



OAKLAND
COUNTY PARKS

The Wilder Side of Oakland County

by Jonathan Schechter

Oakwood Lake Township Park on a Summer Day

My last visit to Oakwood Lake Township Park until last week was six years ago on a blustery winter's day. On that day I arrived as heavy snow began to swirl through the woodlands and a lack of tracks in the parking area told me I would be the sole human amidst its surprisingly isolated 300 acres. Back then I wrote *"It's the kind of place where winter wanderers who walk or cross-country ski will stop often and look and listen to the sounds and silence of nature."*

With the temperature flirting with 80 degrees, I decided it was time for a return visit to this natural area with a small trail system that includes the headwaters of the Flint River and a disc golf course. The parking lot and trailhead is located at 550 East Oakwood Road in Oxford Township. Park passes are not needed. I was delighted upon arrival to see only a few other cars in the small parking lot and no mosquitos to greet me; bringing to mind the words of Thoreau, *"I come into the peace of wild things"*

My plan was a leisurely slow-paced, nature-embracing hike on the trail system with my destination being isolated Rossman Lake. Like many other lakes in our county Rossman is a kettle lake formed about 12,000 years ago when the glaciers retreated and left behind massive chunks of ice that depressed the soil and eventually filled with water.

If you plan to hike there keep in mind the park is only open from dawn to dusk; the trails are primitive, and they do not include signage such as the trails at our Oakland County Parks. The only "facility" is a porta-potty near the parking lot. There is an [on-line trail map available](#), but that too can be a bit challenging to follow. You might do well to print and bring it with you, but as always in a wildland new to you situational awareness is paramount.

It was delightfully pleasant hiking through the forested section of the park however I missed by seconds a photo capture of white-tailed deer that bolted across the trail in front of me. Spittlebugs, the smallest creatures I saw, were abundant in one sunny section of the trail. They are the nymph stage of an insect known as frog hopper and the juveniles protect themselves from their predators by creating a bubbly fortress on plants. (a)

I was surprised by the eye-catching variety of fungi I encountered. Some species I could identify, easily, others such as this purplish specimen one were new to me. Common sense dictates to never sample a species of which you are not 100% sure. I may return in the spring to look for morels, a species I know well. (b)

Old oak trees with decaying centers greatly add to the natural value of the area and provide a habitat to all sorts of creatures. I wasn't able to determine what lived there, but I suspect red squirrels are a possibility and I'm rather certain a few openings near the top would be ideal for screech owls; a species that is seldom seen but very common in Oakland County and are attracted to natural cavities in trees.

My hiking companions were chipmunks, squirrels and songbirds and the not-so-distant distinct call of a Pileated Woodpecker and trailside wildflowers. The habitat is perfect for a great variety of wildlife and I caught a glimpse of large Eastern garter snake that slithered off the trail at my not so stealthy approach.

My favorite part of this exploratory hike was Rossman Lake where I had the pleasure of watching Tree Swallows pursue insects, witnessed a Bald Eagle circling high above and chatted with a gentleman who took his two young sons fishing from the dock. (c)

While they fished, I watched a pair of snapping turtles swimming near and under the dock. I suspect the turtles discovered when people appear, worms in the water soon follow. I stayed on the dock for a few hours appreciating the scenery and the sights, sounds and sweet summer smells of nature on 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.



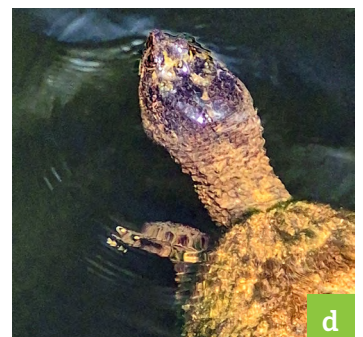
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