

Butterfly Count at the Golden Preserve

The Oakland Bird Alliance's Young Birders' Club helped with the annual Butterfly Count at the Golden Preserve in Davisburg this summer. The Golden Preserve is owned by the Six Rivers Land Conservancy. This property is set aside as a preserve because of its high-quality conservation value. Six Rivers Land Conservancy conducts a butterfly count annually at Golden Preserve through the North American Butterfly Association to monitor the presence of butterflies on the preserve. Butterflies are a critical indicator species. Monitoring butterflies informs land managers about the health of the ecosystems. Habitats where butterflies thrive benefits other wildlife and people. Butterfly counts conducted by citizen scientists amass data about butterfly populations. This information is used by researchers to study population trends and butterfly biology.



Young birders' families and friends gathered on July 13th at the Golden Preserve to count butterflies and birds. Butterfly Count Compiler Sue Greenlee greeted the group along with Ian Ableson, Stewardship Manager, from Six Rivers Land Conservancy and Debbie Jackson, Monarch Watch educator. Sue and Ian shared details about the preserve and tips on identifying butterflies. Sue distributed some butterfly nets and other equipment to collect butterflies. Afterwards, our small troop followed Sue, Ian, and Debbie into the preserve.



Golden Preserve is a restricted area and does not have trails. The group reached a field full of wildflowers right away. Butterflies were flitting about the flowers in bloom. Everyone learned that although butterflies



seem slow, they can move quickly. Several large and colorful butterflies were encountered in the open field habitat. Everyone was thrilled to find Black Swallowtails, Red-spotted Purples, Monarchs, **Viceroy**s, and Great Spangled Fritillaries. The Whites and Sulphurs were also present. These butterflies were sipping nectar from flowers in bloom and some adults were seeking host plants for their offspring. It was a warm, sunny, and humid day.



From the open prairie habitat, the group walked into a mature forest. Along the shaded edge of this forest new species of butterflies were discovered. Different butterflies inhabit the

woodlands. These butterflies are brown with eyespots. Some of these woodland butterflies also sip tree sap and the liquids from rotting fruit as well as nectar. One butterfly found in this shady place was the **Common Wood Nymph**.



Young birders stopped along the way to look closely at the insects during the hike. Sue and Debbie helped everyone with identification. Debbie gently opened butterfly wings to show the difference between the opened and closed wings. Open wings are much more colorful and intricate. When butterflies close their wings, they disappear. The group eventually reached an extensive wetland.



The wetland was a new habitat for both birds and butterflies. At the distant end of the pool of water, a family of Mute Swans were feeding on the vegetation. A Willow Flycatcher flew from its perch on a dead snag to catch flying insects emerging from the water. The group was able to record **28 species** of birds during the hike. Young birders' families and friends returned to the preserve entrance just after noon. Sue, Ian, and Debbie returned to count butterflies for the rest of the



afternoon. At the end of their day, Sue reported **14 species** of butterflies. In total, the group recorded 99 individuals, and the most abundance species was the **Wild Indigo Duskywing**. Complete lists of the birds and butterflies seen during this butterfly count are available upon request.

A special thank you to Sue Greenlee for making this field trip possible along with Debbie Jackson and Ian Ableson helping everyone to see some of the special butterflies at the Golden Preserve.



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