

# Canoeist gets close to wildlife

I WENT canoeing down the Huron River near the Proud Lake Recreation Area the other day. Although the water level was lower than normal, the recent rains raised the water level so we did not bottom out. Canoeing is a great way to see and enjoy wildlife. Many animals are not as wary of man in a canoe as they are of his approaching on land. If a canoeist does not make any rapid movements, he may approach frogs, birds, and mammals for a close look.

AS WE paddled, we saw several groups of mallards resting along the shore. They all looked like females — not a single male among them. That isn't surprising, though, because at this time of the year males look like females.

Unlike most birds that lose their feathers a few at a time, ducks and geese molt all their flight feathers at the same time. In order to counteract this vulnerable state, male ducks molt their bright breeding plumage and attain a more camouflaged plumage like the female's.

In addition to ducks, we saw an adult great-blue heron that had undoubtedly come from the 75-year-old heronry near the Ford plant in Wixom.

After it had finished feeding along the lake shore, it flew right in front of our canoes. We could clearly see its neck cocked into an "S" shape, a characteristic common to all herons, bitterns and egrets.

AT ONE portage we stepped into the water to pull our canoes over a bridge. We were amazed at how warm the water had become. This condition can cause some complications with aquatic life in streams and lakes. As the water



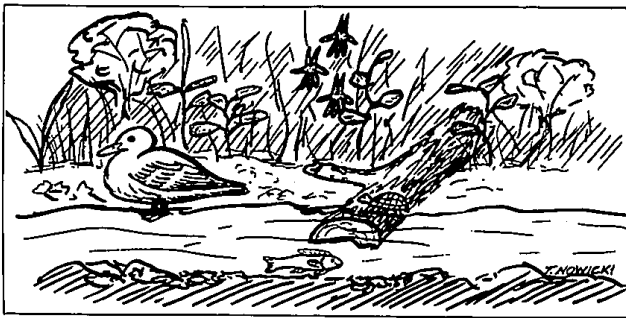
nature  
**Timothy Nowicki**

level lowers, the water temperature increases.

Warm water holds less oxygen than cold water, so animals will find it harder to breathe. Lower water levels means the water will warm more quickly, and there will not be as much churning of the water as it flows downstream. The churning of moving water helps aerate it.

Slowly floating the river and watching for signs of life, we spotted the crimson cardinal flowers that were peeking out from the bank. Contrasting sharply with the green vegetation, they were easy to see once spotted.

However, I would venture to say that many canoeists intent on going from point A to point B did not see them.



Many animals are not as wary of man in a canoe as they are of his approaching on land. The calm canoeist may approach frogs, birds and mammals for a close look.

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