



Belle Isle News



Upcoming Events

Nature Walks with Sean Riley:

1st and 3rd

Saturdays, 7:30am; meet at the Bennington Street main parking lot.

FBIM Annual Meeting in March:

Watch for updates regarding exact date and plan.

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Debbi Norris speaks about Kermit's legacy (photo by Mary Mitchell)

Kermit Norris Dedication

“Soaring with the eagles” in spirit, we trust, is our founding member and first FBIM president Kermit Norris. Although he was lost to this world a few years ago, his memory lives on in the words of his wife, Debbi Norris, who spoke of his legacy on November 6 at Belle Isle Marsh Reservation, as well as in the hearts and minds of his environmental allies and friends. Kermit’s work will live on too, as his family and the FBIM dedicated the *Belle Isle Marsh Education and Research Station* in memory of him, with the goal of carrying his visionary work forward into the future.

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Sean Riley demonstrates bird banding (photo by Kannan Thiruwengadam)

Kermit Norris

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Kermit Norris knew the value of a salt marsh to people and to all the wildlife that lived within it. He had discovered the marsh almost by accident in the early 1980s while seeking a place to fish. He literally bumped into another outdoor naturalist and birder, Soheil Zendehe. Together these two men set out on a mission to preserve this very important and sacred place.

It was a fitting tribute to dedicate the *Belle Isle Marsh Education and Research Station* to an individual who embraced the reservation and knew how important it was to preserve for present and future generations. We know he would be so pleased to know that FBIM continues the work he envisioned and that the research station, under our current Site Supervisor, Sean Riley, has created an important bird banding program which provides valuable teaching and learning opportunities.

We especially thank Debbi Norris for her significant contribution to make this research station possible.



President's Report

by Mary Mitchell

It gives me great pleasure to report our recent dedication of the Belle Isle Marsh Education and Research Station in honor of our founding member and first President, Kermit Norris. The Friends of Belle Isle Marsh incorporated in 1984 and the reservation was dedicated in 1985. We met at the reservation this year on November 6th with Deborah Norris and her family, FBIM members, and special guests, to dedicate “our little red barn” on a glorious fall day for our first in-person event since 2020. We remembered Kermit and his efforts, had a bird banding demonstration by Site Supervisor Sean Riley, and many enjoyed a walk in the meadow. It was great to see so many past board members and presidents, all enjoying the marsh. (See pictures of the event in this issue.)

FBIM continues to move forward with our work with Woods Hole Group and Mystic River Watershed Association to complete the Resource and Resiliency Management Plan for Belle Isle Marsh. This report will give us a plan of how to best move forward in protecting and preserving the salt marsh as climate changes advance, with a list of priority projects that will best meet the needs of the marsh.

We have also entered into another agreement to participate in a MVP (Municipal Vulnerability Program) grant with the Town of Winthrop, the signing community for this regional assessment of the marsh and plan for natural based resiliency. The communities of East Boston, Revere and Winthrop, the MBTA, developers HYM, and Massport will be participating in this agreement over a period of two years.

FBIM continues to work with abutting communities to protect and preserve the important and fragile habitat of the salt marsh, as development projects are put forward. Currently, we have been meeting with the DCR, City of Boston, and Redgate Developers who are looking to develop the old Casket Company site. Read on for more information, and stay tuned for future updates.

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President’s Report *(continued)*

As always, I encourage all of our Friends to come out and enjoy the Reservation. Take a walk on the Winthrop boardwalk, stroll around the Bennington Street reservation, and walk out onto the Sireen Reinstein Boardwalk, or venture over to Revere and walk out to the berm and get a very different perspective of the marsh. It’s beautiful from every angle all year long.

Winthrop Mothers Out Front

Mobilizes to Fight Climate Change and Reduce Solid Waste

by Carina Campobasso



Winthrop Mothers Out Front held Winthrop’s First Annual Pumpkin Drop at Overlook Hill near the Gorman Fort Banks Elementary School on November 6. Children and adults had a blast rolling their pumpkins down the hill into barrels to be collected and composted by Black Earth Compost. In addition to being a lot of fun, the event raised awareness about composting and the importance of reducing waste. Kids made zero-waste bird feeders and tangerine and clove air fresheners and enjoyed cider and cookies. The Friends of Belle Isle Marsh was a co-sponsor of the event, as well as the Winthrop Zero Waste Committee, Clean Water Action, For Kids Only After School Program, and Woodside Ace Hardware. Wendy Millar-Page, Winthrop’s Solid Waste & Recycling Manager, was instrumental in making the event happen.

Mothers Out Front’s primary focus is to advocate for the transition from the use of fossil fuels that are causing climate change to clean, healthy, safe and renewable energy sources. This includes shifting away from the use of dirty gas in our homes for heating and cooking to using electricity generated from clean energy sources. The Mothers Out Front Future of Clean Heat Platform demands a future that is all-electric, safe and affordable for all.

For the past month, MOF has been collecting postcards from community members calling on National Grid to transition from using fossil fuels to using clean renewable energy to generate electricity. Winthrop MOF collected over a hundred postcards and joined with other Mothers Out Front groups to deliver over 2,000 postcards to National Grid’s headquarters in Waltham on November 17. MOF also delivered postcards with the same message to Eversource and Berkshire Gas—for a total of over 3,000 postcards. Let’s hope the utilities listen!

If you are interested in joining Mothers Out Front’s efforts, please contact us at info.ma.winthrop@mothersoutfront.org.



Winthrop MOF members Maryalice Sharkey (center) and Carol Walker (right) joined MOF members from across the state. (photo by Carina Campobasso)

Supervisor's Report

by Sean Riley

Well, the summer and fall seem to be slipping into winter and despite the toils of Covid, the year is flying by. There are lots of updates since our last newsletter. Coming off of the rainiest summer in Massachusetts history, the mosquitos at Belle Isle were also nothing short of record-breaking. Hats off to my staff who wore heavy mosquito suits from June through October. It is safe to say the working conditions at the reservation this year were extremely unpleasant, and the upkeep of the site was achieved with a fair amount of sweat and blood loss.

We also established our first official full year with the research station being open. My assistants and I banded over 500 birds. From falcons to shorebirds, we also banded around 35 of the MESA (Massachusetts Endangered



Species Act) state listed Saltmarsh Sparrows.



The data we collected showed us that we had underestimated Belle Isle's breeding population by about 2/3. Previous passive surveys (just counting visually) show how cryptic these secretive marsh birds can be and how they can be undercounted in surveys. Even after banding around 25 birds at Belle Isle, we were still seeing a lot of birds that were not yet marked. We color-banded our birds with light blue color bands representing Suffolk County, so next year we can tell our returning birds, even at a distance. The Belle Isle Education and Research Station was one of only 3 sites in the state contributing important banding data on Saltmarsh Sparrows, putting us at the forefront of research and data collection for this critically endangered bird, which is, at least on the east coast, the poster species for climate change.

The Friends of Belle Isle Marsh's Osprey Camera was a huge victory despite our birds not being successful at nesting this season. The camera had over 500,000 views the first year it was activated. While the

birds did not raise any young this season, for our goal of providing the public a glimpse into the amazing lives of some of the reservation's wildlife, this could not have gone any better. If you did enjoy watching the camera, I urge you to consider donating to the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, who footed the bill for the camera's streaming costs at great expense to themselves to provide this unique experience.

Lastly, we are still moving along with the reservation's Climate Resiliency Assessment. Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, in partnership with the Mystic River Watershed Association, and some other partners like the Nature Conservancy, DCR and some local municipalities, are looking to the future to try to save our reservation for future generations. The data collection is being done by the Woods Hole Group and will give us strong and scientifically indicated methodologies for restorative interventions. We hope to have this assessment wrapped up in early 2022.

While the future implications of Covid, once again, seem up in the air, for now our bi-weekly nature walks have resumed. They are on the 1st and 3rd Saturdays of the month; we meet in the main parking lot off of Bennington Street at 7:30 am. Walks focus on birds and general wildlife ecology and are free and open to anyone that wishes to attend. We look forward to seeing you there!

(photos of banded male American Kestrel and Saltmarsh Sparrow by Sean Riley)

Children's Corner

by **Mary Mitchell**

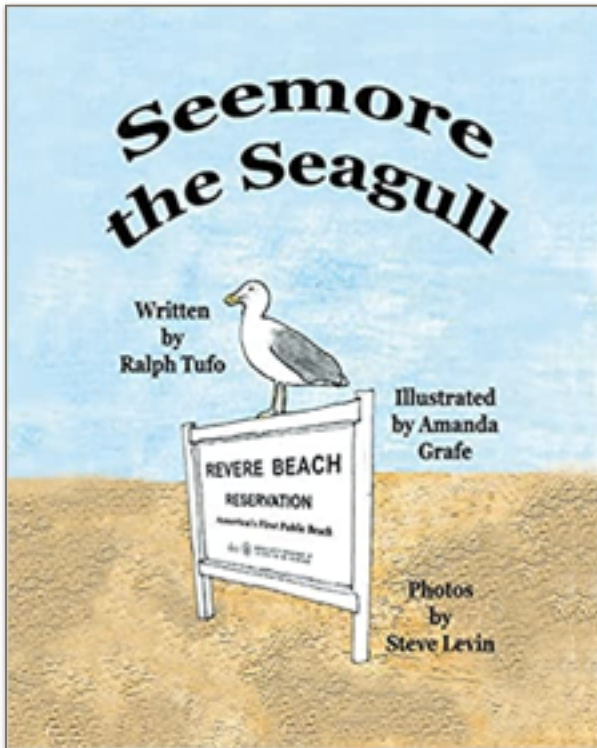


Ralph Tufo on Revere Beach. Photo credit: The Boston Globe

It gives me great pleasure, having written the Children's Corner for about 30 years now, to present a wonderful children's book written by a Friend of Belle Isle Marsh and my friend, Ralph Tufo.

Ralph grew up in Lynn and made his way to Winthrop where I first met him and his wife, Nancy. Ralph, who is a retired teacher, is also a musician, playwright and now a children's book author. When I first moved to East Boston at 19, I quickly found my way to Revere Beach. I had spent my summers as a young girl on the Connecticut beaches. So, although I quickly adapted to city living, I really enjoyed the open space, sea breezes, and salty smells of the beach. And I was mesmerized by the number of gulls soaring overhead. One of them was for sure that spirited Seemore that Ralph has introduced to us in his charming story.

Seemore the Seagull is a wonderful depiction of a day at Revere Beach from the perspective of the feisty, yet wise gull, Seemore. For those of us who live near the First Public Beach in America and have had the pleasure of savoring some fried clams at Kelly's, Seemore's experience will be easily recognized. On a warm summer's day there are people, gulls aplenty, children, the smells of fried food and warm sand as well as the sounds of the sparkling sea. Seemore is a curious and wise observer of human nature. Through Ralph's lyrical prose, Seemore opportunistically grabs treats, watches children and adults as they go about their beach day, and he even lends a hand to solve a problem of children getting along. The photos by Steve Levin depict real scenes that unfold every summer day at Revere Beach (like any beach in the world I would dare say). Amanda Grafe's lovely, colorful illustrations add depth to the bird's eye view to this lovely story that ends with cooperation and a very tired Seemore. This is a great book to pack up to enjoy at the beach with your young ones, but enjoyable by all! Congratulations to Ralph, Amanda and Steve.



Seemore the Seagull: written by Ralph Tufo; illustrated by Amanda Grafe with photographs by Steve Levin.

Boston's Question 2

by Gail Miller

Voters in Boston took to the polls this past November 2nd to vote for Boston's mayor and three ballot questions. While the turnout was less than one would have hoped for, it resulted in decisive victories for Mayor Michelle Wu and for an East Boston community-led Question 2.

Question 2 asked the voters if they wanted to support the proposal of a high voltage electric substation in East Boston next to the banks of Chelsea Creek, behind East Boston's new police station (with attendant gas pumps), next to an Urban Wild, across from a large city outdoor recreational facility and in a flood prone location. Thankfully an extremely high NO vote ruled the day!

This site proposal has been planned for by Eversource for over five years, even while current demand has declined, despite what the utility company would have us believe. (The company would not provide their documentation supporting this position.)

While the world faces sea level rise and climate change, the last thing residents need, in our opinion, is a dangerous structure instead of non-polluting alternative energy sources, which the utility should be developing proactively.

Certain permits have been granted of late, but final appeals are still winding through the permitting agencies. The resounding NO this ballot question received in all of Boston is the "fuel" Mayor Wu needs to oppose this ill advised high voltage electric substation in Eagle Square, East Boston.....

JUST SAY NO!

New England Casket Company

Proposes 221 Rental Units on Their Site

by Gail Miller

The New England Casket Company burned to the ground in 2019 in an electrical fire which permanently closed its doors, and eliminated 100+ jobs along Bennington Street in East Boston. The fire was challenging in that there seemed to be low water pressure and the winds were quite prevalent. For those of you who aren't familiar with this location, it is parallel to the Belle Isle Marsh Reservation, an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), an Important Bird Area (IBA) and a wildlife habitat that is home to dozens of species while being an illustrious example of biodiversity within our urban environment.

This brings to the forefront a question many municipalities face every day: should housing demands override impacts on natural resources? In this case, that resource is a salt marsh that is needed for flood control, spawning habitat, migratory stopovers and is essential habitat for a recorded 270+ listed avian species and other wildlife, and now includes a passive outdoor urban resource for visitors to the reservation.

A salt marsh holds the highest value of any land because of all that is mentioned above.

But sadly, every day in the U.S., one acre of salt marsh is lost to development. While we can all agree development and housing is needed, what is also needed is preservation and protection of our natural resources, particularly because addressing climate resiliency and sea level rise is crucial in our collective

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Calling for New Board and Committee Members:

The FBIM is engaged in important work around climate change, development concerns, grant work and support for our DCR staff to preserve, protect and restore BIM and its environs. We are calling upon our membership to help us with our efforts. Please consider running for a board position or joining a committee to aid in our work. If interested, please send an email letter of interest to Mary Mitchell at mjmbartlett@comcast.net or Daniela Foley at danifoley0@gmail.com. Thank you!



Casket Company

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survival, according to scientists. What will we do about it?

To kick the can down the road and pretend that no harm will come to Belle Isle is not a position the FBIM want to take. There are many ongoing discussions about the remedies to this dilemma with no real outcome. Yet, developers, including the New England Casket Company, along with RedGate, their partner, say "trust us"....we'll find a way to develop and we won't bring any harm to the reservation. Speculation is running high that Belle Isle Marsh Reservation might very well be lost with climate challenges and it may revert to becoming Belle Isle Marsh Bay.

What then? Do we throw caution to the wind or do we wait until we can be confident that there are remedies to preserve and protect Belle Isle, the treasure that it is to residents and wildlife alike?

This project is now being reviewed and considered by Boston officials, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and ultimately state officials to determine the fate of Belle Isle Marsh Reservation. We need the public to weigh in with their concerns and support for Belle Isle Marsh Reservation, especially abutting residents in East Boston and Revere. Contact us through our email address.

Belle Isle Marsh Environment Inventory

*Funding for this project was awarded by MassBays to
Mystic River Watershed Association*

About the project:

Belle Isle Marsh Reservation contains one of the last remaining substantial areas of salt marsh in greater Boston. Belle Isle sits within the Rumney Marshes Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and is home to various endangered species, especially birds, that use it for breeding, feeding and overwintering. Yet its continued existence is threatened by numerous physical stressors and by lack of coordinated conservation and management efforts among various stakeholders.

With funding from this grant, Mystic River Watershed Association will partner with the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh and others to develop a comprehensive resource management plan to guide successful restoration. The work will include implementation of first steps towards addressing priority issues to understand, and eventually, and if possible, reverse the ongoing degradation of this vital salt marsh.

information provided by the DCR website



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*Please send your comments and
suggestions for future newsletter
articles to:*

friendsofbelleislemarsh@comcast.net

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 is mainly educational.

For more information or to add your name to our email list, write to: friendsofbelleislemarsh@comcast.net with the message "subscribe."

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If you would like to nominate yourself or someone you know to serve on the the Board of Directors, please email the nominating committee at mjmbartlett@gmail.com with Belle Isle Nomination in the subject line. Candidates for the Board must have been a member in good standing (dues paid) for at least one year.



Left photo by Liz Kernan: Sean Riley captures a young female Red-tailed Hawk in early December as part of the Belle Isle Marsh Education and Research Station's bird banding work.

Above photo by Joe Aiello: FBIM members and Norris family members honor Kermit at the dedication ceremony.