

Collier's Reserve's BioBlitz

Annual event raises awareness of local biodiversity in Naples, Florida.

BY JOSHUA CONWAY

Although we all are fascinated by exotic places and wildlife, we often miss the amazing variety and diversity in our own communities. Designed to be an engaging scientific and educational event, the BioBlitz helps to raise awareness of the incredible biodiversity that exists in our own communities and the importance of conserving and protecting that unique diversity. The BioBlitz brings together various scientists (e.g., botanists, entomologists, ornithologists, herpetologists, etc.) with citizen-scientists to identify and document as many species of plants, insects, wildlife, and even bacteria as possible in a discrete area within a 24-hour period.

Located near Naples, Florida, Collier's Reserve encompasses 450 acres, including 225 homes and an 18-hole golf course. In 1993, Collier's Reserve joined Audubon International's newly created Signature Program and was the first project in the world to become a Certified Audubon International Signature Sanctuary. Homeowners, staff, and management have continued their dedication and commitment to the Signature Program and have actively looked for new ways to continue their environmental efforts. For the past two years, Collier's Reserve has sponsored an annual BioBlitz (Biodiversity Blitz) educational event. More than 50 Collier's Reserve members and their guests participated, as well as organizations such as the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Southwest Florida Department of Agriculture, University of Florida Cooperative Extension, and Thayer Birding Software.

WHAT IS A BIOBLITZ?

Designed as part contest, part festival, part educational event, and part scientific endeavor, the public is invited to observe scientists' activities, to interact with them and participate in educational opportunities. The purpose of a BioBlitz is to count as many species from as many taxonomic groups as possible in a 24-hour time period. The details of when, where, and how are developed to fit the local situation.

WHY HAVE A BIOBLITZ?

- It's fun.
- It brings out the specialists.
- It's an opportunity to identify rare and unique species or identify special habitats for protection and management.

- It's a way to document species occurrence.
- It brings media attention and outreach to the community.
- It increases opportunities for scientists to interact with each other in the field.
- It helps to promote a relationship between the golf course and local scientists.

WHAT DOES A BIOBLITZ INVOLVE?

As part of organizing a BioBlitz, there are several key elements to keep in mind:

Recruiting Scientists: A key component of conducting a successful BioBlitz is to recruit as many scientists as possible. In addition, the greater the



A helpful component of an environmental education event is to establish a *base camp* that is accessible by the public and the scientists. The area should be large enough to accommodate the number of people you anticipate attending the event.

diversity of expertise, the more species will be found. At the event, surveyors check in at base camp before heading out to survey. At that time they sign in, receive a map of the area with a tally sheet, and are given any special instructions about food, sleeping arrangements, and access to property, etc.

Site Requirements: As you begin organizing your BioBlitz, keep in mind the following site logistics.

- There should be an area that can serve as base camp, preferably a building or pavilion, from which to work. If additional space is necessary, a large area where a tent can be erected for scientific and educational activities is useful.
- The base camp should be accessible to the public and to the scientists, and it should be large enough to accommodate the number of people that you anticipate. The area should be near a parking lot or an area with ample parking.
- The base camp should have access to an electrical supply for microscopes, lights, a microphone, laptops, and — most importantly — the coffeepot.

Educational Activities: The most effective educational activity that occurs at the BioBlitz is the interaction between visitors and scientists. In addition, it is helpful to:

- Provide activities that help explain what the scientists are doing, why they are doing it, and what biodiversity is and why it is relevant.
- Invite other organizations, nature centers, and societies to help you provide activities. A separate tent or tents should be erected near the base camp for these activities.

Public Support: The BioBlitz is a great tool for educating people about biodiversity, but to do this, you need to get people to attend the event.

- If you're inviting the public, send press releases for advance articles to the local media. Alerting radio and television stations about the event is a good approach.

For more information on Collier's Reserve's BioBlitz, enter the keywords **Collier's Reserve BioBlitz** into your search engine.



- If your BioBlitz is for your members only, you can include information in your club newsletter or Web site, and post information in the clubhouse, pro shop, or locker rooms.

Expenses and Funding: The BioBlitz can be relatively inexpensive to run. There are, however, costs that will be incurred. The following is a list of possible expenses:

- Tent rentals.
- Tables and chairs. You will need an adequate number of tables and chairs for scientific and educational activities.
- Food for volunteers. Consider providing dinner on Friday night for surveyors, breakfast for all surveyors who stayed overnight or arrived early, lunch for surveyors and educators, and snacks/drinks throughout the 24 hours.

- Microphone and speaker rental. You will need these for making announcements throughout the event and for the closing ceremony.

- Other expenses. T-shirts, educational materials, signs, maps, cups, napkins, first-aid kit, etc.

The name and concept of BioBlitz is not registered, copyrighted, or trademarked, and it is not a government program. It's just an idea that can be used, adapted, and modified by any group for their own purposes. Start planning your BioBlitz.

JOSHUA CONWAY is the education and communications manager for Audubon International. He can be contacted at jconway@auduboninternational.org. For more information on Audubon International, please visit: www.AudubonInternational.org.