

Boston Harbor Islands

IslandCache Program

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Site 7: Tidepools, Flora and Fauna

N 42° 19.930' W 070° 55.839'



Lovells Island exemplifies coastal New England's great diversity of flora and fauna. Sea urchins, blue mussels, crabs and sea stars live beneath the water line of the tidepools in front of you, which can be easily explored at low tide. Shorebirds and other waterfowl search for food in the tidepools, and nest on many of the rocky, outer islands. The stands of trees and open pastures on the inner islands, such as Lovells, provide nesting habitats and hunting grounds for songbirds and small mammals.

Tidepools

Tidepools, like the one before you, are fascinating natural features. Wind and waves have eroded the house-sized boulders deposited by glaciers into smaller cobbles among human-scale boulders. These niches have created ideal habitats for smaller marine creatures, especially in tidal areas. Periwinkles, skates and sea urchins are well-established species which, at low tide, can be spotted in these niches. Each creature that lives in the tidepools is critical to the health and

success of the intertidal community. Unfortunately, the tidepools are also ideal habitats for invasive—or non-native—species. At Boston Harbor Islands, non-native species include the Asiatic and Green Crabs. It is widely believed most invasive marine species in Boston Harbor were brought in ballast waters of large shipping vessels. If you are visiting the tidepools at low-tide, feel free to explore!

Flora: Agriculture and Landscapes

Vegetation on the islands did not always appear as it does today. Historical records indicate the inner islands had moderate-sized stands of trees and shrubs prior to European contact. During the late 1600s, the early colonists feverishly harvested wood from most of these islands to construct homes, bridges and dams. The open fields were then used for grazing livestock and light farming. Unsuccessful crop yields, however, would push farming communities back to the Shawmut

peninsula (present day Boston) in the mid-18th century. With a dissipating agricultural presence, a handful of colonists began to move from the city to the islands. They built homes and planted domesticated trees, shrubs and vines— forever changing the landscape of the islands. Today, Staghorn sumac, oaks and other species of trees, many of which have been shown not to be native to the islands prior to colonization, are abundant on most of the inner islands.

Fauna: Mammals and Invertebrates

Other than seabirds, waterfowl and marine creatures, Boston Harbor Islands is teeming with life. Two other prominent groups of island inhabitants include mammals and invertebrates. Many mammals, such as European hares, were introduced to the islands by European settlers. Today, fox and minks are regularly spotted on

the islands. In contrast, bats, deer and mice are abundant native species that can be found on the islands. The largest group of animals on the islands, however, are insects. At least two-dozen species of ants, lots of bees, and hundreds of other bugs, flies and beetles have been identified on the islands.