

Oakland Owlets July 2019 Field Trip @ Indian Springs Metropark

The Oakland Audubon Society's Young Birders' Club, the Oakland Owlets, visited Indian Springs Metropark on Saturday, July 20. It was a beautiful warm morning. A group of 13 young birders, family and friends meandered along the trails near the Environmental Discovery Center. The adventure began when one of the leaders who had arrived early found a Henslow's Sparrow nearby. The Henslow's Sparrow is a state endangered bird. Everyone was eager to see and hear this rare bird, so the group trekked off course to locate it. The Henslow's Sparrow was elusive, but the group was entertained by families of Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrels popping in and out of their underground abodes around the playground. One keen-eyed young birder spotted an Eastern Garter Snake in dogwood shrubs taking advantage of the above ground breeze along with access to flying insect treats. While we watched, the snake was motionless and ignored the attention.



Birding along the way, the group wandered back to the Environmental Discovery Center and directed its attention to dragonflies and swallows which were abundant there. The pond near the EDC is a place where dragonflies and swallows hunt. The structure and orientation of the EDC is ideal for swallows to nest. Barn Swallows and Cliff Swallows take advantage of the overhangs and ledges on the building to construct their mud houses. In July, these nests still have fledglings and are the focus of swallow family life. In a short time, the group was able to see five different species of Swallows.

Down the trail, the activity level decreased. Many prairie flowers were blooming. Most notable were the Compass Plants. The flower stems tower above the rest of the vegetation. These tall stems provided perfect places for birds to survey the landscape. A family of five Eastern Kingbirds flew together while hunting from tall perches like these. It is difficult to outwardly distinguish the young birds from their parents, but the offspring could be seen begging from the adults.

Thirty-five species of birds were reported to eBird, not including the Henslow's Sparrow which was only seen by a few people. The weather was sunny and warm-by the end of the hike it was hot. A complete checklist of species seen is listed below.



As the sun rose higher in the sky, dragonflies and butterflies were more active. The group encountered a few dragonflies along the prairie pathways. Although dragonflies were not numerous, a couple of colorful species were observed including the Halloween Pennant and Blue Dasher. Overall it was wonderful day to be outdoors.



Nature Writer and photographer Jonathan Schechter joined the hike. If you are not a regular reader of the *Wild Side of Oakland County*, a blog written by Jonathan Schechter, it is highly recommended for all outdoor enthusiasts. Here is a link to read about Jonathan's experiences from the hike. <https://oaklandcountyblog.com/2019/07/26/swallows-dragonflies-wildflowers-and-a-snake-an-oakland-audubon-adventure/>

Thanks to Nancy Tar and TJ Lang for their assistance with the hike and Jonathan Schechter for sharing his terrific photos. Photo credits - Jonathan Schechter (wildlife) and the group photos by Kathleen Dougherty.



Wild Turkey
Mourning Dove
Double-crested Cormorant
Great Egret
Green Heron
Turkey Vulture
Bald Eagle
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Eastern Wood-Pewee
Great Crested Flycatcher
Eastern Kingbird
Blue Jay
American Crow
Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Tree Swallow
Bank Swallow

Barn Swallow
Cliff Swallow
Eastern Bluebird
American Robin
Gray Catbird
European Starling
House Finch
American Goldfinch
Field Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Eastern Meadowlark
Red-winged Blackbird
Common Yellowthroat
Yellow Warbler
Northern Cardinal
Indigo Bunting
House Sparrow