

# Alive!

At The Boston Nature Center



Mass Audubon  
Boston Nature Center

Spring 2008

## Spring Gardening

The days are lengthening, the earth is warming, and BNC staff is busy preparing for a productive growing season in the Clark Cooper Community Gardens. A portion of these historic gardens is set



aside for educational use and this land provides countless opportunities for children and adults to share meaningful outdoor

experiences. Gardens are places for quiet reflection, active explorations, and good hard work.

This year we are getting a head start by planting many seeds indoors at the nature center. Peppers, tomatoes, and cabbages are already sprouting underneath our grow light. Crops such as cabbage can tolerate cooler temperatures and will be planted out into the fields in a few short weeks. As the weather warms the tomatoes and peppers will be ready, and as May turns into June we will be busy transplanting

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## Beginning Bird Watching

By Pam Chatis, BNC Sanctuary Committee

House Wren

Soon it will be one of the most wonderful times to begin a new hobby: bird watching. The end of March to early April heralds spring migration and just looking out your window you can see birds that

are uncommon during the winter. You might say, "how do I get started?" First of all, you need a field guide or bird list for your area. A field guide is a book with pictures of the birds and tips for identifying them. There are several books that are helpful for our area, including the Peterson Field Guide to Eastern Birds and The Sibley Guide to Birds. The second thing that will help you to see the birds easier is binoculars. You will be able to ask the staff at the BNC for help and advice in choosing a pair or borrow BNC's binoculars. A very important next step is knowing what to expect in your area. A checklist of birds in Massachusetts will give you a list of all the birds you would commonly find in our area. Checklists for all the states are available at:

[http://www.thayerbirding.com/gbna/checklists\\_menu.htm](http://www.thayerbirding.com/gbna/checklists_menu.htm)



Cedar Waxwing  
Photos: Eduardo del Solar

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## BNC Vacation Week and Camp Updates



Children observe their outdoor "animals" during February Vacation Week.

The February Vacation Program at BNC was four full days of meeting new friends, learning about nature and having fun. This year's theme was "Life on the Edge...Adaptations to Winter Survival." Children ages 6-14 were engaged in activities that helped them understand how animals survive in their habitats, no matter what the weather conditions. Children explored survival in the Arctic and Antarctic, discovered how blubber acts as an insulator, how bats slow down their metabolism to keep warm, and how small creatures insulate themselves to survive the winter cold. Children were challenged to keep a small "animal" (actually, a container of JELLO) from freezing outdoors. They worked together deciding what materials would keep the animal warm, as well as the location of the warmest outdoor places. One group investigated

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There are several important “field marks” that will enable you to identify birds; relative size, shape, colors and patterns, habitat or where the bird lives, and voice. It is often helpful to compare the bird you are trying to identify to a familiar bird. Is it larger or smaller than a sparrow? A robin? A crow? What is the shape of the bird? Is the bird's body long or short?



*Wood Duck*

Is the tail long, short, narrow, or wide? How long are the legs or toes? What is the shape of the bill? It may be short and thick in seed-eating birds, long and thin in sandpipers, flat and broad like a duck's, or hooked at the tip as on an owl, falcon, or hawk. What is the color and pattern of the bird? Colors are probably the most noticeable and characteristic identifier of birds,



*Red-winged Blackbird*  
Photos: Eduardo del Solar

but where the color is placed is also important. Is there a color on the tip of wings, tail, or head different than the body? Another good way of identifying birds is through the songs and calls that they make. You could start by learning the songs of the birds in your yard. Later, learn the songs of other birds in the Boston area. Often you will hear a bird before you see it or if there is a lot of foliage you may only hear the bird.

By putting all the identification tips together you will be able to identify many birds. One great thing to do is record all the information about the bird before you even try to look it up in a bird book. Get out your sketchpad and colored pencils and draw, look and draw. Even if you are not a great artist, you can record information that will enable you later to identify the birds you saw. Check the newsletter for bird walks led by naturalists at the BNC and join us for the Birds & Bards Festival and Bird-a-thon. For more information on birds and birding, visit [http://www.massaudubon.org/Birds\\_and\\_Birding](http://www.massaudubon.org/Birds_and_Birding).

## News from BNC's Teen Ambassadors



Two Teen Ambassadors present opposing view points to clarify their values.

As part of the BNY Mellon CityACCESS: An Investment in Youth program, the BNC Teen Ambassadors have the opportunity to strengthen leadership and performance skills while learning to work as part of a team. Teams from two participating organizations take turns collaborating in the focus, design and implementation of a workshop that is presented to the entire group of thirty-six teen ambassadors and their coordinators. The goal is to develop a concept that involves the whole group in a meaningful and interactive experience.

On Thursday, March 6, 2008, The Teen Ambassadors from the BNC and the Malden YMCA developed a session called, “Which Side Are You On?” Through the use of questions on topics important to the teens themselves, a teen from each site paired up with another teen taking opposing viewpoints on the same issue. Through research, talking to peers and their own beliefs, they developed debates on modern day topics relevant to today's teens. All Ambassadors became involved in the discussions and were engaged in thoughtful and independent responses. It was a positive experience for all as the teens discovered the importance of developing skills in listening, learning from each other, being persuasive and defending their beliefs with facts to reinforce them.

## Spring Gardening

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ng seedlings of squash, melon, and asparagus. The garden promises to be a focal point of Summer Camp at the BNC. Campers will help with weeding and watering as they sample diverse new flavors and learn how fun it is to grow

## BNC Vacation Week and Camp Updates *Cont.' from page 1.*

how ice and glaciers actually shaped the landforms we see today. To demonstrate, they created a papier-mâché scale model of Peddocks Island in Boston Harbor that will become part of BNC's spring exhibit. We anxiously waited for snow all week and were glad to see it fall on Friday, so some were able to try snowshoeing for the first time. All week,



Owls created experiments using ice forms as part of their vacation week.

you could hear and see the excitement as children learned through games, art, songs, and real-world challenges.

BNC Staff and Teen Ambassadors are looking forward to our April Vacation Program (April 22-25). Join us as we explore “The Ocean In Your Backyard.” Participants will learn all about Boston harbor and its islands through hand-on/minds-on fun activities. We are currently accepting registrations for children ages 6-14. Please call us at 617-983-8500 for registration information.



Adventurers finalize their model of Peddocks Island.

their own food.

To learn more about how you can grow your own meals from seed to plate, please consider attending a workshop with the Boston Natural Areas Network. BNAN works extensively with community gardeners across the city and can be located online at: <http://bostonnatural.org>

# Innovative Earthship Technology

By Jim and Ellie Hill,  
BNC Sanctuary Committee

Imagine living completely off the electric grid, relying on the sun for heat and electricity, capturing your water needs from rainwater, and having a million dollar view. A few months ago, our son Jim, who is 37 and old enough to know what he is doing, started talking to us about his desire to do just that. Specifically, he wanted to explore moving into an earthship. We thought he might have lost it, but decided to go with him to Taos, New Mexico to check it out. Earthship technology was developed by architect Michael Reynolds to create off-grid, self-sufficient homes that can be built almost anywhere. His base is in Taos where the largest concentration of earthships can be found. Reynolds has written several books describing his innovative building design. You can learn more at [www.earthship.net](http://www.earthship.net). Earthship homes take advantage of both active and passive solar design, rainwater storage, and grey water reuse. The basic construction approach involves thermal mass construction with berms around all but the south side, passive solar design with loads of south facing glass, walls constructed of used tires packed with earth and stacked up like bricks (actually, not as bad as it sounds), photovoltaic panels and substantial battery packs for electricity, solar hot water, and creative air management to control extremes of heat during the warm season. The interior surface of the exterior walls is generally plastered with adobe or cement so you can't see the tire structure inside the wall. Interior walls are often constructed of empty aluminum cans and/or bottles covered with adobe or cement.

In Taos, we drove several miles on unimproved dirt roads to find a small earthship community where you could see mountains and open prairie for miles around. It was easy to imagine wagon trains passing by two hundred years ago. Inside the earthship, it was light, warm and cozy, about 65 degrees as opposed to 35 outside. The kitchen was small, but adequate, with propane appliances and mosaic tile counters. Centered in the living area was an adobe tiled fireplace, which would keep the place warm in the evening. The nearby bedroom had a fireplace as well. The bathroom consisted of a composting



View of the south side of an Earthship



Earthship under construction



Walls are constructed with used tires and recycled aluminum cans.

toilet, a beautiful mosaic sink and a shower supplied with solar hot water. In addition, there was an indoor garden area just inside the wall of glass. The whole thing was very art-fully done with Mexican tile floors and with bottles and cans showing in the adobe walls. It was amazing to think that one could live this well off the grid.

We visited several other earthships of various sizes. Each one had a large indoor planter, fed with grey water, adjacent to the south facing glass. Tomato plants and other sun loving vegetables were prolific in the warm sun, even in January! Most earthships are smaller than the homes we are used to, but they take advantage of every square inch of space with lots of built-in storage, multi-use spaces and no hallways. Reynolds was a sailor and that influence is obvious! Managed properly, they can be completely self-sufficient. Most of what we saw was totally off-grid, supplied its own water needs from rainwater storage in large underground cisterns, and could be (and were) built miles from what we think of as civilization. If you ever get out to northern New Mexico, don't miss out on the opportunity to see these amazing homes.

## JP Trees and Earthworks Will Plant a Tree in Your Yard in Jamaica Plain or Roxbury For Free!

By Lauren Ockene

Trees clean our air, save on cooling costs, and fight against global warming. JP Trees and Earthworks will plant a tree in your front yard with you! Their arborist will help you pick the perfect tree for your yard, and their skilled volunteers will plant the tree with you and teach you how to care for it.

If you want a tree but you live in another part of Boston: The Boston Urban Forest Coalition, in partnership with the City of Boston, is working on the Grow Boston Greener initiative to plant 100,000 trees by 2020. If you live in Boston, you can learn how to plant your own tree in your front or back yard, and receive a tree for free. To get a tree or to volunteer: Contact Gretchen at 617-442-1059 or [gretchen@earthworksboston.org](mailto:gretchen@earthworksboston.org)

# Spring Fling '08

Join us

again at the Boston Nature Center Spring Fling and Not So Silent Auction on Sunday, June 1, 2008 from 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM.

Mark your calendars! You won't want to miss this year's Spring Fling and Not So Silent Auction. Over 100 items will be auctioned to support the BNC Summer Camp. Of course, there will be delectable sweets and beautiful music.



Bidding on one of the 63 Silent Auction items at the Spring Fling last year.

**Come and join the fun!**

## Summer Camp at the BNC



### Summer Camp registration has begun!

Sign up now to ensure your child's spot in some of our exciting weeklong sessions. Children ages 6-14 can register for up to 4 weeks.



For more information on these programs, visit our website at [www.massaudubon.org/boston](http://www.massaudubon.org/boston) or call Kylee at 617-983-8500 for a registration packet.

## Statewide Volunteer Day



Mark your calendar for our second annual Mass Audubon Volunteer Day. Have fun while lending a helping hand with a variety of indoor and outdoor projects for all ages and abilities.

Bring your friends and family and a picnic lunch, and enjoy the sanctuary after the work is done.

**April 26, 2008  
9:00 am—Noon**

More information online at [www.massaudubon.org/workforwildlife](http://www.massaudubon.org/workforwildlife)

Work for Wildlife at any one of these wildlife sanctuaries:

- Greater Boston**
  - Boston Nature Center, Boston
  - Broadmoor, Natick
  - Habitat, Belmont
  - Visual Arts Center, Canton
- Central/West**
  - Eagle Lake, Holden
  - Laughing Brook, Hampden
  - Pleasant Valley, Lenox
  - Wachusett Meadow, Princeton
- Southeast, Cape & Islands**
  - Daniel Webster, Marshfield
  - Felix Neck, Edgartown
  - Long Pasture, Barnstable
  - Wellfleet Bay, Wellfleet

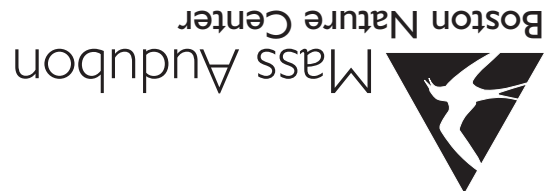
Check out Mass Audubon's website [www.massaudubon.org/boston](http://www.massaudubon.org/boston)



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**SAVE THE DATE!**  
 Sunday, June 1, 2008  
 Spring Fling  
 and Silent Auction!



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 U.S. Postage  
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 Lincoln, MA