



The Wilder Side of Oakland County

by Jonathan Schechter

Exploring Tenhave Woods as May Fades

Tenhave Woods is an eye-catching natural area to visit, especially in these late days of May. Although it's nestled away within the bustling City of Royal Oak "the woods" give visitors a pleasant "tonic of wildness" feeling, something we all need from time to time. With those thoughts in mind I headed to this fenced in protected pocket of land which I look at as the wilder side of Royal Oak's Quickstad Park.

The site is maintained by the [Royal Oak Nature Society](#) with the main entrance located off of Lexington Road. No passes are needed and it is free entry. Dogs are not permitted. I did my most recent trek there late in the afternoon on a sunny day and the trails were easily navigated. However, after a heavy rain slippery and muddy trails may be your welcoming party. During my hike the site was mosquito free, but that can change quickly after a week of rain coupled with high humidity.

Entrancing and exiting the park is through turnstiles, which would make bringing a stroller very difficult. However, I saw several parents with very young children on the trails with collapsible strollers. I smiled hearing one child about 5 years old proclaiming loudly, "We're back in the forest!" as soon as she and her dad entered in the site. I suspect most of the visitors to Tenhave Woods are from the local neighborhood, but at times the Royal Oak Nature Society and other nature groups host hikes there.

I especially enjoyed the old wooden trail display board mounted by the fence that shows the trail system and gives compass direction. My hike was late in the day, so the setting sun served as a direction marker for me. Although you really can't get lost, it easy to lose a sense of where you are on the trails with the terrain being totally flat.

What really drew my attention during my intentionally slow 'nature embracing' trek was the abundance of forest wildflowers that are still blooming including red trillium. I would have missed that beauty altogether had I not watched a chipmunk scamper over a log that seemed to shelter the trillium.

The forest floor also plays host to an abundance of Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*). Bloodroot derives its name from the reddish-orange sap. The deeply lobed leaves are unmistakable and the plant's abundance at Tenhave Woods is not surprising, since Bloodroot thrives in moist deciduous woodlands, the forest conditions that exist at Tenhave Woods.

Fallen trees are abundant and are left in place unless they block a trail. They are excellent examples of microhabitats. Microhabitats are small clearly defined habitats found within a larger habitat, such as the entire preserve. Those trees are excellent for a variety of small creatures, including insects, worms, chipmunks and snakes as well.



Bloodroot - *Sanguinaria canadensis*



There are a few eye-catching standing dead trees with hollows at this urban sanctuary. They are one of the most valuable aspects of the woods. They provide shelter for small mammals and birds. I did not see any woodpeckers during my trek, but several trees showed evidence of woodpeckers. One of the most-eye catching 'trail finds' was an extremely large and very old grape vine, thicker than my arm. It gave witness to the fact of earlier land use practices from probably back in the day when there was farmland in the area.

There is surprisingly good wildlife habitat in this rather small pocket of wildness dominated by mature trees with beech and sugar maple being very common. Chipmunks were everywhere and the habit is perfect for them with an abundance of downed trees, and hollows in others. The hollows in many of the trees would be ideal nesting quarters for screech owls and I suspect they live in the preserve. Tracks in a swampy area confirmed that raccoons also do well in this pocked of urban wildness.

I paused several times just to look up into the thick tree canopy and listen to the rustling leaves as the wind began to blow. I suggest you do the same. Why? I was surprised to spot a perched red-tailed hawk during one of my 'looking up' pauses.

When the sun started setting, I started meandering back to where I parked and suddenly realized I was walking the wrong direction. That is easy to do at the preserve and perhaps next time I'll take a photo of the trail map before my nature-embracing trek in this wilder side gem of the City of Royal Oak.

Here's a travel related head up! There is a fair amount of road work and construction going on near the preserve and your GPS might just take you to the "Road Closed To Thru Traffic" sign I encountered when I tried to follow the designated route to go home.

Oakland County Parks staffer Jonathan Schechter is an avid "nature-embracing" hiker who follows phenology - the study of natural cycles of nature's way - to inspire his blogs.

