

# Year *in* Review

Mass Audubon Boston Nature Center

2024



Mass Audubon



Dear BNC Community,

As we welcome 2025, we are pleased to share this report highlighting the past year's achievements. Our commitment to community engagement and inclusive programming remains steadfast, supported by your continued dedication.

Boston Nature Center, a 67-acre sanctuary in Mattapan, hosts a rich ecosystem of wildlife, birds, and plants. Dedicated volunteers and staff work tirelessly on restoration projects like the removal of invasive species such as Phragmites and Bittersweet, ensuring the preservation of this vital urban habitat for both people and wildlife.

Educational initiatives flourished this year with full enrollment in Pathways to Nature preschool and successful implementation of Growing with STEM in Boston Public Schools. The GreenUp Resilient Schoolyards program enhanced educational reach across more BPS schools. Willow Tree Youth Leaders focused on climate action throughout the school year, educating peers through community projects, and weaving education through community engagement, public programs, and camp.

Vacation programs, summer camps in Mattapan and Hyde Park, and Summer Discoveries programs connected thousands of youth with nature. The metrics page demonstrates extensive reach and diverse educational programming, all strengthened by ongoing partnership with the City of Boston.

The sanctuary thrives because of you—supporters, volunteers, Sanctuary Committee, staff, city-wide partners and our extensive community of gardeners, program participants, and visitors. Your commitment makes BNC an invaluable community resource.

Thank you for your ongoing support!

*Vivian & Erin*

Vivian Ortiz, Chair  
Boston Nature Center Sanctuary Committee

Erin Kelly, Anne and Peter Brooke Director  
Mass Audubon Boston



# Reflections from a Veteran Volunteer

For the past 11 years, Margaret Rhodes has been a dedicated volunteer at the BNC. Margaret has helped with everything from developing summer camp curriculum and facilitating a long-term partnership with Work, Inc, an organization working with disabled adults, to participating in a weekly volunteer group that removes invasive plants from the property—a never-ending task. One of the first events she attended was Rockin' with Raptors, where about 600 people of diverse ages and backgrounds came to BNC to observe raptors, play activities and games, and enjoy music. "Even though I had often gone to other Mass Audubon sanctuaries with my husband and children, I'd never even heard of BNC until I started looking for volunteer work," she reflects. "I consider it to be one of the best-kept secrets of Boston, but I wish it were better known."

She remarks that she was drawn in by the diverse and passionate community of people involved with BNC, and the sanctuary's commitment to expanding access to nature for all people. "BNC is dedicated to understanding and enjoying our natural habitats and wildlife, but always with attention paid to how social injustices affect the work we do. The staff are always looking for ways to involve the community and to learn from them," she says.



Margaret is also passionate about addressing social injustices. In addition to her other community volunteer work at Poor People's United Fund, she actively supports BNC's Sanctuary of Belonging Fund and Annual Fund to help ensure that our work in reaching diverse communities continues to be a central tenant. She notes: "I have been impressed by BNC's strong sense of community and focus on making everyone—whether staff, volunteer, or visitor—feel welcome."

Although she is relocating to Seattle, her lasting impact at BNC will be felt for a long time to come. "It is so important to be reminded of all the good that is being done at the local level," she says. We are so grateful to have Margaret in our community, and we wish her the best with her new journey!

## Nurturing the Next Generation of Leaders

It has been an exciting year of learning and growing for the Willow Tree Youth Leaders. They facilitated a variety of public programs including Nature Journaling; Rodents, Rabbits, and Mustelids; and Fabric Upcycling Art. They represented BNC at conferences, festivals, and other events, such as the American Camp Association Conference, the Central Youth Climate Summit, and Boston Harbor Now's Autumn Adventure.

Youth Leaders set collective and individual goals for their own professional and educational development. They focused on honing skills such as tree identification, birding, sewing, and wildlife photography. They also adopted an area of land at the BNC that they are working to clean up and restore.

The Youth Leaders broadened their knowledge during field trips and workshops where they discussed topics like ecopoetry, accessibility, public speaking, urban forestry, and local insects. They traveled to Chicago for the program "Creating Sustainable Community, Museum, and University Collaborations," networking with other teens and organizations to discuss decolonizing science-based learning spaces and promoting ethical youth partnerships. Through these experiences, they learned new teaching styles and techniques and grew as environmental educators.

*"When I was in elementary school, Kim came to my class to teach us about the environment, and it was so much fun. We visited BNC on a field trip, and I remember seeing Sammy [the corn snake]. It feels so cool to actually work here now!"*

—Anysia Jones



# Engaging the Public

If you visit Boston Nature Center on any given Saturday, you'll almost certainly find public programs where you can immerse yourself in natural discovery and community engagement. BNC has experienced remarkable growth this year, hosting **119 public programs** both on-site and throughout greenspaces in Boston, touching the lives of **1,792 participants**—an impressive **24% increase** from 2023!

The diversity of public program offerings has grown, as have partnerships, audience reach, and location. Participants found their artistic voice through art and nature themed programs such as Nature Journaling and Paper Mache Birds: Conservation through Art. We held space for affinity groups, hosting specialized nature walks for BIPOC and Queer communities, along with an all-ages BNC Pride Get-Together. Traditional natural history programs remained at the heart of the offerings, with popular geology walks, tree identification sessions, and fascinating deep dives into subjects like Massachusetts bumble bees and the mysterious lives of oaks.

Bird enthusiasts flocked to BNC in record numbers this year. Teacher naturalists led nearly **900** participants on **56** dynamic bird walks at the sanctuary and across 20 locations in the greater Boston area, from the sweeping vistas of Belle Isle Marsh Reservation to the serene waters of Jamaica Pond. During migration seasons, Wednesday Birding became a weekly ritual, allowing participants to witness the ebb and flow of both resident and migrating birds.

In a first, the Boston region hosted Mass Audubon's Field Naturalist Certificate Program. This statewide program provides adults with the opportunity to develop their natural history knowledge while they take part in field research, monitoring, and communications training. The group met for 12 weeks this fall to learn from a diverse group of ecologists, naturalists, and researchers on topics from freshwater ecology to climate change. Using Boston as a home base allowed them to dive into the fascinating ecological dynamics of urban environments while ensuring accessibility, as participants could reach every field site by public transportation.

Through these diverse offerings for adults and children and an unwavering commitment to accessibility and inclusion, BNC continues to strengthen its role as a vital bridge between urban communities and the natural world that surrounds them.



## 2024 PUBLIC PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:

- Nature Photography
- Wednesday Morning Bird Walks
- Geology Walk
- Compost Certificate Program
- Animal Tracking





# Life's a Vacation at BNC Summer Camps

It is hard to believe it has been 21 years since Mass Audubon's Boston Nature Center held its first summer camp session. It has grown to two bustling locations, with 55 staff members, and 683 campers and their families.

The Mattapan location offered two specialty camps: The Environmental Leadership for Teens program, designed to train the next generation of environmental advocates and community stewards, and the Farm Trekkers program. Affectionately dubbed the "city mouse meets country mouse" model, this program brings campers together from BNC and Drumlin Farm locations for an experience focused on farming.

This year, the satellite location was relocated to Boston Trinity Academy in Hyde Park, near Stony Brook Reservation. This new site offered campers 12 miles of trails through wetlands, meadows, upland forests, and vernal pools, providing incredible exploration opportunities. Hyde Park campers shared stories of observing snakes, red-tailed hawks, and catching (and releasing) green frogs.

Whether in Mattapan or Hyde Park, all BNC campers attend a two-week camp session with an in-depth nature curriculum that is hands-on/minds-on and designed for their age group. Each session includes all-camp activities, field trips to other Mass Audubon sanctuaries, a story telling activity, and opportunities for unstructured time outdoors.

BNC continues its dedication to making camp accessible for families. Camp fees are based on a sliding scale dependent upon income and family size (new this year). The sliding scale removes financial barriers and provides scholarship money equitably and in a way that families can depend on year to year. Due to generous donations to the camp scholarship fund, families received **\$200,814**. Thank you to all that supported camps!



# Growing Impact in Urban Nature Education

BNC has been buzzing with excitement this year as we continued our deep-impact programs with Boston Public Schools (BPS). These educational programs brought together teachers, students, and administrators from **21 schools** in neighborhoods across the city to supercharge science education.

This year, *Growing with STEM* provided each of the **1,719** Boston students with eight hours of teaching that integrated environmental science with English, Math, History, and Art. These units, crafted in collaboration with classroom teachers to align with Massachusetts Science Standards, were designed to spark scientific curiosity and literacy. Students were brought outdoors to investigate, collect data, engage in scientific journaling, and explore the natural world around them. For instance, at Mario Umana Academy in East Boston, students delved into the fascinating world of insect life cycles, learning to observe and care for local species.

But the magic didn't stop there. BNC also continued its impactful GreenUp Boston Schoolyards program, tripling its work in greening schoolyards. By teaming up with **14 school**

partners, BNC organized **20** all day planting events that transformed schoolyards into vibrant rain and pollinator gardens, showcasing native plants and sustainable landscape designs. With the help of **2,065 students**, schools like Everett Elementary School in Dorchester, Mendell Elementary School in Roxbury, and Mildred Avenue School in Mattapan planted perennials, shrubs, and trees in their schoolyards. Students also participated in hands-on activities focused on natural solutions to extreme weather and urban heat island effects, learning what climate resilience means for their neighborhoods.

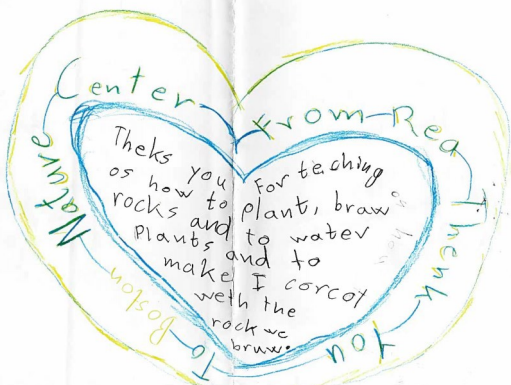


## SEEDS of Change



Mass Audubon's SEEDS (Seasonal Early Education Discoveries and Science) program introduces outdoor nature-based activities to preschoolers in Head Start and family childcare centers. Each month this year, teacher naturalists visited 10 different schools, conducting **120 educational sessions** that benefited **156 preschoolers**. These visits created opportunities for children to explore and understand the natural world, whether through outdoor exploration or bringing nature into their classrooms.

During each session, children participated in age-appropriate, interactive activities that followed seasonal themes. During weather exploration week, students created clouds in glass jars. In autumn, they collected leaves while studying the changes in the trees around them. These activities use simple, readily available materials, making it easy for teachers to recreate experiences independently. Each classroom is provided with transportation to visit BNC 1-3 times a year. By understanding the challenges many urban educators face—from limited access to safe outdoor spaces to uncertainty about nature-based teaching—SEEDS provides comprehensive support, materials, and resources. The program addresses a crucial need in urban early education by making nature accessible and engaging for young learners, while empowering educators with practical tools and techniques for nature-based instruction.





## Knowledge Sprouts at Preschool

The Pathways to Nature Preschool continued to thrive this year, serving **52 children** in a year-round program that fosters learning and growth in a living classroom. With a full-day schedule, extended care options, and an income-based sliding-scale fee structure, this program continues to meet the needs of working families and offers priority slots to Mattapan neighbors as well as families who receive state subsidies.

The three classrooms of students—the Busy Bees, Curious Crickets, and Daring Dragonflies—spent the year exploring the meadows, woods, and gardens of BNC. Through trail hikes, outdoor play, science activities, and gardening, these young scholars (ages 3 to 5) learned about the world around them while preparing for the school career ahead. Each day students answered questions like, “What is happening to the leaves on the trees?”, “Where do all the animals go in winter?”, and “How can we help seeds grow?” The curriculum, thoughtfully designed by experienced educators, seamlessly integrates real-world learning that meets and exceeds age-appropriate cognitive, social, emotional, and physical goals. What sets this curriculum apart is its responsiveness to students' interests and identities, creating opportunity to explore how they intersect with nature and the world around them.

Family participation was integral to another successful year of the Pathway to Nature Preschool classrooms. Family members joined the classrooms as storybook

readers, craft enthusiasts, and guest speakers. Families built a community organizing multiple potlucks, clothing swaps and playdates; strengthening relationships, and building support systems. By nurturing curiosity about the natural world today, Pathways to Nature Preschool is growing tomorrow's environmental stewards and community leaders.

*“Thank you all for your commitment to early education and for your dedication to the Pathways program and the students who attend. Thank you so much for the love and joy you have shared with our daughter this year. She has grown so much. It has been the most wonderful start to her school experience.”*

—Preschool Family



# Program Statistics

## School Programs



3,784 Children  
839 Sessions  
35 Schools

## Pathways to Nature Preschool



52 Children  
3 Classrooms  
87,178 Contact hours

## Summer Camp



683 Openings filled  
\$200,814 Provided in  
scholarships

## Community Use of Facilities



94 Private functions  
3,188 Total attendees

## Community Group Programs



23 Community groups  
3,689 Participants  
84 Sessions

## School Vacation Week Programs



138 Openings filled  
\$11,175 Provided in  
scholarships

## Public Programs



1,792 Participants  
119 Unique Programs

## Special Events and Fundraisers



925 Attendees  
\$9,640 Raised for  
education programs

## Volunteers



598 Volunteers  
4,654 Volunteer hours  
Value of service: \$192,673

## Other



72 Teacher workshops  
~10,000 visitors  
~200 Community gardeners



# Partners

## School Partners

Boston Teachers Union School, Clap Elementary School, Crispus Attucks Childcare Center, East Somerville Community School, Hennigan School, Home for Little Wanderers, Nurtury Learning Lab, Parker Hill Fenway HeadStart, Trotter Elementary School, Walnut Grove HeadStart, and more.

## Community Use Organizations

Boston Harbor Women of Color Coalition, Casa Myrna, Center for Trauma and Embodiment, Consensus Building Institute, Energy Allies, Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange, Massachusetts Black Women Attorneys, Vital Village Networks, and more.

## Community Group Programs

Boston Parks and Recreation Department, Boston Public Libraries, Bowdoin Street Health Center, Charles River Esplanade Association, Groundwork Somerville, Haynes Early Education Center, Higher Ground, Highland Street Foundation, Home for Little Wanderers, Lusterity, Tall Ships Boston, The American City Coalition, and more.

## Volunteer Groups

Alnylam, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Cartesian, Hayden Consulting, Rapid Ratings, REI, Thermo-Fisher Scientific, Toast Tab, VCA Animal Hospital, Vertex, Wayfair, Wednesday Volunteer Group, Work, Inc., and more.

## Making Space for Community

BNC serves as a vibrant hub for the community, engaging and connecting **3,188** people in 2024 through community use of its spaces by local groups. By opening its doors and providing affordable access to the building and surrounding trails, BNC welcomes everyone to experience the beauty of nature.

This past year, **52** local nonprofit groups played a crucial role in this engagement, bringing **2,274** people to the BNC for meetings, strategic planning retreats, staff gatherings, and celebrations. These events fostered collaboration and community spirit.

Additionally, **914** people utilized the Boston Nature Center to celebrate life's important moments. From honoring loved ones to celebrating new lives and milestones, BNC is a key resource for these special family and friends' gatherings.

Most importantly, everyone who visited BNC had the opportunity to immerse themselves in nature and forge their own connections to Mass Audubon's mission. BNC not only provides a beautiful setting but also a meaningful experience for all who spend time here.



*"The Massachusetts Black Women Attorneys have utilized BNC to meet in fellowship with our members. As a not-for-profit organization, Mass Audubon has provided us with an affordable space to carry out our mission and expose our members to the outdoors."*

—Tara Dunn, Massachusetts Black Women Attorneys

## Individual Donors and Donor-Advised Funds

Boston Nature Center gratefully acknowledges its donors, supporters, and volunteers. Thank you for supporting inspiring and engaging urban education. BNC thrives because of your generous support. We are pleased to recognize the following donors who contributed between July 1, 2023 and June 30, 2024.



## George Robert White Environmental Conservation Center

Mass Audubon gratefully and respectfully acknowledges that the George Robert White Environmental Conservation Center is a gift-in-title from the City of Boston's George Robert White Fund and is valued at approximately \$15.8m over the term of its lease to Mass Audubon.



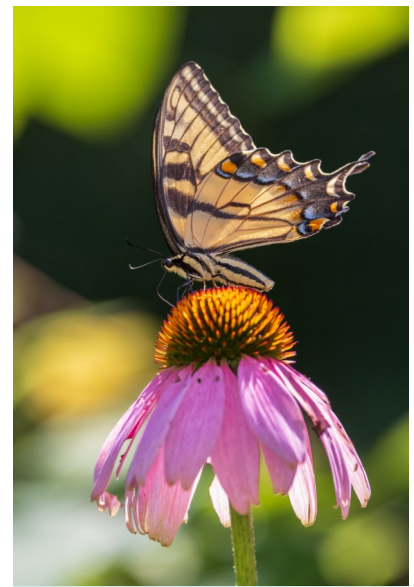
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Nature Heroes like you helped make nature accessible to ~10,000 visitors at BNC in 2024.

Every effort was made to accurately reflect each contributor. If you find an error in the list, please accept our sincere apology and contact the Boston Nature Center at 617-983-8500.

Photos in the BNC 2024 Year in Review are by Eduardo del Solar, Gretchen Ertl, Matt McNamara, and Stephen Baird.

**Thank you!**



# Maintaining the Balance

BNC is home to an amazing diversity of wildlife, and we are constantly striving to create healthy habitats for them. Fighting invasive plants in an important part of this effort—if not managed properly, plants like Bittersweet, Tree-of-heaven, Porcelain Berry, and Japanese Knotweed pose a significant threat to our native habitat. These non-native plants grow extremely fast, outcompeting native species and sometimes even smothering them. Controlling them is a task that requires a lot of hands on deck. Fortunately, **598 volunteers** came out in 2024 to help keep BNC's ecosystem healthy, supported by our diligent property staff. These volunteers collectively provided an impressive **4,654 hours of service**.

It can be a daunting task, but each year more of the sanctuary is reclaimed by removing invasive plants, replacing them with native species, and monitoring for early detection and efficient management. BNC continues to be a vibrant ecosystem where wildlife, from White-breasted Nuthatches and Eastern Coyotes to Snapping Turtles and White-tailed Deer, thrives in an urban oasis. The sanctuary sustains its residents through resources like acorn-producing oaks and fruit-bearing trees, while also serving as a haven for pollinators and migratory birds that contribute to its dynamic web of life.



## Boston Nature Center Staff

Kim Baker, Education Coordinator, Hyde Park  
Ava Bordage, Lead Preschool Teacher, Waltham  
Sara Bremer, Visitor Services, Somerville  
Sal Burnett, Teacher Naturalist, Dorchester  
April Cook, Preschool Teacher, Dorchester  
Heather Deschenes, Operations Manager, Weymouth  
Hazen Emerson, Visitor Services, Cambridge  
Sherry Eskin, Preschool Teacher, Jamaica Plain  
Christina Fritsch, Preschool Teacher, Jamaica Plain  
Correne George, Teacher Naturalist, Milton  
Susan Givotovsky, Preschool Teacher, Milford  
Isabella Guerero, Teacher Naturalist, Quincy  
Megan Harrington, Assistant Preschool Director, Roslindale  
Claire Harris, Education Manager, Dorchester  
Sarah Howdy, Education Coordinator, Dedham  
Hilary Johansen-Silve, Preschool Director, West Roxbury  
Erin Kelly, Ann and Peter Brooke Director, West Roxbury  
Vince Noga, Property Director, Mattapan  
Beth Patroliia, Preschool Teacher, Weymouth  
Kaleen Rodriguez, Lead Preschool Teacher, South Boston  
Jocelyn Weir, Preschool Teacher, Roslindale  
Kiki Zelaya, Assistant Preschool Teacher, Weymouth

## Sanctuary Committee

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