

Swimming in a Natural Pond on the Escarpment

By Mike Davis

It is a privilege to swim in a natural pond that is teeming with life. I swim there often on a warm summer or fall day, slipping into the refreshing waters and thoroughly enjoying the experience. It is a bit of a sprint to get to the pond during the dead of summer with no wind and feeding lots of mosquitoes along the way! They seem to be less interested in me after my swim. Am I less stinky, am I a little cooler, or do I not notice them as much?

Where I go into the pond, there is a bit of a ledge followed by a drop-off. When the water is a bit cooler than the surrounding air, I slowly get accustomed by splashing water onto myself, then jumping in. Sometimes it's a bit of a screamer, but it always feels better after the plunge.

Escarpment Water

The water is pure, fresh and clear from the Escarpment, with no pollution and no bad odours. We are so lucky to have access to a spring-fed small pond on the Escarpment, with slightly warmer and colder sections because of the temperatures of the springs that flow up from the bottom. The warmer springs are likely from aquifers near the surface that are more quickly warmed by the sun, with the cold springs coming from deeper aquifers that stay cool for longer in the season.

The pond was created about 57 years ago by Charles Hildebrandt, who had a small depression enlarged where the previous farmer had watered his cattle. It is about 40 by 20

metres in size and under two metres deep, like a mid-sized municipal or hotel pool, clear with no chlorine. The pond is generally saucer-shaped, sloping up to the shore with more aquatic plants there.

As I prepare to step in, frogs make a mad dash into the cover of the water, in case I am a giant frog-eating predator. Small fish swim near and look at me as I go in, perhaps curiously, but at a distance. I can do the breast stroke or sculling to make my way around the pond. I like swimming with the whirligig beetles, who are busily spinning around looking like a fast-forward bumper-cars attraction at the fair, but are not slamming into each other, in pursuit of their next meal. They are wary of their surroundings, keeping a safe

distance from the great big swimming human. The dragon and damselflies zip back and forth overhead, and light on a pond plant leaf to rest and bask in the sun.

I've seen nature in gory action with an unfortunate butterfly succumbing to a dragonfly attack. First it was merrily in a floating coordinated flight until the scud-missile-like attack, then it fell to the pond dead, like an autumn leaf, after being released by the attacker. If I swim at dusk, seeing the local bats out is a joy, as they swoop and suddenly change direction

following their echolocation sound as they zero in and feed on the insect population.

Mud to Flowers

There is the "ick" factor with pond swimming. There is about a foot of pond scunge or muck at the bottom in the centre. Scunge is more of a derogatory term, as

water. The unknown factor can increase anxiety, but is countered by the joy of being part of nature, of sharing the pond with the local residents for a few minutes.

Swimming among the flowering pickerelweed, cat tail and pond lily is relaxing. The breeding season and its continuous song and



Mike Davis up to his neck in a fresh-water Escarpment pond.

it is almost exclusively decomposing vegetation matter and certainly beneficial to nature. When standing in it, it feels gooey like pudding with some twigs interspersed within, a bit of an acquired taste, but harmless.

There is always the possibility of me feeding a leech, which has not happened yet. I tend to think that any leeches there may be, like to hang out in the vegetation around the edge of the pond so as not to be someone else's meal. I skip over the edge quickly when entering or exiting the

territorial disputes are mostly over in the summer and autumn, but the birds still hang out around the pond. Seeing the birds perching and feeding, with a few calls thrown in, is calming. The sounds of nature are quiet but interesting when you stop to listen to the different bird calls, and insects buzzing overhead. These are the small pleasures that I look forward to enjoying each summer.

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