

Young biologists are testing the waters

BY WILLIAM COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

As Emily Baron carefully studies what appears to be the larvae of a damselfly in a tributary of the Rouge River that winds through Woodland Hills Park, a small green frog jumps in front of her. "There are a lot of them in here," she says, looking up with a start.

Baron, 21, is studying the waterways of parks in Farmington Hills and Farmington to determine the quality of the water. The Farmington resident is doing the field work to help Farmington Hills' parks and recreation department pinpoint any problems due to chemicals or other pollutants.

"There haven't been any big problems so far," said the Southfield Christian High and Bethel College of Indiana graduate. "But I've only been at it for about two weeks."

Baron is volunteering her knowledge of biology in order to build up her experience and field techniques while looking for a permanent job.

"My goal is to work in something like the Shedd Aquarium (in Chicago)."

Baron's know-how is helping the city determine the condition of the water and creatures that depend on it in Woodland Hills, Heritage, Shiawassee parks and on newly acquired land on the north side of the Founders



STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LEBNITZ

Footprints in the stream: Farmington Hills naturalist Joe Derek pointed out raccoon footprints on a submerged log in Woodland Hills Park.

Sports Park on Eight Mile.

"It's a good idea to see what we have now that the city has all this park land," said Hills Naturalist Joe Derek. "It's great to have someone who can do this type of work."

Baron began after Labor Day sampling the water and collecting samples of insect life in order to see whether there is enough dissolved oxygen in the water, how cool the water is and whether excessive amounts of chlorine, nitrogen or other chem-

icals have affected the ecosystem.

With a dry summer, the flow of the water, which Baron tests by dropping an orange at one area and timing it to another, has been a little slow.

But with the water in Woodland Hills and other areas being spring fed, the temperature has remained cool.

"Believe it or not, the rain water can actually warm the stream," she said.

Derek said the water quality can directly affect wildlife, insects and birds living in the

natural areas of the parks. The creation of a wetlands area in Woodland Hills has made the environment more attractive to birds, frogs, and insects.

Another part of the job includes finding just what types of critters inhabit the pond and why.

Not only does that indicate the relative health of the stream, but it can pinpoint any rare or endangered species, such as a minnow called the red side dace.

"We have seen some minnows," she said.

The summer was dry, leaving

less of a sampling of water and creatures, but in parts, it's deep enough as Baron finds out when her boot fills with cool water.

There are also still some unwanted intrusions in the natural areas.

"We do see a lot of garbage," Baron said. "We see cans with motor oil still in them, Styrofoam and other stuff. It's depressing. But some people just aren't responsible."

Derek said Woodland Hills Park has exceeded expectations with 3,600 visitors in its first year.

Wading in:

Rubber boots and a net are part of Emily Baron's gear as she captures insects from the surface of the stream. Frogs, while plentiful, usually managed to elude her net.



What is it?: Emily Baron examines a specimen she took from the creek. Then, like a true scientist, she records her findings.

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