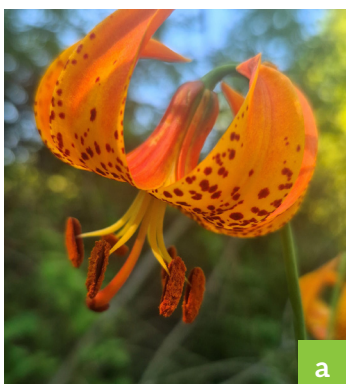




OAKLAND
COUNTY PARKS

The Wilder Side of Oakland County

by Jonathan Schechter



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ROSE OAKS: A “Wilder Side” County Park

Rose Oaks County Park is perhaps my favorite rustic park within Oakland County. A few days ago, on a beautiful sunny morning I decided a return visit to this wildland and wetland gem was long overdue. I filled my thermos with iced tea, tossed a snack in my day pack and headed to rural Rose Township to explore a section of this 649-acre hilly park managed by Oakland County Parks.

It's about a 30-minute drive from my house to the park and the last few miles on dirt roads included sightings of deer, Eastern bluebirds and Sandhill cranes. I headed for the main entrance at 10501 Buckhorn Lake Road; of note there is a separate entrance for equestrians on Fish Lake Road. With the park almost in sight, I had a five-minute delay as a freight train rumbled slowly by but that pause gave me a chance for unplanned bird watching that included a sighting of a Bald Eagle soaring overhead.

The small parking lot has no modern facilities but there is a porta potty on site. I knew it would be a great “nature-embracing” hike when I encountered a small cluster of beautiful Michigan lilies just a few feet off the trail shortly after starting my trek. These native wildflowers are noted for their “nodding” reddish-orange petals with dark spots. Anyone with a love of wildflowers and nature's way will enjoy hiking this park with its abundance of flora and fauna. (a)

This 649-acre primarily natural-area park features 5.5 miles of equestrian-friendly and hiking trails, glacially-created kettle lakes and expansive wetlands. It serves as a passive recreation and nature exploration area rather than a traditional, developed park and is popular with local residents and birdwatchers. Come winter, it's a lot of fun to cross-country ski around the lake; something I have not done for about three years.

For this adventure I hiked the easy-to-follow Richardson Lake Loop which is about 1.4 miles long and then added on a few side trail explorations by following other boardwalks that are easy to access. An abundance of wildflowers are trailside including Purple loosestrife, an invasive wetland plant that is common in sections of the park. As for its redeeming qualities, it was attracting both Honey bees and butterflies during my visit. (b)

Many years ago, when I first worked for Oakland County Parks I created text for interpretive signs destined for Rose Oaks. I was delighted to see they are still in use. I photographed two of them with catching titles: Best Dam Builders in the County and Cold-Blooded Killers. The titles were meant to draw attention and they still do. The “Best Dam Builders” sign is near a beaver lodge and “Cold-Blooded Killers” refers to cold blooded predatory animals, such as snapping turtles, Dragonflies, Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnakes and Northern pike that are found at Rose Oaks.

The views from the boardwalks over the wetland are fantastic and I was pleased I encountered no mosquitos. I was delighted to see a Bald Eagle soaring high overhead not far from the north end of Robinson Lake. A few minutes later I spotted a pair of Trumpeter swans a few hundred yards away from me near the north shore of the lake. My hope is they are residents at Rose Oaks. I'm already planning an early morning return visit.

I wrote the following paragraph about the park back in 2017 and that information is hopefully still accurate. "Wildlife is abundant but most species are not usually seen. The list of some of the more notable and recognizable species includes Eastern coyote, red fox, gray fox, Northern Water Snake, Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake, Blanding's Turtle, painted turtle, snapping turtle, Sandhill crane, Great Horned Owl, screech owl, barred owl, Red-tailed Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, turkey, turkey vulture, tree swallow, Eastern Bluebird, muskrat, beaver, White-tailed Deer and osprey."

Poison ivy and poison sumac are found in the park. You should familiarize yourself with these plant species for your safety. Poison ivy was creeping up some trailside trees and poison sumac which grows exclusively in wet areas is thriving along the edges of some of the docks. Both species produce berries that that birds feast on without any harm. (c)

I encountered only a few other hikers as my trek wrapped up and was surprised at first that a couple approached me and said, "Excuse us, but you may know the answer." I then realized I was wearing my Oakland County Parks shirt and cap. We had a pleasant chat about the formation of the park's lakes as the glaciers receded. As the glaciers retreated; blocks of ice broke off the main section of the glacial and depressed the soil. Rose Oaks has about a dozen lakes, known as kettle lakes, created in that manner. Those lakes and the rolling forested hills and open meadows make this park a tranquil place to sit on one of the trailside benches and just enjoy nature's way in this corner of the wilder side of Oakland County. (d)

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.