

Metchosin Conducts Successful Second BioBlitz

By Kem Luther

The second Metchosin BioBlitz took place on May 5, 2012. More than fifty area specialists tallied almost 950 species, one hundred more than in 2011.

A BioBlitz is a 24-hour field inventory of species' populations in a restricted area. The term "BioBlitz" seems to have originated at an event held in Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens in Washington, D.C., in 1996. Over the last fifteen years, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of BioBlitzes have been held all over the world, and Canada hosts several important BioBlitz events each year. Here in B.C., there are annual BioBlitzes at Metchosin, Burnaby Lake and Whistler.

At the Metchosin event, the birders fanned out across the district early in the morning, eyes and ears cataloguing the species contributing to the dawn chorus. Later in the morning, specialists in plants, lichen, fungi, marine organisms, insects, slugs, reptiles, fish, amphibians, and mammals convened at the Mel Cooper cabin of the Metchosin Boys and Girls Club. The contingent included several members of the co-sponsoring Victoria Natural History Society. Members of the public soon arrived to join the experts. Andy MacKinnon's bagpipe voice organized the arrivals into several groups and sent them out to survey Camosun College's Van der Meer Reserve, the Pearson College



Specialists gather at the Mel Cooper cabin for the Metchosin BioBlitz. *Photo: Roger St. Pierre.*

waterfront, the shoreline from Weir's Beach to Witty's Lagoon, and the Boys and Girls Club property. The Department of National Defense (DND) gave Hans Roemer permission to lead a group of ten scientists into the rarely-visited Mary Hill section of Metchosin. Marine experts volunteered to rendezvous with a morning beach seine conducted by CRD Parks.

Three hours later the groups reconvened at the Mel Cooper cabin for a lunch of pizza and soup. At 1:00 p.m. the experts and members of the public formed themselves into new teams and headed out to several more Metchosin locations. One group (17 people) went to Camp Thunderbird. Another surveyed Blinkhorn Nature Park/Mount Blinkhorn. A third team visited Tower Point at Witty's Lagoon Park. Two of the experts arranged to meet up with a second CRD family program, a nature walk at Witty's Lagoon.

At the end of the afternoon forays, the BioBlitz experts went home to examine their collected specimens and to compile lists of what they had seen. Over the next three weeks, they submitted their lists to BioBlitz co-ordinators, who correlated and checked their sightings – almost two thousand of them – against standard lists. When the numbers were added up, organizers found that the experts had recorded:

Vascular plants	407	Other insects	20
Birds	100	Bees	23
Fungi	88	Algae	22
Lichens	78	Mammals	11
Bryophytes	66	Slugs/Snails	8
Marine organisms	72	Fish	5
Butterflies/Moths	31	Amphibians/Reptiles	5

Over 1200 Metchosin-based species have now been documented in the 2011 and 2012 BioBlitzes. A full listing of the species found at the two events can be viewed at the BioBlitz website www.metchosinbiodiversity.com.

Between 2% and 3% of the species found during the 2012 Metchosin BioBlitz are on provincial red or blue lists. Here are some of the more interesting finds from the species-at-risk subset:

1. A member of the team that Hans Roemer led into the DND lands caught a glimpse of *Rana aurora*, the blue-listed Red-legged Frog. In recent years the spread of the invasive Bullfrog into areas of Southern Vancouver Island has raised concerns about the viability of native frog populations. Bullfrogs are known to take over the habitats of the elusive Red-legged Frogs – they may even lunch on them. The District of Metchosin has allocated money in recent years to help control local Bullfrog populations.
2. A fascinating pair of rare mosses turned up at the 2012 BioBlitz. During the Mary Hill foray, moss expert Gerry Ansell honed in on a rarely-seen population of Rigid Apple Moss, *Bartramia stricta*. This red-listed moss, put at risk by the destruction of wide swaths of its Garry Oak habitat, has only been found on Vancouver Island in two



(Top) Common Bladder Moss (*Physcomitrium pyriforme*). Photo: Jamie Fenneman. (Below) Sharp-tailed Snake (*Contia tenuis*). Photo: Moralea Milne.

places: on Mary Hill and at Nanaimo's Notch Hill. Jamie Fenneman found a second rare (B.C. blue-listed) moss in the field near the Boys and Girls club cabin: *Physcomitrium pyriforme*, Common Bladder Moss, has attractive, urn-like capsules, as you can see in the accompanying photo. This moss prefers exposed, wet soils.

3. Moralea Milne found one of the Sharp-tailed Snakes (*Contia tenuis*) that live on her Camas Hill property. She was lucky – March and early April are better times to go looking for this small snake (it seldom reaches 30 cm in length). Endemic to California, Oregon, Washington, and B.C., Sharp-tailed Snakes are known from only a few Vancouver and Gulf Island sites. As you can see from Moralea's photo, the snake has an oddly stub-pointed tail.

4. Among the rare plants found by BioBlitz experts were two members of the genus *Sanicula*. The yellow flower clusters of the most common sanicle on Southern Vancouver Island, Pacific Sanicle (*Sanicula crassicaulis*), are found in woods and open areas throughout Metchosin. A red-listed cousin, Purple Sanicle (*Sanicula bipinnatifida*), occasionally turns up in the same habitat. This plant, as the name suggests, has purple flower heads. At the BioBlitz Jamie Fenneman found Purple Sanicle on private property on Leefield Road. Joe Antos came across another rare cousin, *Sanicula arctopoides*, the Bear's Foot Sanicle (also called Footsteps of Spring), at one of the CRD parks. Bear's Foot Sanicle has yellow flowers, grows lower to the ground than its cousin sanicles, and likes to live on bluffs near the ocean.

The Metchosin BioBlitz is organized by the Metchosin Biodiversity Project. www.metchosin-biodiversity.com for further information. It acknowledges the organizations whose support made the 2012 BioBlitz possible: the Metchosin Foundation, CRD Parks, the Victoria Natural History Society, CRD Water, DND/Rocky Point, and the District of Metchosin. Gifts of food were received from Costco, My Chosen Pizza, Martha Haylor, and Jo Mitchell.

The next Metchosin BioBlitz is scheduled for Friday night, April 26, 2013, and Saturday daytime, April 27, 2013. Anyone wishing to add their expertise to the next blitz should contact Andy MacKinnon, metchosinmacs@gmail.com

*But nature is a stranger yet;
The ones that cite her most
Have never passed her haunted house,
Nor simplified her ghost.
To pity those that know her not
Is helped by the regret
That those that know her, know her less
The nearer her they get.*

—from “What mystery pervades a well!”
by Emily Dickinson



Purple Sanicle (*Sanicula bipinnatifida*). Photo: Jamie Fenneman.