

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Metchosin BioBlitz Finds Three Rare BC Species

Metchosin, British Columbia - May 5, 2011 – Organizers of a wildlife census in Metchosin, a district on the southern tip of British Columbia’s Vancouver Island, are counting results from the reports of fifty taxonomic experts, participants in Metchosin’s April 30th BioBlitz.

The local BioBlitz, like hundreds of others that have been conducted around the globe in the last year, took a 24-hour snapshot of regional biological diversity. Invited experts teamed with Pearson College students and local residents to track down about 700 Metchosin species in a dozen categories. The species tally includes:

- 290 vascular plants
- 110 birds
- 73 marine animals
- 70 mosses and liverworts
- 50 mushrooms
- 30 algae
- 25 insects and spiders
- 17 lichens
- 16 slugs and snails
- 6 amphibians and reptiles
- 5 mammals
- 2 worms

“The number of species we found tells us how special Metchosin is,” says Metchosin Councilor Moralea Milne, who came up with the idea for the BioBlitz. “We’ve got some of the rarest habitats in Canada here – our Garry Oak meadows are important examples of an endangered ecosystem.”

“Our focus during the BioBlitz was on recording as many readily observable species as possible,” says Andy MacKinnon, an ecosystem scientist who was one of the organizers. “That, and having a fun day with fellow researchers, a competition against time and space. Discoveries of rare species are always a highlights of these kinds of surveys.”

Among the finds of rare species was a sighting of a pair of Western Bluebirds that may have been building a nest. “Bluebirds were common on Vancouver Island and mainland BC until the 1950s,” says Ann Nightingale, co-ordinator of the birding teams. “Then the numbers started to fall. The last bluebirds to have nested on the Island were in the 1980s. There have been a few bluebird sightings since then, but not in breeding season. This discovery happens just as the Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team is gearing up for a major attempt to re-introduce breeding bluebird pairs to the Island. The local birding community is excited about what was found at the BioBlitz. We’ll be keeping our eyes on this pair.”

Jeremy Gatten and Jamie Fenneman spotted the bluebird pair on private property in a northern area of Metchosin. “We were investigating a south-facing, open rock outcrop that had patches of conifers,” says Jeremy, “and we heard a flying bird making calls. It sounded like a bluebird. The bird landed at the top of a nearby Douglas-fir and when I looked at it through binoculars I was astonished to see a brilliant orange wash to the chest. I called Jamie over and, while we were both trying to get photos of the male, a female with food in her bill flew in to join him.”

Also spotted in one of the CRD Parks on Saturday were three rare Blue-Grey Taildropper slugs (*Prophysaon coeruleum*) crawling on mushrooms. They were found by Kevin Trim and Adolf Ceska, who were at the park to count species of fungi. Trim showed the slugs to Lennart Sopuck, a biologist who specializes in terrestrial gastropods. “They are juveniles of an endangered species,” says Sopuck. “We’ve found only one other juvenile of this species and it was much larger than the ones found at the BioBlitz.”

A third rare species to show up at the BioBlitz was the Yellow Montane Violet, *Viola praemorsa*. A cluster of five plants was discovered by one of the birders, Ian Cruickshank, next to a trail in one of Metchosin’s CRD Parks. This is the first verified sighting in Metchosin of this spectacular, once common, now rare inhabitant of Garry Oak meadows.

“Birders finding plants, plant experts finding birds, mycologists finding snails. The breadth of natural knowledge in the science community of southern BC is astounding.” says Kem Luther, another organizer. “This is the sort of synergy that happens at these events.”

Released by the Metchosin Biodiversity Project. For more information about Metchosin's BioBlitz, please see our website: <http://www.metchosinbiodiversity.com>. For further information contact Andy MacKinnon (250-478-8232, metchosinmacs@gmail.com), Kem Luther (250-595-2474, kem.luther@sheridanc.on.ca), or Moralea Milne (250-478-3838, moraleamilne@gmail.com). [Andy MacKinnon and Moralea Milne are out of town until Sunday, May 8. Kem Luther is available to discuss the BioBlitz with media on Friday or Saturday]

Photographs that can be used with this article. Higher resolution versions of the photos are available.



A male Western Bluebird spotted at the Metchosin BioBlitz. Photo by Jeremy Gatten.



Yellow Montane Violet in a Metchosin CRD Park. Seen at the BioBlitz. Photo by Kem Luther.



Juvenile of the rare Blue-Grey Taildropper Slug. Photo by Lennart Sopuck.



Biologist Hans Roemer (far right) leads a BioBlitz team to Metchosin's Sugarloaf Mountain. Photo by Ken Wong.