

# Alive!

At The Boston Nature Center



Mass Audubon  
Boston Nature Center

Winter 2008

## Boston Nature Center's Annual Meeting

BNC's Sanctuary Committee and its standing committees, volunteers, friends, Teen Ambassadors, and staff members attended the annual meeting in November. Participants reviewed the progress of the BNC during the past fiscal year. Each Committee Chair—Bruce Fulford of the Environment Committee, Pam Chatis of the Education Advisory Task Force, and Martha Heath of the Planning and Development Committee—presented major accomplishments, achievements, and challenges.

BNC is delighted with the depth and breadth of its environmental education reach. Its involvement with Boston schools continued to reach children, their families, and educators in a comprehensive manner through the whole school change model, the Boston Schools Environmental Initiative and through the Boston Schools Initiative with second and third grade students. Participation in the Out of School Time programs including the Nature and Enrichment After School Program, school vacation programs, and summer camp continued to steadily climb.

Every year during the annual meeting, BNC presents an award to an individual who makes significant contributions to the

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## Owls in the Massachusetts Winter

By Pam Chatis, BNC Sanctuary Committee

**A**lthough owls are among the best-known birds in folklore and literature, they remain something of a mystery to most people. It is not surprising since they are mainly nocturnal, and by day they hide in tree cavities or roost in the trees where they are hidden by dense foliage. Most species are most vocal just after sundown and then again

just before sunrise. However, during courtship and the early breeding season, which for many of our native species occur in the winter and early spring, they often can be heard throughout the night. Before dawn and just after dusk are the best times for seeing owls. Most successful "owling" occurs between 4 a.m. and dawn on a moonlit night, when owls tend to be more vocal and noisy traffic is at a minimum. At dusk, many owls will come to forest edges to begin hunting. Look for "headless lumps" on bare tree branches. For listening purposes, still, calm, moonlit nights are best. Some of our most vocal residents include the Great Horned Owl, the Barred Owl, and the Eastern Screech Owl.

The Great Horned Owl nests in a wide variety of habitats, from open country to forests to woodlots.

Typically,



Great Horned Owl. Photo: Eduardo del Solar



Great Horned Owl.  
Photo: Eduardo del Solar



Barn Owl.

it will appropriate old nests of other large birds such as hawks and crows. Great Horned Owls begin nesting in December, so you can start listening for their calls and looking for possible nest sites then. Adult Great Horned Owls tend to be vocal during the breeding season and beyond. Listen for their who-ho-o-o, whoo-hoo-o-o, whoo call.

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Eastern Screech Owl.  
Photo: Eduardo del Solar

The Eastern Screech Owl may very well breed in almost every block in Massachusetts. They are cavity nesters and utilize many habitats, including forest perimeters, wood lots, parks, groves, suburban neighborhoods, and urban areas. Old woodpecker holes, natural tree cavities, and nest boxes are used for nesting. Listen for their soft, low-pitched “hoot-hoot.” Normally, hoots are the same pitch, but sometimes they descend slightly, like a horse’s whinny.



Barred Owllet.  
Photo: Eduardo del Solar

The Barred Owl is found in wooded settings with mature trees, especially wooded swamps, and river and stream bottoms. The Barred Owl will use natural hollows in trees or broken tree stubs as well as

old hawk, crow, or squirrel nests, and occasionally nest boxes. You might begin hearing their calls in mid-January. Search for them just prior to the breeding season, late winter through early April. The Barred Owl is the one most likely to respond in the daytime to your own vocalizations: “Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?”

Another way of finding owls is by looking for their pellets. Owls eat their prey (largely rodents) whole, and regurgitate the indigestible fur and bones as pellets 12-24 hours after eating. You can find these pellets under a favorite roosting or nesting spot.

For more information go to: [www.massaudubon.org](http://www.massaudubon.org) and Birds of North America Online.

## BNC Annual Meeting

*Cont.' from page 1.*

sanctuary. This year’s annual award was presented to Toni Lester for her maintenance, care, and tending of the butterfly garden by Jennifer Charles, BNC’s Sanctuary Committee Chair. Throughout

## News from BNC's Teen Ambassadors

### Turkey Facts

The teen ambassadors have enjoyed observing the turkeys on-site at BNC and noticed that the turkey family residing here has really grown this year. During the summer months we observed at least two males and four females and we are all fascinated by their behaviors. They seem to enjoy their own reflections in the glass or in the chrome bumpers of cars in the parking lot. During the winter, they are often seen huddled near an entrance. Here are some other turkey fun facts that we have learned.

- The name of the skin that hangs from a turkey’s neck is called the wattle.
- The wild turkey can only fly for a short distance, but sometimes can reach 55 mph.
- Male turkeys are



Top photo: Male turkey displaying feathers.  
Middle photo: Turkey head with wattle.  
Bottom photo: Turkey poult.  
Photos: Eduardo del Solar

called Toms, while females are called Hens.

- Turkeys can trot up to 25 mph.
- Benjamin Franklin wanted the national bird to be a turkey.
- Turkeys were first domesticated in Mexico and Central America.
- A mature turkey can have up to 3,500 feathers.
- The baby turkey is called a poult.
- Turkeys can see movement almost a hundred yards away.
- Turkeys lived almost ten million years ago.
- Turkey feathers were used by Native Americans to stabilize arrows.
- Forty-five million turkeys are eaten each Thanksgiving.
- Twenty-two million turkeys are eaten each Christmas.
- Turkeys do not really have ears like ours, but they have very good hearing.
- Gobbling turkeys can be heard a mile away on a quiet day.

the season, Toni took a leadership role in identifying and enhancing the butterfly garden. She met with its designer, Deb Howard and learned how to carefully tend to a variety of both perennials and annuals.

Our sincere thanks to all of Mass Audubon’s members, individual funders, foundations and corporations who believe

in our work, support our mission, and provide resources that allow us to continue to grow! If you would like to receive a copy of BNC’s Annual Report, please contact Kylee by email at [kwilson@massaudubon.org](mailto:kwilson@massaudubon.org) or call 617-983-8500. You may also access this report on line at [www.massaudubon.org/boston](http://www.massaudubon.org/boston)

# Gregarious Groundhogs!

The groundhog, also known as a woodchuck (Marmota monax), is the third largest member of the rodent family. Groundhogs have powerful legs with sharp claws, which allow them to dig burrows for their homes. Since they are slow moving and are prey for wolves, coyotes, and foxes, they stay close to their burrow so they can scurry back home at any sign of danger. They whistle through their large teeth to warn one another of danger, so some folks call woodchucks "whistling pigs."

Groundhogs generally hibernate from October through March, making them one of New England's true hibernators. Before hibernating, they feast on their favorite foods-dandelion greens, clover, and grasses-to put on plenty of weight for their long winter nap. While hibernating, a groundhog's body temperature drops from 90 degrees to 40 degrees, and its heartbeat drops from 100 beats per minute to 4 beats per minute!

Contrary to the legend, male groundhogs are not looking for their shadow when they wake in winter-they are looking for love! Male groundhogs survey their territory (roughly three acres) in search of a suitable mate. After visiting several burrows of hibernating females, the males return to their own hideaway for several more weeks. In March, they return to a female's burrow to mate and remain there until the female is ready to give



Groundhog. Photos: Eric Roth

birth, at which time she evicts the male from the den. New litters of baby groundhogs arrive in April when food is plentiful thanks to warmer weather.

## The History of Groundhog Day

In 1723, the Delaware Indians settled Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, as a campsite halfway between the Allegheny and Susquehanna Rivers. When German settlers arrived in the 1700s, they brought a tradition known as Candlemas Day, celebrated at the midpoint between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox. It was the custom on Candlemas Day for clergy to bless candles and distribute them to the people in the dark of winter, thus the name "Candlemas." Superstition held that if the weather was fair on Candlemas Day, the second half of winter would be stormy and cold.

According to the old English saying:  
*If Candlemas be fair and bright,  
Winter has another flight.  
If Candlemas brings clouds and rain,  
Winter will not come again.*

To determine the "forecast," Germans traditionally watched a badger to check for a shadow. In the New World, the groundhog, upon waking from a midwinter slumber, was selected as the replacement. Thus the tradition of the groundhog and his weather forecast began: If he sees his shadow, he regards it as an omen of six more weeks of bad weather and returns to his hole. If the day is cloudy and, hence, shadowless, he takes it as a sign of spring and stays aboveground.

For more information go to:

[www.massaudubon.org](http://www.massaudubon.org)

*Many thanks to the Mass Audubon website for this story.*

## The Fast-Growing Eastern Cottonwood Tree

By Dan Locicero,  
BNC Northeastern University Intern

While the Boston Nature Center only occupies a small area of Boston's total green space, there is definitely no shortage of plant species here. Over 380 plant species have been documented on the property, including New England natives and invasive species from around the world. The eastern cottonwood is one tree species found throughout the BNC that is known for its towering height, fast growth, and the "cotton" attached to its seeds.

The cottonwood's most amazing characteristic is its ability to grow to incredible heights in time spans shorter than most other hardwoods. In one test done in the southern United States, cottonwood trees were able to grow to over 100 feet in nine years.

Can you imagine a tree growing in your yard at the rate of over ten feet a year? This trait makes the eastern cottonwood a valuable commercial resource for everything from soil stabilization and shade to furniture and cabinetry. One proposed use for the eastern cottonwood is feed for cattle because of its good cellulose content and the high concentration of protein and minerals in new growth. Eastern Cottonwoods can be found all through the BNC's property and can be seen from the Snail and Fox Trails.

Information taken from USDA Forest Service Website [www.na.fs.fed.us/](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/) from the article titled Eastern Cottonwood by David F. Van Haverbeke.



## Learn with Us During February Vacation

### LIFE ON THE EDGE: *Adaptations to Winter Survival* February 19-22, 2008

Have you ever wondered why birds' feet don't freeze in the snow? Or what a coyote track looks like? Find out during February Vacation Week Program at the Boston Nature Center! Children ages 6-14 will explore winter nature through hands-on investigations, art projects, and games.

*Space is limited; please call to register  
(617) 983-8500!*

### LA VIDA AL BORDE: *Adaptaciones para Sobrevivir el Invierno* 19-22 de Febrero de 2008

¿Usted se pregunta una vez por qué los pies de los pájaros no congelan? ¿O cómo

se ve la huella del coyote? ¡Inscríbese en el programa para las vacaciones de Febrero en el Boston Nature Center! Los niños(as) edades de 6-14 explorarán la naturaleza del invierno a través de investigaciones científicas, proyectos de arte, y juegos, mientras ejercitan sus habilidades manuales.

*Tenemos cupo limitado; ¡por favor llame al  
(617) 983-8500!*

# Snow Scenes at BNC



**Statewide Volunteer Day**

*2nd Annual*

Work for Wildlife at any one of these wildlife sanctuaries:

**Greater Boston**

- Boston Nature Center, Boston
- Broadmead, Natick
- Habitat, Belmont
- Visual Arts Center, Canton

**Central/West**

- Eagle Lake, Holden
- Laughing Brook, Haverden
- Pleasant Valley, Lenox
- Wachusett Meadow, Princeton

**Southeast, Cape & Islands**

- Ousel Waterer, Marshfield
- Felix Neck, Edgartown
- Long Pasture, Barnstable
- Wellfleet Bay, Wellfleet

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)

## Wish List:

- Storytellers for young and old alike
- Local residents with Oral Histories of the former Boston State Hospital
- Sturdy garden gloves for volunteer groups
- 20 x 20 ft. canopy or tent without sides
- Great Auction Donations
- Volunteers to lead bird walks

Printed on Recycled Paper with Soy Inks.

*The Trails:* Open every day, dawn to dusk.  
Saturday, Sunday, and Monday holidays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
*The Boston Nature Center is open:* Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.,  
If you get lost, call 617-983-8500.  
Still identify it as "Boston State Hospital" or "State Hospital."  
Walk Hill Street, and Harvard Street (Route 203), American Legion Highway,  
Boston Nature Center is located on the grounds of the old Boston State  
**THE BOSTON NATURE CENTER IS EASY TO FIND.**

Stanley Washington  
Charlene Ross  
Martha Heath, *Planning and Development Committee Chair*  
Alma Habtewold  
Bruce Fulford, *Environment Committee Chair*  
Tom Daly  
Bill Coady  
Jennifer Charles  
Cathy Campbell  
Pam Chatts, *Clerk*  
Jim Hill, *Vice Chair*  
Betsy Johnson, *Chair*

### SANCTUARY COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Julie Brandlen, *The Anne & Peter Brooke Director*  
Jean Dorcus, *Education Manager*  
Mohamed Abdulrahman, *Property Worker*  
Susan Brace, *Teacher Naturalist*  
Andrew Breck, *Teacher Naturalist*  
Irma Cambara, *Receptionist*  
Tim Cooke, *Property Manager*  
Paula Davis, *Receptionist*  
Jean Dorcus, *Education Manager*  
Janmy George, *Teacher Naturalist*  
Timothy Juba, *Caretaker*  
Brian Lawlor, *Teacher Naturalist*  
Dan Locicero, *Intern*  
Erica Quigley, *Teacher Naturalist*  
Kyle Wilson, *Office Manager*

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



**Mass Audubon**  
Boston Nature Center  
500 Walk Hill Street, Mattapan, MA 02126 • 617-983-8500  
[www.massaudubon.org](http://www.massaudubon.org)



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