

September 1980



Warm, misty, pitch-black. As our canoe approaches the masses of tall grass standing above high tide, we hear the incessant screams of the terns. Suddenly, flocks of shorebirds erupt just ahead and fly around our heads. We beach the canoe and set up 'scopes. We've just arrived at Snake Island to census the herons and shorebirds for TASL (Take a Second Look). We're at an island off Cape Cod, right? Some exotic far-off place? No, we're right here in Boston Harbor, $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from Logan Airport. A mile away, TASL censusers are arriving to count the birds of Belle Isle Marsh; others cover Point of Pines, Constitution Beach, Thompson Island, Squantum Marsh.

TASL's "Year of Boston Harbor" censuses are tremendously important in documenting the year-round bird-life of Boston Harbor, as well as pinpointing where the birds concentrate. TASL showed that a minimum of 17,000 water birds (not counting gulls) used the Harbor last winter. Our summer censuses tallied up almost 400 Snowy Egrets in the Harbor region, in addition to thousands of shorebirds.

We established, as a result of the TASL summer censuses, that two little-known areas of the Harbor, Belle Isle Marsh and Snake Island, are major avian concentration spots. The following descriptions of these two sites is intended to help you appreciate these areas for their beauty and abundance of life. We would like your support in our efforts to protect and preserve them.

BELLE ISLE MARSH

This, the largest salt marsh in the City of Boston, overlaps Winthrop and Revere. In addition to Spartina marsh, there are two large salt pans, extensive stands of Phragmites, and a few scattered cottonwoods. About 35 acres of the marsh, formerly filled and used as a drive-in theater, are presently being converted by the MDC into a park.

The bird-life of Belle Isle consists of many of the common marsh dwellers and migrants of eastern North America. Highlights over the years have included:

- Snowy Egret: high counts of between 50 and 100, July to September.
- Black-crowned Night-heron: high counts of 20 to 30, spring to fall.
- Glossy Ibis: regular visitor; high count of 25 on August 3, 1979.
- American Kestrel: one pair, suspected of breeding every year.
- Over twenty species of shorebirds, including Killdeer and Spotted Sandpiper breeding, and high concentrations of migrants such as Short-billed Dowitcher (up to 600), Greater Yellowlegs (up to 100), and Hudsonian Godwit (up to 30).
- Black-headed Gull: 1 to 5, every fall and winter since 1977.

In addition, Barn Swallow, Robin, Yellow Warbler, Common Yellowthroat,

Red-winged Blackbird, and Sharp-tailed and Song Sparrows are known to breed in or around the immediate marsh area.

SNAKE ISLAND

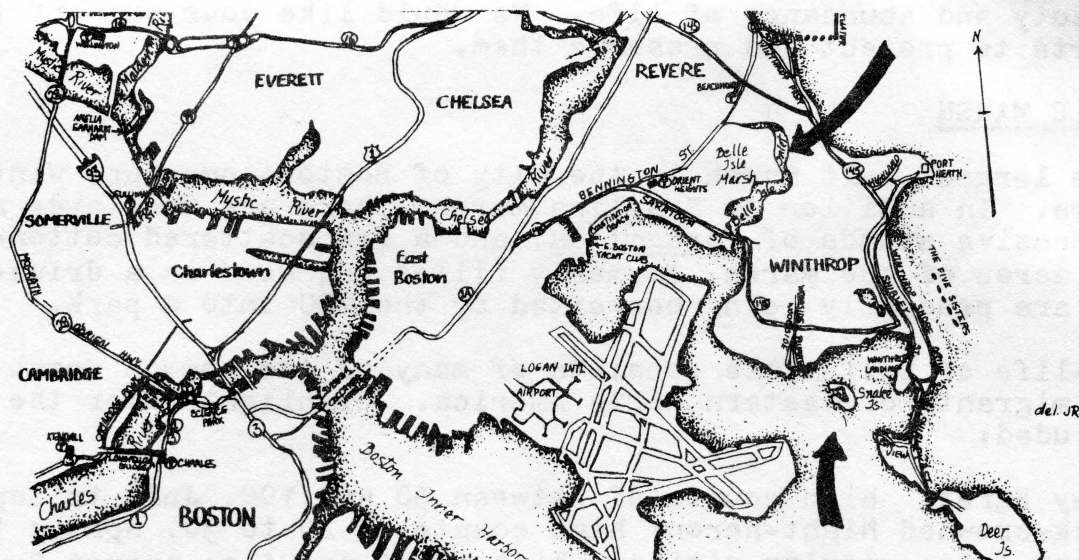
A six acre sandbar owned by the town of Winthrop, Snake Island is situated in Winthrop Harbor. Scrubby bushes and Phragmites grow on the horseshoe-shaped glacial debris that comprises the island at high tide. The center of the horseshoe is a salt marsh, three acres in extent. The island is ringed by tall stands of Spartina alterniflora. As the tide recedes, vast mud flats open up around the island. These areas are used by commercial clam-diggers as well as many species of waterfowl, herons, shorebirds, gulls, and terns.

During the breeding season the island is of particular interest as it is the only known site in Boston Harbor for nesting Piping Plover, as well as the largest colony of Least Tern (over 20 pairs) and Common Tern (up to 200 pairs) between Duxbury Beach and Crane Beach. Black Duck and Spotted Sandpiper are also known to breed on the island.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

By carefully surveying and censusing the birds of Boston Harbor, TASL is documenting the importance and abundance of nature right here in an urban setting. Also documented are the uniqueness of two areas, Belle Isle Marsh and Snake Island.

We urge all of you who are interested in the enhancement of the Boston Harbor ecosystem to take note of these two sites and include them in any plans for the preservation of natural beauty in the city.



Copies of this informational leaflet can be obtained through TASL News, 22 Almont Street, Malden 02148