



OAKLAND
COUNTY PARKS

The Wilder Side of Oakland County

by Jonathan Schechter

The Wilder Side of Friendship Park

Up until a few days ago I had never explored the nature-embracing trails of Friendship Park. I was totally unaware of the trails, woodlands and wetlands of the park until chatting with Orion Township staff at the Glow-Bye Summer event hosted there by Oakland County Parks. (a)

There is a wilder side to this amazing park that has free entry and is open from dawn to dusk. The trails and hilly woodlands are on the northeast side of the park and if you are looking for a great adventure, this might be your place. The park even has a pond that harbors turtles and allows catch and release fishing. I had a brief glimpse of what I believe was a hefty Northern Water Snake at the edge of the pond; most likely hoping to feast on a frog or small fish. (b)

I meandered the trails for about two hours a few days ago with this quote from Henry David Thoreau in mind; "I wonder what the world is doing today." I started my exploration by sitting on a bench near the pond just taking in the sights and sounds. I was surprised no one else was around and during my bench time I watched a Red-Tailed Hawk perched on a tree limb; and a kettle of vultures soaring high overhead, a reminder that the vultures will soon be heading south for the winter. Avid birders know the term "kettle of vultures"; but if it's new to you that phrase refers to vultures slowly ascending and rising on columns of warm air known as thermals. (c)

After that brief relaxing break, it was time to walk around the pond once more before heading for the woods. Turtles splashed back into the pond and puffs of wind gave wings to the seeds of milkweed pods; a reminder that autumn has arrived. With the pond meandering over it time for me to hike the 1.4 mile loop trail for the first time. (d)

Much to my surprise the trail was surprising hilly which added to the fun as I walked along listening to the pounding of a woodpecker I never saw. The timing was perfect for just a few minutes later I passed a large dead tree with an excellent interpretive sign "Wildlife Habitat in Progress" featuring an image of a Pileated Woodpecker.

The woodland part of my exploratory hike was a real treat. I encountered one impressively large tree which I believe has to be a few hundred years old. If it could speak it would certainly have stories to share about Orion Township. (d)



a



b



c



d

It was great to see that fallen trees remained in place for they provide critical microhabitat for small creatures including salamanders, snakes, chipmunks and all sort of insects. I imagine that after spring rains the forest floor will be alive with salamanders departing from under the logs as they head to the pond for egg-laying. (e)



Mountain bikers are permitted on the trail system and one sign showed a "Trail Direction Schedule" based on odd and even numbered days. I'll confess, I found that a bit confusing but I stepped out of the way for the only mountain biker I encountered and he slowed down for me as well.

About an hour into my hike I took a break on an old bench that has certainly seen better days but it was a great place to watch a few birds flitter around; including a Downy Woodpecker. There is even a lone picnic table in the woods. That surprised me! (f)



I meandered off trail a bit to try and capture photos of a woodpecker and when I got back on the trail and walked for a few minutes I realized I was not heading back in the direction I came from. That worked out for me! I ended up passing by a historic structure complete with an informational sign. I need to return soon to discover more about this easy to access intriguing park managed by Orion Township Parks.

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.