

Second Metchosin BioBlitz

Kem Luther

A second Metchosin BioBlitz took place on May 4 and 5, 2012. More than fifty invited specialists found nearly 950 species, a hundred more than they found last year.

Metchosin's 2012 Bioblitz began Friday night, May 4, at the District Office's council chambers with slide talks by Andy MacKinnon and Ann Nightingale. Ann took a group on an owling expedition following her talk.

Early on Saturday morning birding groups fanned out across the district to spy on the dawn chorus. Ann, after only a few hours sleep, co-ordinated the search. By the end of the day birders had identified a hundred avian species.

At 8:30 am specialists in plants, lichen, fungi, marine organisms, insects, spiders, slugs, reptiles, fish, amphibians, and mammals began to arrive at the Mel Cooper cabin of the Metchosin Boys and Girls Club. Waiting for them at the cabin was a hot drink and warm sticky buns (courtesy of Martha Haylor). The specialists picked up their gifts of BioBlitz hats, CRD water bottles, and a buildable wooden model of a horse or flying pig crafted by Metchosin's own Derek Wulff.

Members of the public soon arrived to join the experts. With Andy MacKinnon's help (and bagpipe voice) the attendees were soon organized into groups to foray (1) Camosun College's Van der Meer Reserve, (2) Pearson College's waterfront, (3) the shoreline from Weir's Beach to Witty's Lagoon, (4) Department of National Defense's (DND's) Mary Hill, and (5) the Boys and Girls Club property. Marine experts volunteered to connect up with a CRD beach seine at Witty's Lagoon.

Three hours later the groups reconvened at the Mel Cooper cabin to enjoy soups prepared by Metchosin Councillor Jo Mitchell and pizza donated by My-Chosen Pizza. At 1:00 pm experts and members of the public formed themselves into new teams and headed out to several more locations. One group of seventeen went to Camp Thunderbird. Another team surveyed Blinkhorn Nature Park and Mount Blinkhorn. A third group visited Tower Point. Two experts arranged to meet up with a second CRD program, a nature walk at Witty's Lagoon.

At the end of the afternoon forays, BioBlitz experts went home to examine their specimens (collected with a special CRD permit) and to compile lists of what they had seen. Over the next three weeks

they submitted their lists to BioBlitz co-ordinators Andy MacKinnon, Moralea Milne, and Kem Luther. The co-ordinators correlated, recorded, and checked the sightings – almost two thousand of them – against standard lists. When the numbers were added up, organizers found that the experts had sighted:

Vascular plants	407
Birds	100
Fungi	88
Lichens	78
Bryophytes	66
Marine organisms	72
Butterflies/Moths	31
Other insects	20
Bees	23
Algae	22
Mammals	11
Slugs/Snails	8
Fish	5
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 web site (www.metchosinbiodiversity.com).

More than two percent of the species encountered during the 2012 BioBlitz have been classified as at-risk species by the province (i.e., on the provincial red and blue lists). Libby Avis, a member of the team that Hans Roemer led into the DND lands, submitted a sighting of the red-legged Frog, *Rana aurora*. This amphibian lives in quiet ponds and lakes and seldom ventures far from the water. In recent years the spread of the invasive bullfrog has raised concerns about the viability of BC's red-legged frog population. Bullfrogs tend to drive away the elusive *Rana aurora* by occupying their habitats. They may even lunch on them. The District of Metchosin has allocated money in recent years to help suppress local bullfrog populations.

At this BioBlitz Moralea Milne found one of the many sharp-tailed snakes that live on her Camas Hill home. She was lucky; March and early April are better times to look. Sharp-tailed snakes are small, seldom reaching 30 cm in length. Endemic to California, Oregon, Washington, and BC, they are known from only a few Vancouver Island sites. The snake has an oddly stub-pointed tail.

Among the rare plants found by BioBlitz experts were two members of the genus *Sanicula*. Sanicles are members of the larger carrot family of plants. The most common sanicle in our area is pacific sanicle, *Sanicula crassicaulis*. It has yellow flower clusters and can be 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. Jamie Fenneman found purple sanicle on private property at Leefield Rd. Joe Antos came across another rare cousin, *Sanicula arctopoides*, bear's foot sanicle (also called footsteps of spring), at a CRD Park. 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.

Several of the birds spotted at the second Metchosin BioBlitz have been designated as endangered species. Among the endangered birds seen on BioBlitz day were the three species of BC cormorants. The two marine species of these birds, Brandt's cormorant (*Phalacrocorax penicillatus*) and the pelagic cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus pelagicus*), have been given a red rating, the highest level of provincial concern. The Brandt's cormorant is larger and more gregarious than the pelagic. It has black plumage with a pale throat chinstrap and sports a blue chin flap in mating season. The smaller Pelagic has a broomstick neck and white on its flanks in mating season. Both nest on Vancouver Island, the Brandt's typically on the west side of Vancouver Island, the pelagic along the Strait.

The BioBlitz co-ordinators thank the many people and organizations who made the 2012 BioBlitz possible. Our partners include the Metchosin Foundation, CRD Parks, the Victoria Natural History Society, CRD Water, the District of Metchosin, Costco, and My Chosen Pizza.

The next Metchosin BioBlitz is scheduled for Friday night, April 26, 2013, and Saturday daytime, April 27, 2013.