

Michigan Lilies in Stoney Creek

Written and photographed by Bruce Mackenzie

We often think of wildflowers as adorning the forest in the spring. Spring wildflowers take advantage of the sunshine in the forest before the leaves come out on the trees that shade the forest floor. After the trees create their canopy of leaves overhead, wildflowers mostly disappear. The Michigan Lily is an exception. The Lily starts growing in April but because of its large size it is not ready to bloom until the end of June when it has exceptional orange blossoms.

The Michigan Lily is not commonly found in our area so it is a real treat to come across it. A few years ago, some of these lilies popped up along the Dofasco Trail in Stoney Creek. The trail parallels the Niagara Escarpment and Bruce Trail just south of Ridge Rd. Running from the 11th Rd., called Fifty Rd. below the Escarpment, it terminates at the Devil's Punch Bowl waterfalls near First Rd. It passes through many different habitats and there are always some surprises to please the trail walker.

If you find one Michigan Lily, you are likely to find a hundred or more. At the very east end of the Dofasco Trail there is a lovely woodlot that the trail cuts through just west of the 11th Line.

Here the Michigan Lilies grow along the trail. Most of them are just on the other side of the fence on private property, but all are easily viewed from the trail. They are pretty big plants so their beauty can be easily enjoyed.

One Metre Tall

Michigan Lilies are normally considered to be found in tall grass prairies in Ohio and Michigan and points west. Finding them growing in this woodlot is indeed a treat. They are perennial plants that sprout each year, growing from a corm. A corm acts like a bulb. The Lily's corm has the appearance of a funny clump of white rice when exposed in the soil and each spring new plants grow from the corms increasing the numbers in the group. They also spread by seeds released in the fall. They grow up to almost two metres in height and, depending upon their age, the number of blooms on each plant will increase. As many as 10 blooms on one plant have been found. Most of the plants in this woodlot are about a metre in height with two or three blooms. Canada Day always seems to be when the blooms are at their peak. The brilliant orange show usually lasts until mid July.

A couple of years ago there was a whole new stand of these Lilies next to the trail

with several hundred plants. But this new patch was not in the woodlot, just adjacent to it on the east side of the woods in a most beautiful meadow. Here the plants were growing in full sunshine and in full competition with the grasses, milkweeds and vetchs. Wow, what a sight but why that year? Lilies had not been seen growing here before. One difference that year was that cattle who normally graze in this field had not been put out to this pasture. Just maybe in the past the cows had taken a liking to nibbling on the flower heads of the Michigan Lilies. That year we thoroughly enjoyed the fact that the cows were somewhere

else. We will wait to see what happens in future years.

So keep your eyes out for the brilliant orange blooms of the Michigan Lily along the Dofasco Trail. If you miss the Michigan Lily don't be disappointed for there are many more flowering plants, including Yellow Jewelweed, that will be blooming along the trail throughout the summer and into October.

Bruce Mackenzie retired Director of Customer Service of the Hamilton Conservation Authority, is active in various naturalist organizations in the Hamilton area and is deeply involved with the Save the Wood Lot project in Grimsby.



▲ Sometimes mistaken for Turk's Cap Lilies, these are Michigans, without the green central star of the Turk's Cap.



▲ Although there can be as many as 10 blooms per plant, these Michigan Lilies have two or three flowers each.



▲ Michigan Lilies growing in a sunny meadow among purple vetch, milkweed and tall grass near the Dofasco Trail, Stoney Creek.