



OAKLAND
COUNTY PARKS

The Wilder Side of Oakland County

by Jonathan Schechter

Just A Walk in the Woods

Oakland County is fortunate to have a great wealth of parks where it's easy to just go for a walk in the woods without much pre-planning. A few days ago I headed to 1,140 acre Addison Oaks County Park and Campground with no particular goal in mind except wandering and embracing nature's way on a beautiful sunny afternoon. As is often the case on days like that timeless words of Henry David Thoreau came to mind once again. "I wonder what the world is doing today."

It had been about a year since I last hiked the hilly Buhl Lake Loop Trail that circles around beautiful Buhl Lake. Perhaps meandered is a better word than hiking since it took me several hours to complete my 2 ½-mile journey that could easily be done in an hour. I paused frequently to look for the hidden wonders of nature's way, enjoy the shoreline view and capture photos.

As I approached the water's edge, a Great Egret took flight from the shallows where I suspect it was hunting fish or frogs. A quick glimpse of a small patch of green near the egret's eyes confirmed it was male. He then landed again much further away near the shoreline amidst rather guttural croaks that could be heard from a long way off.

With the egret out of sight, I paid more attention to eye-catching white water-lilies that can form dense colonies in shallow waters. They covered more than an acre of shoreline and lured in dragonflies.

A splash of bright blue from a cluster of small flowers on the shoreline caught my attention and was attracting a few honeybees and butterflies. I like to think that I know most of the common flowers found in our county but these were new to me. After returning home I was able to identify it as a Spiderwort based on its violet-blue petals.

With that section of shoreline behind me I followed the paved trail that led uphill into the woods and once again, followed my practice of walking slowly, stopping often and looking around. My timing was perfect and I watched a large Eastern garter snake slither across the trail and then pause to bask in the sun on a large trailside branch. As I watched the snake, a family with young children approached. They were delighted to see the snake and we chatted about the snake's behavior and nature's way for a few minutes.

As the trail ascended and entered shady areas I began to encounter a variety of fungus. One of my favorites is known as coral fungus and these decomposers were abundant on a fallen log. Once again it was time for me pause and that gave me a brief glimpse of a Pileated Woodpecker in flight.

I meandered off the main trail and followed the narrow mountain bike trail to continue my uphill section of the trek, something I would not do if bikers were present. That trail gave me a close up look at fungi and took me over a very tiny dry creek. I found a trailside stump to sit on and took a 20 minute break to just enjoy the woodlands. That pause brought to mind another Thoreau quote; "Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads"

As I reached the highest elevation of the trail I took another nature embracing pause on a bench near a large clearing. Bird song kept me company and fluffy cumulus clouds held my attention. That site is a perfect rest stop for anyone to embrace nature's way.





I fell into my interpretive naturalist role when a young couple apparently taking noticing my “Oakland County Parks” cap stopped to chat. They were pleased a large dead tree was left standing and provided excellent habitat for many small creatures. I agreed with them, that dead support of a variety of creatures including woodpeckers.

One of my favorite “pause and listen” spots was near a small shallow vernal pond, a natural feature also known as an ephemeral pond. These ponds dry up in summer. They teem with life and host breeding salamanders and wood frogs. As for the listening spot; I was listening to the sounds of silence except for the rustling of leaves and the music of birds.

I wrapped up my nature-embracing hike back where I started just relaxing near the lakeshore and appreciative of this Oakland County Park with diverse protected habitat that’s rich in nature’s way.

The main section of Addison Oak County Park is located at 1480 Romeo Road in Lenoard, just a bit north of Rochester.

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.