


EVENTS

Programs are free and open to the public.

 **Summer heron censuses.** See page 8 for details.



Father's Day canoe paddle at Belle Isle.

Sunday, June 19, 2 - 4 pm. Meet at Belle Isle Park main parking lot off Bennington Street, East Boston. *Participants must be able to swim and be at least 10 years old. Children under 18 must be accompanied by an adult. Preregistration required. Call 617-727-1199 ext. 410.*



Summer canoeing at Belle Isle.

Saturday, July 16, noon - 2 pm.
Saturday, July 30, 10:30 am - 12:30 pm.
Saturday, August 13, 11 am - 1 pm.
Saturday, August 27, 9:30 - 11:30 am.
Meet at Belle Isle Park main parking lot off Bennington Street, East Boston. *Participants must be able to swim and be at least 10 years old. Children under 18 must be accompanied by an adult. Preregistration required. Call 781-485-2803 ext. 109.*

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Belle Isle News

Published by Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

Number 86

June 2011

East Boston Needs a Beautiful Bike Path!

Playing Steps on Mary's stoop at 424 Meridian Street was crazy. Steps is a game where you throw a pimple ball (so-called because of the raised rubber dots that decorate the ball) off the edge of a step and another kid fields it. On Meridian Street, you'd have to go back on a pop fly while gauging the two way traffic to time your catches in synch with the flow. Motorists were not amused, but we kids could handle it.

Most East Bostonians learn to coexist with traffic, but the families whose houses line Bennington Street in the Star of the Sea neighborhood face a mix of commuter, commercial and industrial traffic that races between stop lights at speeds well over 40 mph.

I remember preparing myself to get out of the car in front of 541 Bennington Street where my grandparents lived. You had to get out fast and run because only a narrow alley of safety separated you from a river of 2-ton SUVs and 15-ton buses. With the traffic wind pelting sand and hot pollution in your face, you couldn't help



Photos by Chris Marchi

The deadly traffic of Bennington Street

thinking how strange it was to be that close to such danger ...and how foolish. And yet Bennington Street has been seriously proposed as the route for the

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Lumpfish Cyclopterus lumpus

One Man's Trash, Another Man's Treasure

I have a shelf at home that contains old bottles, pieces of broken china and a porcelain imported mustard jug. I found all of these treasures during various dive outings. I freely admit that if I had found any of these objects as I was walking down the street, I would not have bothered to bend over to pick them up. The fact that they were underwater seems to have added mystery and value to each of them. Most people don't think much of this stuff, but I do, so I collect them, even if my family sees no value in them.

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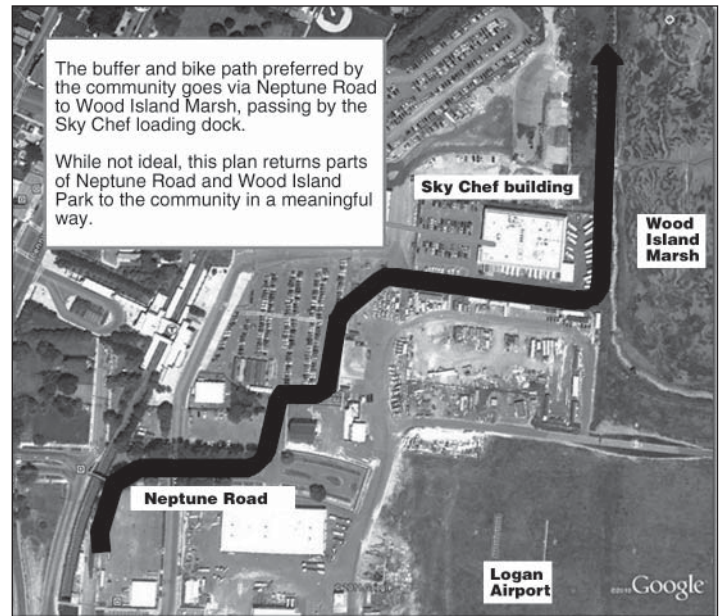
Airport Buffer (continued)

bike path and the airport buffer.

I still have family on Bennington Street. And the grimy stampede is still flowing. To illustrate how contemporary these problems are, my 12-year-old son and I observed traffic at the intersection of Lovell Street and Neptune Road on a Saturday afternoon a couple of weeks ago. In 15 minutes, he tallied 61 vehicles: 33 limos, 2 taxis, 11 flight kitchen vehicles, 9 personal vehicles, 1 security vehicle and 5 buses. Then he counted traffic on Bennington Street in front of Wood Island Station. It took 2 minutes and 30 seconds to get to 61 vehicles there! Using his middle school math, Thomas told me there was 6 times more traffic on Bennington Street at that time than on Lovell Road. Take away the limos and taxis, which will be at the rental car facility in Jeffries Point, and he says there would have been *13 times*

more traffic on Bennington Street alone. Even a guy who routinely played in traffic on Meridian Street can see that the proposal to use Bennington Street as a community bike path isn't a good idea.

Traffic and air quality studies in East Boston show that risk factors associated with pollution from the airport and motorized traffic grow higher the closer you get to Bennington Street. So in addition to the physical danger on this street, pollution is a concern, and important to consider



when planning a buffer park and bike path.

Mayor Menino and the City of Boston's Conservation Commission

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One Man's Trash (continued)

Believe it or not, putting objects in the sea changes their use and value. It has long been recognized that sunken vessels, railway cars, surplus army tanks, airplanes and a whole host of other things very quickly function as artificial reefs. The sea and the life in it quickly claim as their own just about anything that man has placed in it. I am certainly not advocating dumping our trash in the sea, but the ocean does seem to possess a remarkable redemptive quality. It takes our trash and miraculously makes it something of value, be it a broken bottle that eventually becomes collectible sea glass or an old boat that becomes a reef.

The Atlantic Ocean has had more than its fair share of tires discarded in her waters over the years and it never fails to amaze me the number of creatures that make their homes in these tires. Lobsters, many species of crabs, sea stars, sea urchins and a variety of small fish quite happily live in the presumed safety of a Goodyear steel belted radial. The tire no doubt provides refuge from predators, waves

and currents.

Perhaps the most unique use of a tire that I have ever seen was by a male Lumpfish (*Cyclopterus lumpus*). Lumpfish are cartoonish in nature, about the size of a football with seemingly undersized tail and pectoral fins. They resemble a miniature Goodyear blimp. Their most prominent feature is a large suction disk on the belly which allows them to adhere strongly to surfaces. They are awkward and slow swimmers, and come in a variety of colors. Lumpfish are predominantly found in areas of large rocks and boulders that support macroalgal and kelp growth. They happily spend their days moving as little as possible among the kelp looking for prey (worms, crustaceans, mollusks, small jellyfish). On occasion a Lumpfish forages actively, but it generally prefers to ambush its prey. It remain motionless, securely attached to a surface, until some unsuspecting creature comes within range of its mouth.

While collecting samples in an eel grass bed in Nahant, I came across a tire in the middle of the underwater meadow. Sitting on the edge of the

tire was an adult Lumpfish, which was a mild surprise, since Lumpfish aren't normally associated with eel grass. The larger surprise was still to come as I more closely examined the fish and the tire. The tire was serving as a nest for a large clutch of eggs. Female Lumpfish lay up to 150,000 eggs and then leave them in the care of the male until they hatch. The male Lumpfish guards the nest and constantly blows water over the eggs to keep them aerated. Here, the eyes of the developing embryos were quite visible through the clear egg membrane. I gently backed away and allowed the male to maintain his vigil undisturbed.

Back in my office, I did some research on the spawning habits of Lumpfish and found that science had not yet identified their preferred spawning habitat in the Gulf of Maine. For a brief moment, I could envision the title of my next scientific paper: *Goodyear blimp fish found to spawn in Goodyear tire*. I decided that the Lumpfish's secret was safe with me.

Phil Colarusso

Phil, a former Winthrop resident, is currently at the US EPA.

Airport Buffer *(continued)*

brought representatives of Massachusetts Port Authority (Massport) and community groups including Airport Impact Relief (AIR) Inc. and Friends of Belle Isle Marsh (FBIM) to the bargaining table recently, directing them to get the long overdue buffer park and bike path plans finalized.

AIR Inc. and FBIM believe that a buffer path should bring the people of East Boston and the region the highest relief from pollution and hardship. At a series of community meetings over the past 12 months, we proposed a path that traverses the remnants of Neptune Road; follows the airport security fence north to Wood Island Marsh; then runs north to DCR's Constitution Beach.

Most people don't realize that Neptune Road, which once acted as a gateway to an entire neighborhood as well as to Wood Island Park, the lost 75-



Photo by Chris Marchi

High tide at Wood Island Marsh

acre Olmsted-designed urban parkland masterpiece, still stands and is owned by the City of Boston. Neptune Road is the buffer route preferred by the community. The trees that lined it when it was a beautiful residential neighborhood remain. The tops of these trees can be seen on the right as you drive north past Day Square on Route 1A.

The combination of shaded Neptune

Road and wide open Wood Island Marsh viewing would make for a spectacular path. To create such a path, city and airport planners need to route the path along the airport security fence, out of the way of airport operations but directly past the Sky Chef loading docks. While the Sky Chef portion of the path is not scenic, this route incorporates Neptune Road and the Marsh.

Other options exist, but they don't incorporate our most beautiful resources. They make them afterthoughts. Hopefully, the same creative planning and operational expertise that found a way to relocate the Central Artery in Boston underground can help our community make a simple but beautiful bike path.

Chris Marchi

Chris Marchi is Vice President of AIR Inc., an East Boston grass roots organization

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Construction!

That is the word of the year! The Belle Isle Bridge project on Saratoga Street (between East Boston and Winthrop) will cost \$3.4 million and is expected to impact traffic for two years as the bridge is rebuilt one side at a time. This bridge carries the majority of Winthrop's commuter traffic into Boston and provides access for emergency vehicles as well. If you've ever taken a close look at the old, deteriorating pilings, you'll be happy that this bridge is being replaced!

East Boston's major construction project will be the demolition and reconstruction of the Orient Heights MBTA Station, expected to begin this fall. The old station, built in 1952, does not meet current accessibility standards and is in poor condition. The thousands of commuters who use the station every day look forward to the new station's elevators, escalators, solar panels and better drop-off access. The \$27 million project will take 28 months and will be the gateway for area residents and visitors who take public transportation

to Orient Heights and Constitution Beach.

Another East Boston construction project, the airport runway safety ramp, begins in June near Constitution Beach.

At Revere Beach, construction is already underway for a \$45 million, 1400-car parking garage near the Wonderland MBTA Station that will be part of a future major new development of housing, hotels, and retail stores that is expected to revitalize that area.

Short Beach road, park and seawall reconstruction continues this summer and should be completed next spring.

With all this construction activity, let's not forget that a nature walk

around Belle Isle Park is a great way to relieve stress. Bring binoculars and you'll feel like you've been on a mini-vacation!

Ethanol train

Global Petroleum's proposal for 60-car ethanol trains has been given the green light by the Revere Conservation Commission, although some neighborhood residents and officials are concerned about public safety in the event of an accident. The proposal allows two deliveries a week of ethanol to the Global site on Lee Burbank Highway. Each delivery uses sixty railroad cars carrying 30,000 gallons of

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Photo by Barbara Bishop

Kiwanis Marsh clean-up crew, April 2

President's Report *(continued)*

ethanol per car, or 1.8 million gallons per delivery. One potential obstacle is that the track, a spur off the MBTA commuter rail which runs along Chelsea Creek, has not been used for years and may require a major upgrade.

An ethanol train derailment in Ohio in February of this year resulted in a fireball that went thousands of feet in the air, and fire that could be seen for 20 miles. Local residents had to be evacuated from their homes. A recent local meeting revealed that while the technology on Global's site is considered extremely safe, the company has no responsibility for the ethanol while it is in the tanker cars before it reaches the Global location.

For additional information, contact Gail Miller eastiegail@aol.com.

Casino

FBIM is watching with great interest the proposal by Suffolk Downs to construct a casino at that site, which is on 200 acres of filled mud flats that was once Belle Isle Marsh. Since 1935, Suffolk Downs has been the home of thoroughbred horse racing in New England, a sport which has declined in interest as slot machines and casino gaming has increased. As an environmental advocacy organization, we will be vigilant and ensure that all regulations for water and air quality and wildlife protection are followed.

It's notable that Suffolk Downs Grandstand, which seats 16,000 people, was constructed in only 62 days.

*Barbara Bishop
President, Friends of Belle Isle Marsh*

BNAN President **Valerie Burns** received the 2011 Justine Mee Liff Spirit Award at the Eighth Annual Party in the Park in the Back Bay Fens on Wednesday May 18, 2011. The award honors the vision and joy that Justine Mee Liff brought to her work as Boston Park Commissioner from 1996 until 2002. It is presented annually to an individual whose leadership and passion for public places inspires others.

Orient See



Blood and Feathers

The telephone wires are strung with pearls and the grass glistens with diamonds. It's Easter morning and mist is drifting in from the ocean. It's nearly as quiet as it ever gets around here. Spring has definitely arrived. The leaf buds are starting to burst open. Leaf-out will start by the end of the week and then there'll be green trees again. Winter's signs will disappear. The bark chewed away by the deer will be less obvious and soon enough the snow-flattened reeds will be crowned by another season's growth. Best of all it's warm. The Ospreys are back and nesting in the T-train yard. Swallows are feeding off flying bugs and all is right with Belle Isle Marsh.

After walking the dog this morning, I glanced out our pantry window. We have

an outside thermometer and I wanted to see just how warm it really was. I noticed a maple seed twirling down. Now that's a strange sight for this time of year. Then another floated down and I wondered. So I looked a little closer and really saw what was happening. A young Sharp-shinned Hawk was feeding off its prey, a smaller bird. It was tearing off pieces from the body and feathers were floating down. The bird was barely 16 feet from me. "Nature red in tooth and claw" (Alfred Lord Tennyson). It wasn't a burger pinned beneath its talons but a chewed up carcass. That's strong stuff before breakfast. We don't see this sort of thing often and that's too bad. We need reminding about how nature works. There are no chocolate bunnies or yellow peeps hidden in the grass. Life is messier than that. Strong smells, strong sights are more common. The bird was unconcerned by my presence in the window and kept on feeding. This small predator was itself and alive, vibrantly alive. It was a humbling moment to be in its presence.

George Cumming

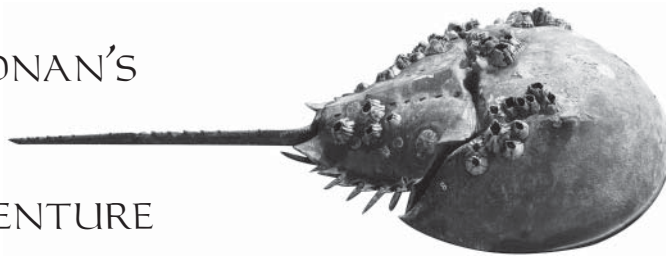
George Cumming's blog OrientSee is at <http://www.georgemacumming.com/>.



Photo by George Cumming

Sharp-shinned hawk and meal

RICHARD HONAN'S EXCELLENT CANOE ADVENTURE



Canoeing the wilds of Belle Isle Marsh.

I had some fun with my brother Steve, my son-in-law Elvin, some friends and a couple of my grandchildren as we went exploring the marsh. It's probably one of Winthrop's best kept secrets, very serene and peaceful with lots of small inlets to poke around in a canoe. At one point we pulled the canoes up on the marsh grass, walked up to higher ground and had a picnic lunch. After lunch, we paddled over to the observation tower where the grandkids went for a swim in what was probably one of the last really warm days of a long summer season.

It's a great place to explore with children and teach them the importance of preserving these disappearing open spaces. And one of the best features, it's not five minutes from downtown Winthrop.



Rugs (in canoe) and granddaughter Emily

Richard Honan

Photos by Richard Honan



*Front canoe: Son-in-law Elvin, grandson Christopher
Rear canoe: Brother Steve, grandson Jasper*



Grandkids Christopher and Emily, son-in-law Elvin



Brother Steve, grandson Jasper



Eddie Raymond, Jack Markley



Son-in-law Elvin, grandson Christopher

The Nature of Belle Isle



American Oystercatcher *Haematopus palliatus* in our midst

Haematopus Linnaeus; Greek *haima*, genitive *haimatos*, “blood,” referring to the color; Greek *pous*, “foot”; hence blood-red foot; *palliatus* Temminck; Latin *palliatus* “wearing a cloak,” from the dark feathering of the back. (Oddly, the bird does not have red legs, but does have a red bill. -ed)

The Dictionary of American Bird Names by Ernest A Choate, *Gambit*, Boston, 1973.

If we can believe the statements of Audubon, the Oyster-catcher once nested north as far as the (Canadian) Labrador coast. As the Black Oyster-catcher ranges north to Alaska and the European Oyster-catcher to Greenland, our bird may well have bred on the Labrador coast in the old days... Unfortunately no one corroborates Audubon’s statement.

Birds of Massachusetts and Other New England States by Edward Howe Forbush, *Commonwealth of Massachusetts*, 1928. (Forbush was Massachusetts State Ornithologist 1908 - 1929.)

Forbush gave the early 20th century breeding range for American Oystercatcher as extending from Virginia to Texas, both coasts of Mexico, on Caribbean islands and all the way to Argentina. He said that it was seen on the Massachusetts and Maine coasts and was even said to be “not very uncommon” in the fall at some points hereabout in his recent past.

In our own recent past, in the 1970s, American Oystercatchers began to be reported as breeding birds on Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard, where they

typically put in their first appearance of the year in late February. Soon thereafter little crowds of noisy, excited oystercatchers began to be seen all along our southern New England shores and little by little they moved up the coast. They are now among the most conspicuous breeding birds in Boston Harbor—conspicuous not so much because of their numbers but because of their large size, their clownishly huge red bills and the tendency to be noisy and gregarious.

Early this spring, one of the most reliable and indefatigable Belle Isle birders, Paul Peterson, began reporting 2 oystercatchers along Belle Isle Creek, visible from the Reinstein Boardwalk. Sure enough, on a visit in early May, I saw them there, associating with a flock of Brant, out on the edge of the Creek. In a few weeks the Brant will be gone, headed for the shores of the Arctic Ocean. Will the oystercatchers stay and nest?

Oystercatchers belong to the tribe of sandpipers and plovers generically called shorebirds in America and waders in Britain. But unlike most shorebirds,

notorious for having evolved cryptic brown and grey plumage so they can best blend in with the sand and mud and rock and tundra grass habitat that they frequent and nest in, oystercatchers are conspicuous and showy. The huge red bill, black head with large eye circled with red, black neck, brown back, flashing white underparts and loud whistled calls—these are no way to stay unnoticed. And yet, an oystercatcher nest is among the most difficult of open-country bird nests to find. Somehow they have a knack for fitting it in a place that it blends in and the parents have a way of noticing intruders and slipping away long before their location can give away the nest.

Like most shorebirds, oystercatchers gather in flocks during the non-breeding season. They don’t nest communally, but they have showy and raucous courtship and territorial group flights. Sometimes 6 or more fly about, for hours it seems, whistling and turning and twisting together; sometimes it looks like one bird is chasing the others, other times you can’t tell what is going

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Shorebird plate by Louis Agassiz Fuertes, Birds of Massachusetts

Flying: Black-bellied Plovers, American Oystercatchers; Standing (clockwise from top left): American Oystercatcher, Killdeer, American Golden Plovers, Black-bellied Plovers

American Oystercatcher (cont.)

on, but they all are utterly involved in their community affairs—whatever they are.

Once the courtship and nest-site selection is done (the nest often being on open sand or pebbles, sometimes with a lining of shells or dried wrack), there is a period of about a month when the parents take stealthy turns coming and going from the nest, sitting on two to three eggs, the normal clutch size. As with many shorebirds, the young are precocial. This means that they begin to run about and look for food on their own within hours of hatching. This does not mean that chicks can actually feed themselves. It has been estimated that chicks depend on adults for feeding for at least 60 days after hatching. The young may follow the adults to where food is found and wait around until they are fed soft parts of shellfish. Or adults may forage a mile or more away, then bring whole food items back for the chicks.

At hatching they are just little grey and white puffballs on stilt legs, but they grow fast and begin to flock with the adults within 5 – 6 weeks of hatching. Young birds can be distinguished from adults for several months because of the dusky bill color, becoming nearly black at the tip. The full bright vermilion red bill is not acquired until the birds are more than a half-year old.

The big and powerful bill of the oystercatcher is a formidable foraging tool. As a wag pointed out long ago, oysters don't exactly sprint and so they do not need to be "caught." On the other hand, an oyster can shut up its shell tight. The abductor muscle shuts the oyster shell (and other bivalve shells) tighter than most creatures, including unarmed humans, can wrestle open. But an oystercatcher has at least 2 different ways of tackling an oyster (or mussel or other bivalve). In one scenario, the bird walks quietly among its prey until it locates an open shell. The bird then jabs quickly into the shell and attempts to sever the abductor muscle,

forcing the shellfish to remain open while the bird eats it (or feeds it to its young.) Alternatively, it can pick out a closed shell, place it in the correct orientation and hammer at the location of the abductor muscle until the shell releases. In addition to oysters and other shellfish, these birds feed on a variety of mollusks, crustaceans, worms and other marine invertebrates.

It appears that they have come here to stay. Maybe they will even nest at Belle Isle. Who will be the first to see the babies?

Soheil Zende



Photo by Phil Ellin

American Oystercatcher adult and youngster near rocky nest.

May Birds

The month of May is our biggest bird migration month. When bad weather comes in May, sometimes we get what are called "migrant fallout" events, where migrating birds literally fall out of the sky and appear in odd places or large numbers. Such was the case in the middle of this May, when nearly a week of stormy and cloudy weather forced down some mighty peculiar species for Belle Isle. At least one, Eurasian Wigeon, had never before been recorded at the Marsh.

Jeremiah Trimble, quick on the draw, managed to get a few pictures of the rarities and generously donated some for this publication.

Here is my own personal list of cool, strange or unexpected birds reported at Belle Isle in just 48 hours, May 18 - 19:

Eurasian Wigeon, reported by Paul Peterson, photographed by Jeremiah Trimble, first ever record for Belle Isle.

Least Bittern, photographed in flight by Jeremiah Trimble, reported occasionally from Belle Isle since 1986.

Virginia Rail, reported by various observers, photographed by Jeremiah Trimble, nests at Belle Isle.

Red Phalarope, reported by Matt Garvey and Tim Factor, only one previous Belle Isle record from 2004.

Louisiana Waterthrush, reported by Paul Peterson and Alice Morgan.



*Left: American Wigeon, drake
Right: Eurasian Wigeon, drake*



Least Bittern



Virginia Rail

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.

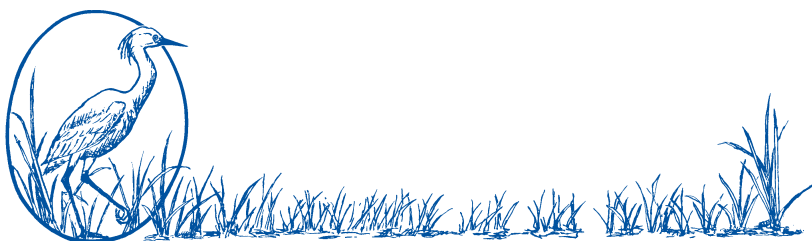
This issue was produced by Soheil Zende with help from Barbara Bishop, Daniela Foley, Gail Miller and Christine Zende.

SZ11

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Events (continued from page 1)



Perseid meteor shower hike, Middlesex Fells.

Thursday August 11, 8:30 -10 pm. Meet at sheepfold parking lot by the bulletin board, off Rte 28, Stoneham. Join a Ranger for a night hike to Bear Hill Tower. We'll look to the Northeast sky & watch as Earth passes through the Swift-Tuttle Comet and produces one of the year's more prominent star gazing events.



East Boston community gardens bicycle tour.

Saturday, September 10, 12 noon. Meet at Umana School, 312 Border Street, East Boston. Limited bikes and helmets available to borrow. Contact BNAN to reserve a bike. Cosponsored by Friends of East Boston Greenway, Environmental Chelsea Creek Crew and East Boston Neighborhood Health Center. To register: Call 617-542-7696; email info@bostonnatural.org.




For additional events and listings:

DCR listings and calendar are at <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/events.htm#northeast>

Boston Natural Areas Network (BNAN) events are at <http://www.bostonnatural.org/program-activities.htm>

2010 Dawn Heron Censuses

Meet at Siren Reinstein Memorial Boardwalk at the southeast corner of Belle Isle Park. Parking on Bennington Street across from Suffolk Downs T station, near Belle Isle Park entrance.

	Sundays	Meeting time	High Tide
	July 24	5:00 am	6:30 am
	August 21	7:00 am	5:00 am
	September 4	7:00 am	4:40 am

Help count the Snowy Egrets, Great Egrets, Great Blue Herons, Black-crowned Night-Herons and Glossy Ibises. In addition to herons, you'll see other shore and water birds. Bring binoculars, waterproof footwear and mosquito protection. The census lasts anywhere from one to four hours.

More information: 781-863-2392.

