



## Meet the new park manager

Natalie Haley has worked in environmental education at Fox Island since 2006. She started out as a part-time naturalist before becoming the full-time environmental educator. Her latest role is the new park and education manager, which she moved into earlier this year after Ron Zartman retired. Natalie was kind enough to answer a few questions for the Fox Tale:

### **What did you do before you came to Allen County Parks?**

I worked as a seasonal naturalist for Indiana's Department of Natural Resources in the early 1990s at both McCormick's Creek State Park and Raccoon State Recreation Area. I have a Bachelor of Science degree from Purdue University in Wildlife Science, (with) a wildlife research option in Purdue's Forestry and Natural Resources Department. As a student at Purdue, I worked for Purdue University as a laboratory and field technician assistant. (When my husband, Scott, was transferred to Wisconsin) I found work as an environmental educator and the program director interim at an old National Audubon Society camp, Hunt Hill Audubon Sanctuary, in Sarona, Wisconsin. When (Scott) was transferred back home to Indiana in 2005, we settled down in Auburn, Indiana.

### **How did you first come to work at Fox Island?**

I noticed the little sign out on Jefferson Boulevard that said Fox Island County Park. I had never heard of a county park system and became curious. When I noticed they had programs and a nature center I called the superintendent, Ron Zartman, and asked if there were opportunities to volunteer as I had a preschool daughter at home still.

### **What has been your most memorable experience at Fox Island?**

I have many memorable experiences working here for the past 12 years. Some of my favorites are conducting salamander research, photographing a great horned owlet for hours, running the "swoop" with spring break day campers, finding a ruffed grouse on the main trail, meeting so many interesting people and networking with so many naturalists across the Midwest.

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# Let's go fishin'

By Ed Powers

Birds as a group eat about everything that's living or ever was. Most species, however, specialize to some extent. I find those who mostly eat fish to be especially interesting, because of the variety of birds that do it, and the various techniques they use to catch them.

A number of species dive from the water surface, catching fish underwater. Three species of ducks do this: hooded, common and red-breasted mergansers. These unusual ducks have "teeth" – actually serrated edges on their bills to help them hold onto slippery fish.

Loons use this method, swimming with their heads underwater to look for prey.

Cormorants also dive for fish, and in Japan have been put to use to catch fish for human consumption. The angler will have a flock of several birds, each with a ring around its neck to keep it from swallowing the fish and a line attached to the ring with the angler holding the other end. It has been reported that the cormorants will put up with this until it has surrendered six fish, but it won't continue unless it gets to keep the seventh. This seems to indicate that some birds can count.

Anhingas, found in the southeast United States, dive, but rather than capture fish in their open mouths, spear them with their beaks. They bring them to the surface, toss them into the air, catch them headfirst and swallow them.

American white pelicans don't dive, but catch fish from the surface by dipping their beaks into the water. Sometimes they coordinate their effort, forming a line and herding a school of fish toward the shore where they are easier to catch.

In contrast, brown pelicans will sight a fish from as much as 65 feet in the air, and plunge into the water after it. If it catches the fish, it will also have a couple of gallons of water in its pouch, so it will lower its pouch against its chest and let the water drain out before enjoying lunch.

Terns also hunt from the air, circling over the water with beaks pointing down. Spotting a fish, they will hover briefly, then dive, sometimes submerging completely.

Great blue herons and great egrets wade slowly or stand still in shallow water and capture fish or other prey in their bills. I once saw a great blue heron catch a fish as big as its head, and work at it for about five minutes before managing to swallow it; you could see the lump moving down the heron's neck.

Other herons, such as tricolored herons and reddish egrets, use a variety of techniques. One is to run about in shallow water chasing a fish, then crouching and lunging. Sometimes they will stop the run to canopy-feed. This involves spreading their wings over their heads, creating a canopy shading the water. Perhaps this lets the bird see under the surface better, or maybe the fish are looking for a shady place.

Green herons use bait. They will drop bread, a mayfly or a feather on the water, and capture the fish that come to investigate. They have been observed digging up worms for bait.

An osprey will fly over the water until it spots a fish, then dive feet-first, catching the fish in its talons. It will orient the fish head-first for streamlining as it flies to a perch to eat it.

While the osprey's method makes a big splash and wet feathers, a bald eagle will soar over the water, snatching a fish almost without getting its feet wet.

Finally, kingfishers will perch or hover over water and dive for a small fish. Since the fish they look for is usually near the surface, the bird doesn't submerge. After catching a fish, it will fly to a perch and beat the fish against the perch to stun it and maybe to soften it up.

### **What are you looking forward to most in your new role?**

In my new role I hope to diversify what we offer during our summer season. I have always been in charge of summer day camps. It is all-encompassing. I would love to do more of what Jeff Ormiston is doing with his life cycle aquariums and greeting the public both on the trail and in the nature center.

I think we do a wonderful job with our school field-trip offerings and always have, thanks to the generous help of our trail guides. We should make the scheduling a little easier on teachers so I hope to improve that. The trails are fully saturated and I think we need more boardwalk projects or possibly a grant for rubber boots!



### **What will you miss about your old position?**

So far I am still doing all of the duties of my old position so I am not missing that yet. As we transition away from day camps following this summer I will miss having that deeper connection with the kids.

### **If you could change one thing at Fox Island, what would that be?**

I would request that the people of Allen County pay \$3-\$5 more per year, thereby making the county parks free to all.

### **When you're not on the trails or leading a program, how do you spend your time?**

I spend my time programming. I love to develop new curriculum or activities. When off the clock, I prefer kayaking, camping, photography, hiking, writing, yoga, painting and exploring new places.

### **What would you tell someone who is interested in getting involved at Fox Island? And how can they get involved?**

To get involved you just need to meet with me or Jeff Ormiston and we can discover your passion and establish a niche for you. We need help with trail maintenance, boardwalks, advertising, exhibits, teaching, writing specific programs for Fox Island and then tying them to standards, taking care of nature center animals and so much more! The Fox Island Alliance is also a great way to meet others and begin a new project in the park.



The Allen County Parks staff is looking for volunteer help with several projects at Fox Island, Metea and other Allen County parks locations. These projects may include painting, cutting small trees, plantings and many other needed activities for the benefit of the parks.

We have our “honey do” list that grows daily and now we need help with the “do” part. It is our goal to have an online signup site so volunteers can see at a glance what help is needed.



# ***Kit Kapers: Fox Island Park for Kids***

***By Pam George***



## **Beware the purple berries of summer**



A.



B.



C.



D.

**Match the pictures of the purple-berried plants above with their descriptions below. Decide if the berries would be a welcome snack as you hike the trails at Fox Island or whether they could make you very sick. If in doubt, never touch!**

\_\_\_\_\_ **1. Elderberry:** All parts of the elderberry plant, except the flowers and fruit, contain a toxic chemical. However, the purple berries are edible and can be used to make delicious jellies, jams or as an ingredient of cakes and pies.

The leaves and fruit of the elderberry are also an important food source for birds and deer.

Crushed elderberry leaves release an unpleasant smell. In the past, people used these leaves (attached to the horse's mane) to repel flies during riding. Elderberry is a perennial plant that can survive from 80 to 100 years in the wild.

\_\_\_\_\_ **2. Wild Grapes:** Summer grapes are the ones you expect to find in open thickets. Their berries are dark blue or black when ripe and are only edible after a few frosts.

Riverbank grapes are the most common. They are the ones you will find along rivers, streams and in wetlands. They have quite large vines that can grow to the top of tall trees and then drape down like something from a Tarzan movie. Riverbank grape fruit are big and have a deep purple color when fully ripe. They start to ripen earlier than most other native grapes but can be sour until a good frost.

Frost grapes are another common Hoosier species of grapes. They do best in a wet habitat, but can also be found in thickets, along the edge of woods and in fence rows, where the fence rows still exist in Indiana. The frost grape fruit grows in clusters of up to 6 inches in length. The individual berries are around one-fourth inch in diameter and are nearly black when fully ripe, which is after a frost. They are very juicy and sweet and make delicious jellies and jams.

\_\_\_\_\_ **3. American Pokeberry:** American pokeweed has a tall, smooth, green or purplish-colored stem with many branches. It can reach 4 to 6 feet in height – even up to 10 feet under the best conditions. The pokeweed has a large taproot that grows deep into the ground and spreads out to give support and stability for the tall stem.

The purple berries are an important source of food for many songbirds. They eliminate an undigested seed when they “poop,” which helps spread the seeds to grow new plants.

All parts of the plant that are tinged with red or purple contain a toxin that can be harmful to humans and livestock. However, the juice from the pokeberry has been used for centuries in various ways. The juice made a perfect natural dye for basket materials and as an additive to paint. During the Civil War, soldiers wrote letters using pokeberry juice collected in the wild. One such letter is on display at the History Center in Fort Wayne.

\_\_\_\_\_ **4. Wild Blackberry:** Blackberries are similar to raspberries except that they have larger seeds. When picked, the stem remains attached to the blackberry, whereas when a raspberry is picked, the stem stays on the plant.

Wild blackberries can be consumed raw, or mixed into desserts, jellies, jams, and pies.

Blackberries are very high in antioxidants, which protect against all kinds of diseases.

**Answers:**

**1. B; 2. D; 3. A; 4. C**



# Juan Velasquez on birding Sax-Zim Bog in winter

By John Velasquez and Terri Gorney

Juan Velasquez, 12, will be speaking at 2 p.m. Aug. 11 at Fox Island’s nature center about his birding trip with his father, John, to Sax-Zim Bog in Minnesota in the heart of winter. He will be presenting the amazing birds of winter and tell of some of his “lifers” (to birders that is birds that they see for the first time). His “target” bird was the great gray owl of northern Minnesota.

Juan enjoys leading hikes and attends bird field trips with the Mississinewa Audubon Club. He has been a presenter at the last several Indiana Young Birders Conferences and has led several bird hikes around the state. He enjoys spending time outside connecting with nature and teaching his fellow peers and others about the wonderful beauty of the birds.

Juan has a twin sister, Catalina, and a younger brother, Luis, 9. He attends Blackford County schools, just completed Northside Elementary and will begin junior high school in August. Juan plays clarinet in the school band and was recently moved up to oboe. He is also a member of the chess club and the student council. Juan and his siblings also play soccer in the fall and has for the last five years.

We hope you will come to hear Juan present some of the pictures that he took of the winter rarities of Sax-Zim Bog. This is a family-friendly event hosted by the Stockbridge Audubon Society with light refreshments served.



Courtesy photo

## Annual meeting filled with appreciation

The annual Fox Island Alliance meeting May 10 included food, music and gifts of gratitude.

Jeff Ormiston and Barb Bauer recently left the board. In return for their long-term service, board president Kate Sanders presented them with plaques. Cynthia Powers, previous Fox Tale editor, also received a thank-you gift. Freshly retired parks manager Ron Zartman also received some gifts of appreciation.



Jeff Ormiston, who recently left the Fox Island Alliance board after taking a full-time job with the park, and Barb Bauer, who organized the annual meeting, received plaques.



Cynthia Powers looks at her gift and card.



Ron Zartman shows one of his gifts to the meeting attendees.

Photos by Lisa Esquivel Long



## Fox Island Alliance

**Ed Powers**  
**12206 W. Yoder Road**  
**Roanoke, IN 46783**

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- Kate Sanders, President
- Brett Fisher, Vice President
- Carol Gaham, Vice President
- Raquel Walker, Secretary
- Nathan Arata, Treasurer

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Nathan Arata, Renee Bentz, Kevin Boner, Grace Danel, Brett Fisher, Carol Gaham, Terri Habig, Liz Hincks, Lisa Esquivel Long, Ed Powers, Kate Sanders, Raquel Rodriguez and Darrell Will

**Directors Emeritus:**

Kate Ferguson, Pam George, Phil Herrick, Dr. Solomon Isiorho, John McCory and Iona Mensch

Fox Tale Editor:

Lisa Esquivel Long

The **Fox Island Alliance** is a volunteer not-for-profit organization. Its purposes are to help preserve the natural features of Fox Island County Park, to assist its orderly development as a nature preserve, to raise funds to facilitate its development, to promote Fox Island's use as an educational center, and to coordinate volunteer efforts.

MEMBERSHIPS EXPIRE ON MARCH 31. CHECK YOUR ADDRESS LABEL TO BE SURE.

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**Fox Island Alliance Membership Application**    **New**    **Renewal**

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