

Butterflies and Birds at the Golden Preserve

On Saturday, July 8th, young birders' families, and friends gathered at the Golden Preserve in Springfield Township to participate in a butterfly census. The Six Rivers Land



Conservancy surveys this preserve annually to measure the success of management practices to create habitat for butterflies. This year was the nineteenth year of the count. Butterfly counts require sunny skies and a rain-free forecast. Unfortunately, the weather forecast on July 8th included rain and the official butterfly count was rescheduled to another day. However, the Butterfly Count Compiler, Sue Greenlee agreed to meet the Oakland Owlets to look for butterflies and birds despite the weather.

The Six Rivers Land Conservancy is a private non-profit organization incorporated to protect and conserve lands in five counties in southeast Michigan. The Golden Preserve is a protected preserve located within the headwaters of the Shiawassee River Watershed. The preserve is a biologically diverse property with unique natural communities rarely seen in the area including a dry sand prairie, a prairie fen, wooded wetland, and a dry mesic forest.



A small and enthusiastic group headed into the preserve armed with nets and collecting jars provided by Sue. Even though conditions were not ideal for butterfly activity, it did not take long for the group to find butterflies. Along the pathway to the prairie, several brown butterflies were netted immediately. Sue examined the butterflies closely to identify them. These initial butterflies were members of the Satyridae family. This family includes medium-sized brown butterflies with eyespots on the upper and undersurfaces of their wings. Most species from this family live in brushy habitats or open woodlands. The **Common Wood Nymph** is shown in the photograph. Additionally, we found other members of this family including Little Wood Satyrs and Northern Pearly-eye.



Wandering deeper into the Preserve, the open prairie was dotted with multiple colorful blooms and seed pods. The brilliant orange flowers of Butterflyweed were full of nectar as pollinators buzzed around them. Other butterflies seen in the prairie

despite the overcast skies were **Eastern Tailed Blues**, Delaware Skippers, and a Sliver-spotted Skipper. Sue explained how to identify each butterfly we encountered.



Sue guided the group from the prairie into a woodland. We hiked down a ravine and across a woodland stream, then



eventually climbed to a high moraine in a mature Oak Forest. The tree canopy sheltered the group from the light rain. Walking along the moraine ridge, we discovered several Wild Turkey feathers. Eventually, we reached a point where we could see open water. Sue identified beaver activity in this wetland including a dam and lodge along with a perched fen adjacent to the watershed. This type of fen is unusual.

As the rain continued, the group watched several different birds hunting insects over the wetland. Tree Swallows and Barn Swallows glided over the open waters while several **Cedar Waxwings** darted from the trees along the shoreline to snatch insects. All the time **Common Yellowthroats** continuously repeated their "*Witchey, Witchey*" songs nearby. Inside the magical bubble of the forest canopy, the group observed birds sheltered from rain. Tracking birds, the young birders listed **28 species of birds** during the field trip despite the weather.



The rain stopped once the group exited the forest. Heading back to the parking area a Wood Duck flew overhead. Although the weather was rainy and without much sunshine, the Oakland Owlets were able to see some butterflies, dragonflies, and several birds. An Eastern Kingbird flew into view along with a pair of House Finch at the conclusion of the hike. It was a nice ending to the walk.

Everyone thanked Sue Greenlee for sharing her bug expertise and willingness to guide the group into this remarkable preserve. A complete eBird checklist if available upon request.



Photo Credits – Kathleen Dougherty & OAS Gallery.

