



OAKLAND
COUNTY PARKS

The Wilder Side of Oakland County

by Jonathan Schechter

Little Things of Nature

Nature's way is full of wonder and surprise. Every trek in the woods or fields brings to mind these timeless words of Henry David Thoreau. "I wonder what the world is doing today?" Sometimes it's the little things of nature that make the most memorable encounters if you walk slowly, stop often, look about and listen. Today I share six of the "little things" from this past week that you may encounter well into August.

Hummingbird moth: They are one of my favorite insects on a sunny summery day. These fascinating moths (members of the Sphinx moth family) are active in the day unlike most moths which are night creatures. If you get close to one that's sipping nectar from a flower you may even hear a slight buzzing sound as they flap their wings and hover. I believe the one I photographed in flight is a hummingbird clearwing moth. (a)

Monarch butterfly: The Monarch butterfly is one of the most recognizable butterflies of fields and flowery meadows. Their vibrant orange and black wings with tiny white spots near the tips make them extremely recognizable. This photo is of the caterpillar stage of a monarch butterfly before it reaches the adult stage. The caterpillar stage feeds exclusively on milkweed plants and this one was just yards from my door. They are short-lived but eye-catching creatures. The entire Monarch butterfly life cycle, from egg to adult butterfly, takes four or five weeks. (b)

Katydid: Katydids are nocturnal insects that are heard far more often than they are seen. An early evening walk in their habitat, which is healthy woodlands, may give you a chance to hear their "katy-did, katy-did" call which led to their name. They are hard to spot since their green color blends in well with leaves. I was extremely fortunate to see one perched on the railing of my porch. It stayed around long enough to 'pose' for a photo and I've been hearing them as well the past few nights. (c)

Gray treefrog: As a naturalist I should not have a favorite species of frogs, but the Gray treefrog is my favorite. Spoiler Alert: If you want to see a Gray treefrog on a hot summer day don't search at a pond or lakeshore – look in trees! They are nocturnal amphibians that spend most of their daylight hours well camouflaged in leafy hardwood trees or thick shrubs emerging at night to hunt insects and spiders. I was extremely lucky to encounter this one in the daylight perched in my arbor. Perhaps the most fascinating fact about these arboreal amphibians is they can change their color from bright green to various shades of gray to blend into their habitat. (d)

Purple coneflower: These rather showy flowers that thrive in full sun and may be four feet tall are in full boom now and are easily spotted in most of our larger parks. They are very visible trailside at Independence Oaks County Park, Indian Springs Metropark and in lands managed by Six Rivers Land Conservancy and Blue Heron Headwaters Conservancy. I'm happy to see some growing roadside in sections of northern Oakland County. And of course on a sunny day you may see butterflies visiting these eye-catching beauties. (e)

American dog tick: I would be amiss without acknowledging I am not a pro at identifying the various species of ticks in Michigan but I am tick aware; especially after having one crawling inside my shirt last summer on Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore's South Manitou Island. I've visually encountered them twice this July. The first encounter was at Independence Oaks -North Unit after I sat in a grassy field to look out over Upper Bushman Lake. The second time was just yards from my door in Brandon Township. If you wonder what the world is doing today; go for a walk in a natural area, but be sure to check for ticks when back home! (f)

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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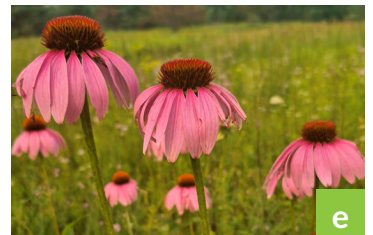
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