

TASL News

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OF EASTERN MASSACHUSETTS



BONAPARTE'S LEGACY - A LIVING MEMORY

"Like snowflakes wafted by the wind the loose flock drifts along; one hardly realizes that it has come before it has swept away beyond our vision." (Bent)

My mother, Elizabeth, died suddenly on September 3, in an automobile accident just after we had risen from dinner at her small house on Cape Cod. A month later her death came slowly home. We had wanted to leave her house as it was, her possessions as they were, so that she could live on through her oyster knife, her silver, and her Quimper. But that was not to be. We had to empty her house of her. For a time.

My sister had taken out Elizabeth's clothes. A friend had told me, "To part with her shoes, that will be the hardest thing to do." We worked for three days to pack up the rest. At the end of the first day, we lit the last fire she had set. I wished I could have named a bird for her.

Time and royalty might once have offered me the chance.

The Bonaparte's Gull is a small gull that migrates through Massachusetts waters, sometimes in very impressive numbers. It can most readily be identified by its distinctive buoyant tern-like flight, its white outer primaries, small black bill, and bright orange-red legs.

The Bonaparte's Gull nests throughout most of Canada and apparently used to nest in parts of the United States as well. It is the only commonly occurring gull found on the East Coast that builds its nest in trees, and thus, the northern limit of its breeding range is the furthest extent of the boreal forest. This nest is usually saddled on a branch of a spruce or fir tree and may be anywhere from four to twenty feet high.

In the fall Bonaparte's Gulls migrate south along both the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts. The largest number winter in our southern waters and may be found as far south as the Caribbean Sea. Small numbers may remain further north as long as icing does not occur. In Massachusetts the largest number can be seen in the fall and good numbers may remain into January. They are generally absent during February and March, but return starting in April. Significant numbers may be found into June and stragglers or non-breeding birds may be present throughout the summer. Southward migration begins again in August.

Bonaparte's Gull, Larus philadelphia. Generic name by Linnaeus, species name by Ord, common name by Ord.

Charles Lucien Jules Laurent Bonaparte (1803-1857), naturalist, statesman, exile. Prince of Canino and Musignano; nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of France. Married his cousin Zenaide Charlotte Julie, the daughter of Joseph Bonaparte, King of Naples and Spain (1808-1813). Left Europe for the United States in 1822, with Zenaide and Joseph. The "Father of systematic ornithology in the United States" (Choate). Lived first in Bordentown, then in Philadelphia. Devoted himself to continuing the work of Alexander Wilson.

Alexander Wilson (1766-1813), the "Father of American Ornithology"; author of American Ornithology; or, the Natural History of the Birds of the United States (nine volumes, 1808-1814); Philadelphia school teacher.

George Ord (1781-1866), son of a Philadelphia ship chandler and rope maker, who prospered in his father's trade. Lifelong scholar both of natural history and philology. Close friend and colleague of Alexander Wilson, whose classic work he completed, editing Volume VIII and writing Volume IX himself. Concealed his contribution well. Sought no fame for himself, only for Wilson. Named Larus philadelphia for his city, and the Bonaparte's Gull for the man who had honored Wilson.

Bonaparte's Gulls often look more like terns than gulls. Their sleek appearance and fairly rapid wingbeats are not at all like the slow gliding flight of most gulls. As the tide falls, they stream down the beach to feed in long lines and loose groups just offshore. "A gathering of white butterflies" (Pough). When sitting on the water they ride high with their small heads and long tails perked up.

Feeding Bonaparte's Gulls are fascinating to watch. They employ various methods depending on the tide conditions, the quarry pursued, and the feeding locale. At low tide they may be seen standing or swimming in shallow pools, their heads bobbing up and down as they pick at various creatures in the water. To stir up the waters, they may use foot-stirring techniques, when standing, as do Snowy Egrets; when swimming, they may spin around and around, as do phalaropes. During high tide they can often be seen circling in large numbers over tidal rips, diving down toward the water repeatedly and picking off various organisms from the surface with their bills. Although they are mainly insectivorous on their breeding grounds, their diet at other times of the year is comprised mainly of small fish, shrimps and other surface-swimming crustaceans, and marine worms.

The best locations to observe Bonaparte's Gulls in Massachusetts are the Merrimack River in Newburyport, Boston Harbor, particularly along Revere Beach, and at Nantucket. In the fall at Point of Pines in Revere more than 500 birds may be seen feeding as the tide drops, while at Nantucket in the winter large numbers may be seen feeding on the offshore tidal rips.

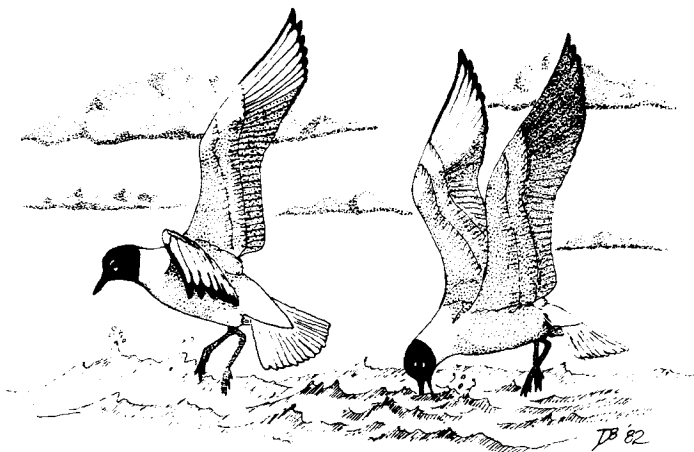
Mourning Dove, Zenaide macroura. Generic name by Bonaparte, species name by Linnaeus, common name from the sadness of its call. The dove, symbol of love and hope, emblem of the Holy Spirit, sign of the Annunciation, model of affection. Chosen by Bonaparte to bear the name of his wife.

Had I the chance, I believe I'd look for a hummingbird to name for my mother, a graceful creature, strong, like Anna's, which stays the winter, definite of manner and forceful of small voice.

James Barton
Craig Jackson

Sources

- Bent, Arthur Cleveland, Life Histories of North American Gulls and Terns, Dover, New York, 1963.
- Choate, Ernest A., The Dictionary of American Bird Names, Gambit, Boston, 1973.
- Grant, P. J., Gulls: A Guide to Identification, Buteo, Vermillion, 1982.
- Pough, Richard H., Audubon Water Bird Guide, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, 1951.
- Terres, John K., The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1980.



Editor's Note: Although we generally do not publish the correspondence we receive, we felt that TASL participants and readers would appreciate seeing this December 10, 1982 letter from the State Wildfowl Biologist.

Craig Jackson
Bird Observer
462 Trapelo Road
Belmont, Ma 02178

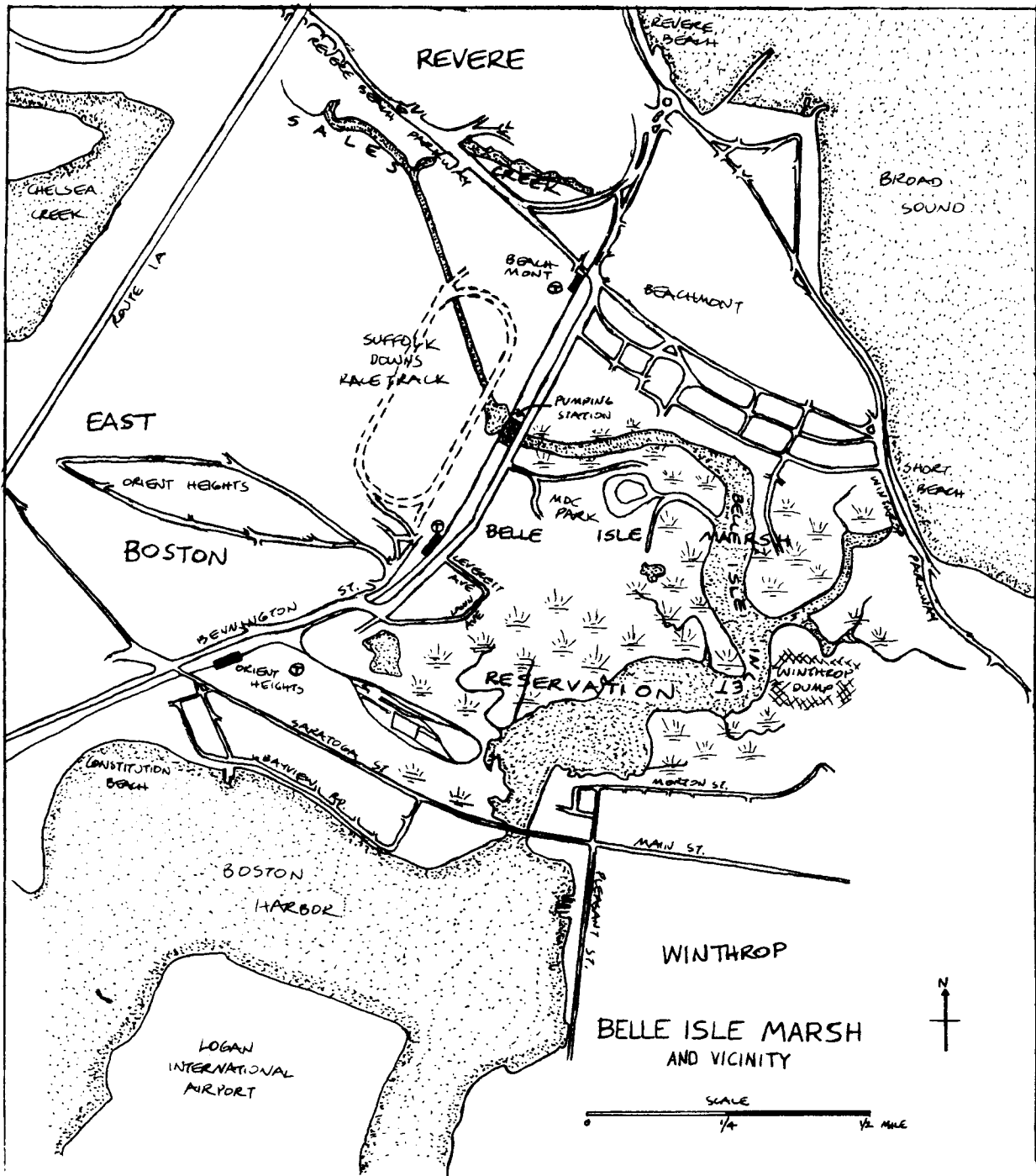
Dear Mr. Jackson:

I read with interest your report on various Boston Harbor area bird counts. TASL counts appear to be the most accurate. Since we are duplicating counts, I wonder if we could use TASL data and save us the expense of sending a 2 man crew by vehicle to Boston. We will continue to fly the Newburyport harbor area. Incidentally, our field data is broken down into smaller areas than the data you get from the Newton office.

Also, we do fly the outer Boston islands which probably accounts for our high eider count. Many of those flocks would not be observable from the ground since they may be hidden behind islands.

Sincerely,

H W Heusmann
Waterfowl Biologist



BELLE ISLE MARSH AND VICINITY

map by SZ



Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

BELLE ISLE MARSH NOTES

Field Trips

Friends of Belle Isle Marsh (FBIM) has been offering a series of monthly community field trips at Belle Isle Marsh since last winter. This fall we began to publicize these trips in local newspapers. The result has been a significant increase in the number of participants, particularly those from Winthrop and East Boston.

Attending our November trip were 26 persons, including Ms. Dumanoski of the Boston Globe. Her subsequent article in the Globe on November 22, 1982 featured photos of FBIM members Rose Corrado and Kermit Norris, as well as a description of this largest marsh in the City of Boston and the threats to it from petty dumping and encroachment.

Smaller numbers of people came in December and January; some who showed up in January were unfortunately not prepared for hiking in wet areas and had to turn back. On this trip a Short-eared Owl was sighted, and innumerable marsh mollusks and crustaceans were roused from their dormant stage by Craig Jackson's insistence that we should inspect the life in the mud.

These field trips will continue throughout the winter and spring. All field trips start at 2 PM, and are free and open to the public. Please meet at the entrance to MDC's Belle Isle Park on Bennington Street, East Boston. We suggest very warm clothes and water-proof boots: we will walk through parts of the marsh. Please see back of this issue for field trip dates.

Community Clean-up

Several residents of East Boston who are neighbors of Belle Isle joined with members of FBIM in inviting State Representative Gus Serra to a meeting on Sunday, December 5, 1982. The topic of discussion was a clean-up and beautification campaign for the marsh. Representative Serra, who is himself a native of the area and has always taken a strong stand on the preservation of Belle Isle, was impressed by the volume of trash carelessly dumped along the edges of the marsh. Immediate plans for a major clean-up by MDC personnel and machinery were discussed.

A major clean-up by MDC is obviously needed to remove the bulk of large and persistent trash in the marsh. In the long run, however, it will be the community, the marsh's neighbors, who would ensure the park's preservation and maintenance. In cooperation with Representative Serra's office, we intend to organize a community clean-up day in late spring, when neighbors can come out and join each other in cleaning and celebrating. Thus, a sense of communal and individual pride in this unique urban resource can be built.

Sales Creek

Originally a tidal creek that was connected to Chelsea Creek, Sales Creek is now a polluted, land-locked body of water in the southern area of Revere. During rain-storms, flood-waters in this area rise sufficiently to drown people's property. To alleviate this problem, in 1976 the Waterways Division of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Quality Engineering (DEQE) proposed a plan to pump flood water out of the Sales Creek area and into Belle Isle Inlet. (The option of pumping into Chelsea Creek was rejected due to cost considerations.) The Environmental Impact Report for this project stipulated dredging and clean-up of Sales Creek to prevent adverse impact on Belle Isle Marsh.

The pumping station for this project has been constructed on Bennington Street and was ready for test-operation in December 1982. Meanwhile, the dredging of Sales Creek has been postponed to 1984 or later. The Winthrop Planning Board, alerted last spring to the possibility that Belle Isle and Winthrop Harbor might be receiving a heavy dose of pollutants when the pumping actually got underway, commissioned Environmental Research and Technology Company (ERT) to study the contents of Sales Creek and its bottom sediments. The ERT study found high amounts of coliform bacteria, oil sludge, and heavy metals in the bottom sediments and the waters of Sales Creek.

The Winthrop Planning Board and its Belle Isle Subcommittee have been joined by a number of interested parties, including the Winthrop Conservation Commission, the Winthrop Board of Health, Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, the East Boston Land Use Council, the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions, and citizens of Revere, Winthrop, and East Boston, in demanding that no pumping from Sales Creek be undertaken until the impact of such pumping on Belle Isle and the Winthrop beaches and harbor are delineated in a new EIR.

Ms. Dumanoski of the Boston Globe followed her original article on Belle Isle Marsh with a very informative one on November 29, 1982, describing Winthrop's concerns about the Sales Creek project. Since then, a large amount of publicity in local and city-wide newspapers has alerted interested citizens to the environmental issues involved. Many people who had never heard of Belle Isle before have become aware of its existence and importance.

DEQE's latest action has been to take samples of water and sediment from both Sales Creek and Belle Isle and send them off for testing. The results are to help determine what course to follow regarding the pumping station and the dredging of Sales Creek.

Membership Meeting for The Friends of Belle Isle Marsh

On Sunday, March 13, we held an introductory membership meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to bring together many in the community who are concerned with Belle Isle Marsh as open space, city park, and wildlife refuge.

Although this meeting was free and open to the public, we are launching a membership drive to raise funds for publication and mailing. Membership cards will be available and yearly membership fees are as follows:

individual \$3.00
family \$5.00
seniors and youth \$1.00.

If you wish to join up, please mail a check to FBIM, Barbara Gard, Treasurer, 41 Ware Street, Somerville, MA 02144.

For further information, please write to FBIM, 20 Palermo Street, East Boston, MA 02128.

This issue of TASL News was produced by Janet Heywood, Craig Jackson, Barbara Phillips, and Soheil Zende. Illustrations were contributed by Denise Braunhardt and Mike Payne.



ANNOUNCEMENT: SEAL CENSUS

The Manomet Bird Observatory, under contract with the National Marine Fisheries Service, Woods Hole, MA, is conducting a census of the harbor seal population in Massachusetts. We are dividing the coastline into as many small areas as possible, so that a few individuals can survey the area as thoroughly as possible with minimal effort. Although the major concentrations are known, small groups of seals can only be censused by individuals who know the harbors and bays intimately.

The dates of the two remaining survey periods are March 25, 26, 27 and April 22, 23, 24. If you are interested in participating, please drop a card with your name and phone number to: Mike Payne, MBO, Manomet, MA 02345.

BELLE ISLE MARSH FIELD TRIPS

All field trips start at 2 P.M., and are free and open to the public. Please meet at the entrance to MDC's Belle Isle Park on Bennington Street, East Boston. We suggest very warm clothes and water-proof boots: we will walk through parts of the marsh.

Sunday March 20

Saturday April 23

Saturday April 16

Saturday May 14

For further information, please call any of the leaders: Craig Jackson, 321-4382; Kermit Norris, 567-2339; Soheil Zende, 628-8990.

Since 1973 Bird Observer, a bimonthly magazine, has been publishing records of Eastern Massachusetts bird-sightings. Each issue features an article on where to find birds in this state (and elsewhere). The February 1983 issue contains a major article by Chris Leahy on birding Cape Ann. Other pieces on field problems, ornithological research, and bird behavior also appear in the magazine.

Annual subscription to Bird Observer is \$7.50. If you are interested in subscribing, please mail your check to Bird Observer, Inc., 462 Trapelo Road, Belmont 02178.

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