

A small white silhouette of a fairy with wings, sitting on the top left of the word 'Fairy' in the title.

Fairy Doors

ON BELLE ISLE

Story Guide



1 DNR Rangers

*The rangers ensure
The park is clean, safe, maintained,
For all to enjoy.*



Park rangers are responsible for protecting, preserving and enhancing Michigan's state parks and natural resources, while also making sure park visitors are safe and happy. Park rangers have a great appreciation for the outdoors and want to share that love with others by ensuring the park is as beautiful as nature intended it to be. Here on Belle Isle, we applaud the group of hard working rangers who spend their days making this park the Gem of Detroit.

2 KBIB

*While relaxing on the beach or biking your last mile,
the fairies keep watch over the magical Belle Isle.
Leave it better than you found it, we all must be dutiful,
you too can make a difference to Keep Belle Isle Beautiful.*



Join us! Keep Belle Isle Beautiful (KBIB) is a campaign to shift behavior, increase awareness, and educate the public about the impact of plastics and other harmful litter in Belle Isle Park. Our goal is to reduce litter on Belle Isle while leading to healthier, litter-free parks and neighborhoods. In 2019, 2,077 individuals volunteered, removing 4,491 pounds of plastics and other harmful litter from the land and waterways of Belle Isle, preventing it from reaching the Detroit River.

3

Aquarium Ceiling

The Belle Isle Aquarium has a beautiful ceiling, designed to invoke an under the water feeling. While many assume it is adorned with Pewabic tile, that's simply not the case on this Isle. The fairies assure you that what is on display, is most certainly not made of clay. The Aquarium's green tiles are made of opalite glass, and add a certain touch of class.



When designing the Belle Isle Aquarium, architect Albert Kahn sought to engage visitors' experiences beyond the tanks. He wanted guests to step through the doors and find themselves completely immersed in awe and splendor. The green ceiling, made with tiles from the Opalite Tile Company in Monaca, Pennsylvania, was designed to make guests feel as though they are underwater, and one with the aquatic life around them.

4 Lighthouse

*A fairy's wings will glow in flight
But many times they aren't too bright
What's needed on a stormy night
A beacon of hope, a house of light*



On the east side of Belle Isle stands North America's only all marble lighthouse. Designed by the famed Detroit architect, Albert Kahn, its 58 foot tall sculpted column originally dawned an 8,600-candle-power light that could be seen from 15 miles away. The unique beacon was named after William Livingstone, the longtime Lake Carriers Association President, who deepened the Detroit River's water channel, which allowed large cargo vessels to pass through. His contributions have made mariner's travels safer through the Detroit River for nearly 90 years.

5

Mudpuppies

*What do you see by the river's flow?
A type of puppy you might not know.
A salamander friend with maroon red gills.
Try not to scare them, stay very still.
From these waters, they will never emerge
even though the fairies do urge.*



Found off the coast of Belle Isle and elsewhere in the Great Lakes region are mudpuppies. They are Michigan's largest, fully aquatic salamanders and experience a condition called "neoteny", because of which they never undergo metamorphosis and retain their external gills. Mudpuppies are an important indicator species, meaning their absence from lakes and rivers could be an early warning sign for environmental problems. With more and more disappearing each year, they are now of special concern and protected by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

6 Mesic Forest

*Whose woods these are, the fairies know,
among their roots the waters flow.
Within the ash and oak and maples
migratory birds find needed staples.
Vernal pools give spots to breed
as eagles nest and hope to feed.*



Built on clay from an ice age past, lives a unique forest only a fairy could craft. It sits in water for part of the year and is home to many animals like frogs and foxes and deer. These woods contain trees so migratory birds can rest their wings and vernal ponds to host amphibian eggs each spring. However, wet mesic forests are disappearing fast. The one on Belle Isle is an ode to Michigan's natural coastal wetlands, once plentiful and vast.

7 Pollinators

*Bees and moths and butterflies,
plants and flowers more than meet our eyes.
They are a sacred space, where fairies dwell,
to ensure all life keeps growing well.*



Pollinators are essential to our environment. The ecological service they provide is necessary for the reproduction of over 85% of the world's flowering plants, including more than two-thirds of the world's crop species. Fruits and seeds derived from insect pollination are a major part of the diet of approximately 25% of all birds, and of mammals. Unfortunately, in many places, the essential service of pollination is at risk from habitat loss, pesticide use, and introduced diseases. You can help protect pollinators by growing pollinator-friendly flowers, providing nest sites, avoiding pesticides, and spreading the word!

8

Aquarium Facade

Deep in this building
 Tucked far away
 Fairies are working
 All night and most days
 Tending to fishes
 Their playtime and care
 The fairies that guard here
 Do want to declare,
 "Watch over our fishes, both inside and out
 They need our clean waters, don't litter about
 We will be watching,
 from rafters above
 To ensure all the fishes
 know the Earth's love."



A building as beautiful as the Belle Isle Aquarium warrants an entrance equally awe-inspiring. The decorated stone façade features an elaborate Beaux-Arts style entrance with carvings of kelp, two spitting dolphins, and Neptune, the Roman god of water. In the center is Detroit's seal with the motto, "Speramus Meliora; Resurget Cineribus" – "We hope for better things; it will rise from the ashes," commemorating the fire of 1805 when the city of Detroit was destroyed.

9 Sturgeon

*Deep in the river,
just to the east,
lies a wondrous place, a limestone reef.
A home underwater
for a primitive fish,
the sprites that live with them have only one wish...
Take care of the waters as you would your own home,
the Detroit River again is where Sturgeon do roam.*



Once abundant in the Detroit River, lake sturgeon are now just 1% of their former population. Overfishing, channelization, loss of coastal wetlands, and water pollution affected this ancient species almost to the point of extinction. So, scientists decided to take action. They built limestone reefs in the St. Clair and Detroit rivers to encourage sturgeon spawning, including three reefs on the coast of Belle Isle. In 2017, large amounts of eggs were found on all three reefs, indicating that sturgeon are making a successful recovery.

10 Volunteers

*On a small little island
in the middle of a river
works a group of fine people
the greatest of givers*

*They plant the spring bulbs
welcome guests with a smile
they educate youth
and care for the isle*

*The cream of the crop
the best of the best
Belle Isle volunteers
make us truly blessed*



The fairies are always busy here on Belle Isle and sometimes they need a helping hand. Belle Isle volunteers have been working in the park for generations and provide an invaluable service for the park and park visitors. They help to educate youth during field trips, they clean up trash from the land and water, they plant trees and flowers, they assist in keeping the Aquarium and Conservatory open and running, just to name a few.

11 Orchids

*Dancing ladies, and slippers, and boats
Calypso, and bees, and vanillas afloat
Moths once reigned here and the vanda did too
This glass house was built by orchids,
it's actually true!*



Now a window into the past, the Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory towers over Belle Isle rising 85 feet in height. With five distinct sections, it houses hundreds of different plant species from all around the world. In 1955, Anna Scripps Whitcomb gifted her collection of 600 orchids to the conservatory, many of which were saved from Britain during World War II. As a token of gratitude, the then Belle Isle Horticulture Building was renamed in her honor.

12 Indigenous People

*She's named for an Isabelle,
from the family of Cass.
But the island's first people,
Had a name that contrasts.*

*Those who lived here first
Called her Wahnabezee by name.
So when we converse,
Swan Island is what we shall proclaim.*



Before being colonized by the French in the 19th century, Belle Isle was home to the Ottawa and Chippewa tribes. The island was known as Wahnabezee (translating to Swan Island) before being renamed Hog Island. In 1845, to honor former territorial Governor Lewis Cass' daughter Isabelle Cass, the name Belle Isle was given to the island and means "beautiful island."

13 Great Lakes

*The greatest of lakes, a collection of five
Fresh water flows through them
So that we may thrive
Created by glaciers A long time ago
They now need our help
So the waters still flow*



Huron. Ontario. Michigan. Erie. Superior. Shaped by glaciers approximately 10,000 years ago, the Great Lakes of North America hold 21% of all the world's surface freshwater and are the largest freshwater system on earth by area. They provide 40 million people with water and are home to 3,500 species of plants and animals with incredible adaptations and conservation stories. Situated on the Detroit River, which helps connect Lake Huron to Lake Erie, Belle Isle is witness to the flowing waters of the region as they travel to the Atlantic.

14 Bald Eagles

*Fairy wings, as you know, are delicate and light
When those wings are light blue, it might be a sprite
But the greatest of wings, on this here Bell Isle
Belong to a bird who can see past two miles
Bald eagles live here, in the tops of the trees
Look up to the sky as they glide through the breeze*



A bald eagle's white head may make it look bald. But actually the name comes from an old English word, "balde," meaning white. These graceful birds have been the national symbol of the United States since 1782. Bald eagles were on the brink of extinction because of hunting and pollution. But laws created almost 40 years ago have helped protect them, and they've made a comeback. They live around 20 to 30 years old in the wild. They build the largest nest of any North American bird. Some bald eagle's nests can weigh as much as 2,000 pounds!

15 Police Station Radio

*Back in the day
A long time ago
When people needed help
The response was very slow
To help the City out
And keep people in the know
Belle Isle Police station started police radio*



In 1928, a dedicated Detroit patrolman created the first successful one-way radio link between police headquarters and cruisers. For the first time ever, police radio operators broadcasted on their own frequency to communicate solely with the Detroit Police Force. The Detroit Police Department made history as the first to dispatch patrol cars regularly by radio. This was a game changing improvement for public safety, now police officers could be updated of crime happening in real time while they were out patrolling the streets.

16 Family Reunions

*Yellow shirts, red shirts, blue shirts and green
The smell in the air of amazing cuisine
Good friends, and neighbors, and family from afar
The grill master here is the big superstar*



For generations Belle Isle Park has served as the headquarters to pass down family traditions, stories, and tightly guarded recipes. Summertime in the park wouldn't be complete without the fellowship, laughter, music, and amazing smells that family reunions bring each year. Help the fairies in preserving this long standing custom by carefully disposing of coals in proper areas, not releasing balloons, and disposing of trash.

17 Daffodils

*Beneath the dirt beneath the snow
Beneath your feet the magic flows
A tiny bulb will soon be a bud
And flowers will flourish in a glorious flood*



Each fall thousands of daffodil bulbs are planted on Belle Isle and their beautiful yellow petals emerge each spring. Started by the Belle Isle Daffodil Project, nearly 700,000 bulbs were planted yearly on the island, one for every person in the city of Detroit. These blooms were meant to symbolize hope and rebirth for the city. The project, now led by Daffodils4Detroit, has expanded across the metropolitan area with the new goal to plant one bulb for every person in the Detroit Metro area. So next spring when you see a daffodil, remind yourself that Detroiters are tough and will emerge even stronger from recent trying times.

18 Underground Railroad

*Days upon nights, nights upon days
Walking and running as if through a maze
Danger, it lurks, and often displays
Praying that dawn will emerge from the haze*

*Keep pushing forward, make your way to the river
Find location midnight, try not to shiver
The light is ahead, now almost a sliver
The hope in your body, blooms into a quiver*



The Underground Railroad was a network of people offering aid to slaves from the American South trying to attain freedom in Canada. Detroit was codenamed "Midnight" as one of the last stops on the railroad before getting to Canada, including a settlement community of former slaves called Dawn. Fugitive slaves crossed the Detroit River, in which Belle Isle resides, in small skiffs, canoes, rowboats or anything that floated on their journey north.

19 Bridge

*Wheels on the top of me
Water flows beneath
I am made of stone and steel
Protecting travelers from underneath*

*I am the one who makes connections
Between friends and foe alike
I serve here to guide the fairies
On every moonlit night*

- Bridge



Belle Isle has received visitors since the 1880's. After the original bridge caught fire, a new bridge to the island was designed by two University of Michigan professors and cost an estimated 2 ½ million dollars to build - that's 35 million dollars today! Opened in 1923, the bridge still stands proud today. In 1942 it was renamed the Douglas MacArthur Bridge in honor of the American military commander.

20 Invasive Species

Creepy, crawly, icky and yuck. Invasive species are running amuck. You'll find them in trees, in water, on land, now the Belle Isle fairies are taking a stand. If you wish to help them, and I know you do, protect native species, even if just a few.



Every animal and plant species has a native habitat, or environment where it naturally and normally lives and grows. Humans sometimes relocate a species, either by accident or on purpose. Introducing a non-native species to a new ecosystem can have negative consequences—the species may become an invasive species, or a species that causes harm to the new environment. The best way to fight invasive species is to prevent them from occurring in the first place. You can help stop the introduction and spread of invasive species and protect native plants and animals by planting native plants in your garden, never releasing a pet animal into the wild, or volunteering to remove invasive plants right here on Belle Isle.

21 Oak Trees

The tree of life, a mighty oak, stands vigil over his kinfolk. A home for many woodland creatures, a place to sit on Sunday leisures. The towering beauty shelters us from above, to it we extend our praise and our love.



Oaks stand mighty in Michigan forests and act as caretakers for life within and below. Not only are they places for butterflies to lay their eggs and birds to raise their chicks, but they also produce acorns that are a food source for many animals such as squirrels, mice, and deer. However, oaks are now facing an invasive fungal disease called "oak wilt". If you have oaks in your neighborhood, you can help slow the spread of this deadly disease by making sure not to prune them April through July.

22 Visitors

Look in the mirror. A visitor to Belle Isle, maybe a seasoned veteran or someone brand new. The fairies welcome you to this space, a beautiful and roaming place.



Belle Isle Park welcomes visitors from all walks of life, from all over the state, country, and even the world! Each year the park sees over four million visitors explore the island. There are so many reasons our visitors love the park and continue to come back season after season, year after year. The fairies hope you find your own special place here on Belle Isle, just like they did.