

Take Only Photographs

Every year, thousands of people explore the trails of Rouge Park. Can you imagine how the Park would look if each of those visitors picked one flower, or left one piece of trash? Rouge Park's vision includes the need for human activity to exist in harmony with our natural values. To maintain this delicate balance, it's important for visitors to consider proper and improper uses of the Park. Compatible park use will help us preserve this natural sanctuary, yet there seems to be a rise in inappropriate park use.

Many deer have fallen victim to poaching in the Park. Often when we hear the word 'poaching' we think of exotic animals being killed illegally for black market trade. It is easy to assume that this is a problem occurring somewhere very far from here, whether it's black bears in British Columbia or African elephants, but poaching is happening right here in Rouge Park. Killing animals in the Park is illegal. This is a dangerous activity for people too. The poaching of large animals such as deer involves weapons that pose a safety concern for the unsuspecting public, especially if they have not stayed on the official trails. Make no mistake, this is not hunting – hunting is the harvest of wildlife in legal areas, at legal times, using legal methods. **There is no legal use of firearms, including bows or crossbows in Rouge Park at anytime.**

Removing plants or mushrooms from the Park is also prohibited. Many people do not realize that stopping to collect some of their

favorite wildflowers or edible mushrooms while exploring the Park can have a significant negative effect on the ecological processes that occur in the area. Every species, from deer to mushrooms, has an important role to play in the ecosystem. For example, fungi act to decompose dead plant and animal matter returning important nutrients to the soil. This in turn allows new plant growth to flourish. If we harvest a species quicker than it can be replenished, that species could become seriously depleted or even extinct, causing these ecological processes to be altered.

In the Park, species such as American Ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) are currently suffering from the effects of over-harvesting. Taking even a small amount can destroy a viable Ginseng population. What was once a common sight in forests is now a threatened species in Canada. Likewise, the harvesting of fiddleheads from ferns such as Ostrich Fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*) has also caused a depletion of the populations in Rouge Park.

The removal of flora and fungi can also be a dangerous activity - there are many poisonous species in Rouge Park that can cause serious harm, possibly even death, if eaten. Many of these species are hard to distinguish from those that are edible, leaving the offenders in a very risky situation.

Rouge Park is for everyone to enjoy, and if we all become stewards of this land and do our part to protect the natural resources of the area, it will continue to flourish as a natural wild space. This means enjoying the natural environment of the Park without disturbing the plants and animals within it. So, if you must take something from the park, be sure it's a photograph, a memory, or a sense of appreciation for the sanctuary the Park offers. There are plenty of those for everyone!

*Vicki MacDonald,
Biologist*

