

## 2010 Get to Know Bioblitz: Guide to Hosting and Leading a BioBlitz

---

### **Introduction**

The BioBlitz is a citizen environmental education project, bringing together scientists, education experts, naturalists and the public to encourage outdoor exploration and enhance our understanding of biodiversity through hands-on learning. The Get to Know BioBlitz is a special type of BioBlitz, focused on getting young people interested in learning and caring about biodiversity. The concept is highly flexible and can easily be adapted according to the organizer's interests and strengths, special features of the location, expected age of the participants, and available resources.

### **Average Length of a BioBlitz:**

Although traditional BioBlitzes usually last 24 hours, an average Get to Know BioBlitz is designed to last two to three hours, which is the recommended length of time so as to maintain the interest of the younger participants. This is only an average, and it is up to the organizers to determine the length of their activity. Some may, for example, wish to combine a series of events into a single BioBlitz day.

### **What's Needed**

BioBlitz Field Kit recommendations:

- Species Lists: identifying key animals and plant life in the relevant area
- Field Guides: to provide more insight into the species list
- Map of Area: if possible, GPS units can enhance the experience.
- Binoculars
- Magnifying Glass
- Digital Camera
- Video equipment, if available

It is important to ensure that all participants have the proper clothes and footwear for the weather and terrain conditions. It is also a good idea, if possible, to provide t-shirts, hats, or other incentives from sponsors, which contain an identifying feature that will make the participants feel that they are part of a unique experience.

### **Choosing the Location**

A BioBlitz can take place at any natural location, and can be adapted to both urban and rural settings. It is important to carefully consider the unique features of a given location as you plan for the BioBlitz event.

### **Before the BioBlitz Day**

In order to fully realize the potential of a Get to Know BioBlitz day, proper preparation is necessary by both organizers and participants.

#### **Recommendations for Leaders:**

- Study the area where the BioBlitz will take place, carefully noting points of interest, reference points and locations where species can potentially be located. Coordinate the schedule and, if applicable, transportation requirements for the day. Identify key species and plants that are native to the park or greenspace. It may be useful to divide these species into the key taxonomic classifications, including:
  - Invertebrates: including Arthropods (Insects) and Arachnids (Spiders)
  - Vertebrates: divided into Amphibians, Reptiles, Birds and Mammals
  - Plants: these can also be divided into Deciduous and Coniferous plants for older participants.
- Turn the BioBlitz into a truly community-centered event by involving volunteers. Naturalists, community volunteer groups, student groups, etc. can add a significant community focus to your event.

#### **Recommendation for Participants:**

- Participants are encouraged to become as familiar as possible with the area in question, as well as the species they will be looking for. Some useful tools that can assist this program (where available) are the Get to Know Virtual Hike and Natural Treasure initiatives.  
*For more information on how these tools can be integrated into the BioBlitz, please contact the Get to Know Program.*

### **On the Day of the BioBlitz: Procedure/Organization**

Designate a clear location where all participants are to gather. If the attendance is high, it might be a good idea to break participants into smaller groups.

There are a number of different ways to do this. Here are some suggestions:

- Divide into groups (each, preferably, with its own leader) and provide each with a field guide containing different species from each classification; participants will be challenged to focus on these species.
- Appoint each group as an “expert” in each particular classification; participants in each group will be challenged to identify as many species from their particular group as possible.
- Have different groups focus on different activities. You can, for example, have some participants focus on the creative, and others focus on the technical aspects of the BioBlitz.

- In order to avoid congestion and confusion along the way it is recommended that you stagger the start of these smaller groups.

Be sure to provide each group with clear instructions on how the BioBlitz works.

### **After the BioBlitz: Evaluation**

Once you have completed the BioBlitz, it is helpful to debrief by obtaining formal (survey) or informal (conversation/observation) feedback on a number of key questions, such as:

- What did the participants learn about the park or greenspace?
- How did this translate into a deeper understanding of biodiversity?
- How have the participants understood the connection between biodiversity and conservation?

It would also be helpful if organizers collect information such as the number of people in attendance, the participants' satisfaction with the activities and suggestions for improvement of future BioBlitz activities. It would be greatly appreciated if the organizers took photos (and even films) of the activities.

There are numerous opportunities to expand the participants' understanding of biodiversity. Lesson Plans focused on teaching youth about plants and animals in their local environment will be available from the Get to Know website – as will various educational resources that can contribute to the learning experience.

### **Variations on the BioBlitz Scenario:**

This guide is only intended to provide useful ideas and suggest a sample general framework for organizing a BioBlitz. Above all, we want each BioBlitz event to be fun and flexible, for both participants and organizers. As a result, the key is to devise your BioBlitz in accordance with your own ideas and priorities, while also considering key features of the chosen location, the target age, and the expected turnout. Any variation is welcome, as long as searching for and identifying species is involved.

## **Bio Blitz Activity Guide**

---

A Get to Know BioBlitz is a celebration of the biodiversity in a specific location. As the organizer of a local BioBlitz, you have the opportunity to choose activities that will best suit the unique ecological make-up of your area. The following Activity Guide is meant to highlight a number of ideas for planning and administering a Get to Know BioBlitz.

The Get to Know BioBlitz includes exciting educational activities that combine creative and technical approaches. First is the creative aspect, encouraging participants to experience nature through artistic discovery. This can take the form of photography, map sketching, or video productions based on pre-determined themes.

The second approach is a more technical one, utilizing more traditional aspects of a BioBlitz such as counting and reporting species in the area, or focusing on a specific conservation project. The Get to Know BioBlitz should provide opportunities for one or more of these activities to take place. Ideally, it should maintain a balance between these two approaches—inviting participants to connect with nature aesthetically, but also through fun, focused learning about conservation and biodiversity.

### **Creative Activities**

1. **Photography or Art Project** – Each participant will use their creative talent to provide a visual representation of each of the species they identify. This can include photography, sketching or other art forms. Once participants have completed these projects, they can post them online at the **Get to Know International BioBlitz Gallery**. They can also use them as entries into the annual **Get to Know Contest**.

Some suggestions for projects:

1. Have students take a variety of pictures and then combine these images (either by way of cut and paste or through programs such as Photoshop) into a collage. School classes or youth groups could consider combining their images into a Biodiversity mural for their classroom, clubhouse, etc. This is a great way to extend the BioBlitz experience through creative thinking.
2. Invite students to become a “species expert” by focusing on a particular plant or animal for their photography project; by encouraging youth to photograph a specimen from different points of view (i.e. close-up, wide-shot, black and white, from overhead or from below) it will encourage them to think more carefully about this species, and foster a more memorable personal connection.
3. Encourage students to write captions for their BioBlitz photos and to publish these in a print/digital photo journal; this will allow them to refer back to their BioBlitz experience, as well as to

share their findings with friends, classmates, and other youth through the Get to Know International Biodiversity Gallery.

2. **Videography Project** – Participants can apply their technological abilities to film and edit 30 second videos about biodiversity, based on their experiences and findings during the BioBlitz. These videos can also be posted to the **Get to Know International BioBlitz Gallery**.

In order to keep video projects well focused, and to ensure that youth remain on task, it is helpful to provide them with topics, such as a particular species or park area on which to base their project. Given that youth can share their work with other BioBlitz participants across North America, these videos represent a great opportunity to showcase unique aspects of a local environment.

*Note: because access to video cameras may be limited, organizers should invite youth interested in filmmaking to form groups, collaborate on projects by sharing cameras, and to take turns using cameras – it may be best to allot each group 15 minutes with a video camera.*

Some Suggestions:

1. Depending on the wildlife characteristics of the region and/or important local conservation topics, give youth an appropriately “themed” question to answer, such as:
  - “What does Biodiversity mean in your community?”
  - “How does your community care for Biodiversity?”
  - “What are some of the greatest threats to Biodiversity in your area?”
  - “How are your wild neighbours part of your community?”
2. Have youth come up with their own question, or eco-challenge to other young people; this can serve as the basis for their film, which can then be posted on the Get to Know International BioBlitz Gallery.

*Question Example:*

A young person in Quebec could film a species they are curious about, maple trees for example, and explain why this species is important to them and to their local environment. At the end of the video, they could ask a question addressed to young people across Canada, such as: “Why do maple leaves turn orange in the fall?” or “Why do we need to protect maple trees?” or “How do maple trees benefit us?”

*Challenge Example:*

A young person in British Columbia could challenge youth in Ontario to come up with ten ways that they can conserve their local environment.

## **Mapping**

### **Creative Approach**

The purpose of this activity is to have the students draw a creative map of the area, highlighting what they see – landscape, points of interest, wildlife or plant life. They can then sketch these onto the map, or locate them using their creative capacities.

The emphasis here is on encouraging the participants to see nature as a ‘canvas’ that encourages creativity. Accuracy is not necessarily important, though it should be a fair representation of the area.

Template maps can also be provided to help participants identify their location.

### **Technical Approach**

*Note: There is the potential here to use GPS devices to provide more variety within these activities.*

Have the students plot their findings on the map of the area (if possible, have them provide GPS coordinates for their sighting). When they have done this, have them combine all of their findings into one larger map.

Options:

- a. Have participants do the same area and then let them compare their interpretation of the area.
- b. Have the participants work together in pairs, with one acting as a “spotter.” Have each group “log” the wildlife and plant life they identify while creating their map.

## **More Traditional Activities**

**Reporting Activity** – The foundation of a traditional BioBlitz is to identify and record the species of a designated area. This activity encourages leaders and participants to identify as many species as possible, and record their findings in a report. These reports can then be used by scientists, naturalists and local organizers to determine if biodiversity is present or diminishing in a certain area.

While looking for various species, participants will be able to interact with experts and learn more about their surroundings and the species that can be found there.

# Get to Know<sup>™</sup>

## BIOBLITZ

This activity can be undertaken in different ways. Suggestions include:

1. Develop a project around the identification and reporting of a certain species. Have the participants count how many they see or hear, and have all of them come together to provide a report on that particular species.

An ideal example of how these counts can be translated into a conservation report, see the Christmas Bird Count from the Audubon Society -

[http://cbc.audubon.org/cbccurrent/current\\_table.html](http://cbc.audubon.org/cbccurrent/current_table.html)

2. Diversify by allowing students to roam the area and – with the help of naturalists and local experts – identify as many different species as they can on their own. They can then record this in the journal/activity guide you provide them with.

It is also possible to integrate the mapping activities into these reports, and make that part of the final report component.

If the participants are unable to find a scientific name for a species they found, you can encourage them to name the species themselves.

**Conservation Project** – Linking the BioBlitz explicitly to conservation is an ideal way to make it clear to participants how their findings can contribute to local and national conservation efforts. Once participants have compiled and consolidated their findings, they can determine a way to apply these findings to a local conservation project or clean-up initiative. These projects can be an effective way to raise awareness of biodiversity in the community by linking outdoor experiences with the conservation efforts.

BioBlitzes in the past have been linked to conservation projects through such activities as shore or land clean-ups.

### **Bonus Activities**

These activities are opportunities to keep participants engaged and connecting with nature. If possible, it is also useful to provide incentives to those who complete these activities.

### **Suggestions**

**BioBlitz Bingo** – Distribute the Get to Know BioBlitz Bingo templates to youth at the beginning of the BioBlitz. Encourage them to keep their eyes open for animals and plants on the bingo cards. The cards vary in difficulty according to participant ages. You can also make your own cards with the specific animals and plants found in your location.

**Creative Writing Project** – Encourage youth to write a short descriptive piece or a story about their experience in nature. Youth can either be given the freedom to write in any style and on any topic, or be given some age-appropriate suggestions (e.g. a specific animal, a description of the natural area, an account of what happened during the BioBlitz, a

# *Get to Know* **BIOBLITZ**

description of a conservation issue, etc.). Youth can also be encouraged to use their creative and cooperative capacities to write and illustrate a “newspaper” documenting what they learned during the BioBlitz.