



# Friends of Ellisville Marsh

Fall, 2023

## Acting in Our Natural Self-Interest

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### President's Corner

I greatly admire Greta Thunberg, the Swedish 15-year-old who in 2018 began skipping school on Fridays to demand climate action outside the Swedish Parliament. Greta (now 20) has become an icon in the worldwide climate change movement. But demanding urgent action on the global stage isn't enough. It's equally important to have people like us working locally to address climate-related challenges and raise community awareness.

We work with nature on an intimate level—getting to know individual Piping Plovers nesting on a barrier beach, measuring tidal elevations in the salt marsh, mapping an underwater eel grass bed, and more. Why? Because changes measured in centimeters can be as telling as those measured in millions of acres.

How can the wider population be shown that it's in their self-interest to become directly involved? Friends volunteers and leadership are deeply connected to what's around us. We've committed thousands of hours of time in an unselfish expression of what one might call *natural* self-interest. We make decisions and act in ways that serve only to preserve and enhance the natural places around us.

Let's spread the word. We may not be able to change the world by ourselves but we can do something meaningful in our own backyard. Reduce your individual carbon footprint. Pick up trash by the roadside. Go for a quiet walk in the woods and appreciate what we have before we lose it.

--Eric Cody

## Special Report: Birds to Look for in Ellisville October/November



Contributed by Lisa Schibley, ISS Coordinator–North America



**Nelson's Sparrow**

Photos courtesy of Lisa Schibley



**Vermillion Flycatcher**

For those of us who love birds, each season brings its own excitement - from the waves of migrant warblers in May to the endearing new fledglings throughout the summer to the southbound shorebirds gathering on our coasts in August. This time of year, however, the fall migration has begun to wind down. Most shorebirds have left, though a handful of Dunlin, Sanderling, Black-bellied Plover, and Greater Yellowlegs can linger in the Ellisville Flats throughout November. By the end of October, almost all flycatchers and vireos and most warblers are gone, with the exception of the ubiquitous Yellow-rumped Warbler whose talent for berry-eating means it can survive colder temperatures than its insect-eating kindred.

But October and November are also the time for new arrivals. Each north wind brings skeins of sea ducks – eider, scoter, and other species who may pause along our coasts in large flocks before heading further south. October is also the time for sparrows. Of particular interest to Ellisville friends are the Ammospiza sparrows. Three species – Saltmarsh Sparrow, Nelson's Sparrow, and Seaside Sparrow – can be found in the marsh in October. They can be tricky though. The best time to look is a mid-October morning, when the birds are most active, during a high tide which will push the birds in the open along the edge. The IDs are tricky too. Saltmarsh has a strong orange eyebrow and mustache and strong dark well-defined breast streaks. The Nelson's Sparrow is similar, but the breast streaks look like someone took Saltmarsh streaks and tried to smudge them out with an eraser. Seaside is the easiest ID, larger and grayer without any orange at all. And it is also the most unusual, so if you happen to find one, consider yourself lucky!

Of course, the most sought-after birds of this time of year are the vagrants. Birds who are trying to follow their migration path, but get pushed off track by fall storms or an incorrect sense of direction, will often find their way to our coast and settle down in a nice patch of habitat. This is the time of year to discover a Western Kingbird, a Bell's Vireo, or a Northern Wheatear (did you hear about the one on Plymouth Beach?!?) to send the birding world aflutter. Given its outstanding habitat, Ellisville is overdue for a rarity. Maybe this year it will be our turn to find that Vermillion Flycatcher from Arizona to make the birders ooh and aaahhh.

Whether you are interested in studying sparrows, seawatching for scoters, or searching for a lost western vagrant, Ellisville Harbor is an excellent place to spend your time. I am very grateful for the care the Friends give to this magical place so we all can love its birds and other wildlife. Thank you!



## The Way It Was a Hundred Years Ago

Old photographs like this one looking across Ellisville Marsh are periodically received by the Friends. This image came from Chuck Stultz, whose grandfather, then father, owned the house at the corner of Ellisville Road and State Road, opposite the Harlow Farmhouse for a total of forty years. Best estimates are that the photo is from the period 1910-15. The old fish houses by the harbor can be seen in the center of the photo. The view is from the southwest.

## Check Us Out on Facebook and Instagram

Join the nearly 200 people who already follow the Friends!



Our social media sites are frequently updated with new information and images, thanks to the efforts of Friends' board member Adela Hruby.

[Go to Facebook Now](#)

## **Inlet Maintenance Permitting Update**

The joint effort by the Friends of Ellisville Marsh and the Town of Plymouth to obtain replacement local, state, and federal permits is finally underway. Sustainable Coastal Solutions of North Falmouth has been retained by the Town to consult with regulatory agencies to identify the best route for obtaining long-term, jointly held permits. The work is funded by an \$89,000 Best Value Grant awarded to Plymouth by the state. We have until early 2025 to obtain new permits before our ability to maintain the salt marsh inlet disappears. Early reports from the consultant about agency cooperation are encouraging.



## **What's Up with the Harlow Farmhouse?**

It stands like a sentinel at the back of Ellisville Marsh. While it's not the original house on the site, the Harlow farmhouse is nevertheless a historic property, currently owned by the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) as part of Ellisville Harbor State

Park. The farm outbuildings are long gone, as is the barn, but some Friends' members vividly recall what it was like to live in the house. DCR's Historic Curatorship Program held a listening session in mid-August to solicit inputs from the community on what to do with the building. Proposals for reuse and stewardship of the house were due August 28th. We wait with bated breath to see how the community can come together to revitalize this special place perched on the edge of nature.

## You Can Eat This!

***Chorda filum***. This brown algae goes by many names--dead man's rope, sea lace, mermaid's tresses, sea-catgut, bootlace weed, sea-twine, and mermaid's fishing line. It's edible but not often found on menus! Add it to stews and soups to provide a salty flavor. It grows in shallow water in Ellisville.



Our membership year began July 1st. Click here to renew if you haven't already.

The membership year runs from July 1 through June 30.

The Friends of Ellisville Marsh, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. Our federal tax ID is [77-0691727](https://www.irs.gov/efile/efile-identifiers/efile-identifiers-501-c-3-nonprofits).

Visit us at: [www.EllisvilleMarsh.org](http://www.EllisvilleMarsh.org)

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