshes and Swamps, by Gail Gibbons, Holiday House, N.Y. 1998.

Gail Gibbons describes several wetlands, including fresh and salt water marshes, fresh water swamps, and mangrove swamps. She gives simple explanations and includes many

drawings of the plant and animal life found within. She includes a section about conservation and also shows a map of where in our country some of our largest wetlands can be found. Wouldn't it be great to visit them all.

Mary Mitchell

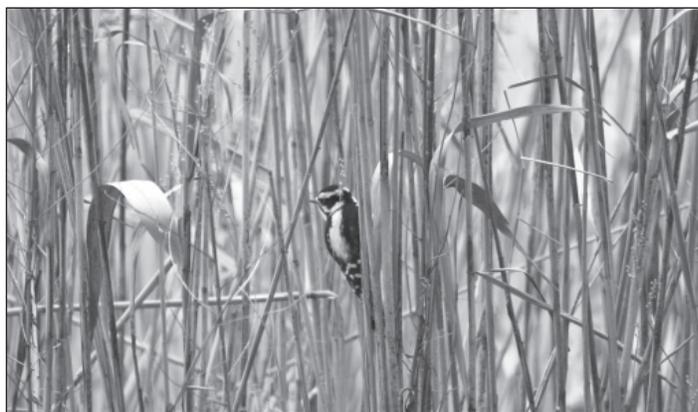


Photo by George Cumming

Downy Woodpecker in reeds

Dear Friends:

Elections of new officers to the Board of Directors of Friends of Belle Isle Marsh takes place at the Annual Meeting, March 14. We will elect **President**, **Vice President**, **Secretary** and **Treasurer** for one-year terms and two **Members-at-Large** for two-year terms. An officers must have been a member in good standing for at least one year.

We are also seeking **committee members** and **committee chairs** for these standing committees:

Fund-raising Conservation Education
Publicity Membership

Committee chairs automatically become Board members.

The Nominations Committee invites you to submit the names of interested candidates. You may nominate yourself. Please fill out this form and submit by March 1 to:

Mary Mitchell, Chair
Nominations Committee
121 Bartlett Road
Winthrop, MA 02152

or write friendsofbelleislemarsh@comcast.net.

Friends of Belle Isle Marsh Nominations to the Board

nominee:

address:

phone: (home)
(work)

email:

position:

comments:



President's Notes *(continued)*

Thanks to the Department of Conservation and Recreation, FBIM members of all ages enjoyed DCR's programs including canoeing, nature walks, photographing wildlife, campfires on the beach, the New Year's Day Walk on Revere Beach, Espresso Spanish and so much more. Special thanks to Belle Isle Site Supervisor Geoff Wood and Visitor Services Supervisor Matt Nash for their dedication to Belle Isle and to the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh and all the other advocacy groups they work with throughout the year.



With thanks and inspiration from Paul O'Donnell of the Winthrop Cemetery Department, we'd like to plant a wildflower garden at the Lawn Avenue area of Belle Isle Reservation to serve as a children's garden and art project for this year.

Another goal is to attract our Ospreys to their new platform in the new location. They do not like the idea of moving, so we'll hope for the best!

We welcome CVS as our new partner for our spring cleanup in April.



The global recession was felt at our own Belle Isle Marsh when DCR put on hold the Short Beach seawall project, the addition of benches and lighting at the "Plaza" at the Winthrop Parkway-Revere Street site, and the work at the former Zoppo property, also called the Bayou Street Marsh. That project would have removed construction debris including large granite blocks that had been dumped there more than twenty years ago. DCR's plan is to create a new path from Winthrop Parkway to Belle Isle Creek *and* construct a pedestrian bridge connecting Short Beach to the

Cemetery, completing part of the long-term plan for a Winthrop Greenway. Some day the area will be another jewel in the crown for Belle Isle, with magnificent views of the marsh. Today, however, the health of the Bayou Street Marsh needs to be addressed or the salt marsh will be lost forever. We hope to see the great potential of that area fulfilled—a park for the public to enjoy. We look forward to working with DCR and other agencies to make this plan a reality.



This newsletter is sent only to dues-paying members. If you are not now a member and would like to join, send your membership dues by check or come to the annual meeting on March 14th and you can join in person.

Thanks for your support.

Barbara Bishop
President, Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

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 tables at your coffee shop, public library or boat club, etc., call 617-567-5072 or email: friendsofbelleislemarsh@comcast.net

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

Also, look for us on Facebook.

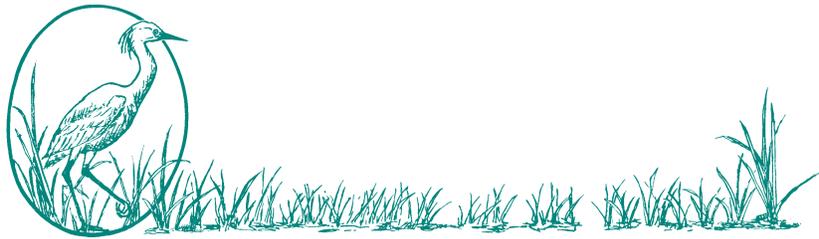
*This issue was produced by Soheil Zende
with help from Barbara Bishop, Daniela Foley,
Gail Miller and Christine Zende.*

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*Friends of Belle Isle Marsh
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Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

Annual Meeting

Sunday, March 14, 2 - 4 PM
St. John's Episcopal Church Hall
222 Bowdoin St., Winthrop, MA

Also at the Annual Meeting:

Annual elections for Board of Directors
Social hour
Refreshments

This event is free and open to the public.



Guest speaker:
Phil Colarusso
Marine biologist
on Eelgrass

