

Unusual species found in Metchosin bioblitz

[Judith Lavoie \(/authors?author=Judith Lavoie\)](#) / Times Colonist



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A rare thrush, a lungless salamander and mushrooms that look like pixie cups are among the special finds now being tabulated by organizers of Metchosin's third annual bioblitz.

Species specialists from throughout B.C. descended on Metchosin last week to document as many species as they could find in a day — and the result is a record, said organizer Kem Luther.

"We found over 1,200 species. The first year we found 850 and last year was 930 and we sort of had our fingers crossed for 1,000 this year, but, lo and behold, we had 1,200," he said.

Birders found a Townsend's solitaire, a rarely seen thrush that feeds on juniper berries, and a biologist found two ensatinas, lungless salamanders that breathe through the pores of their skin.

"They're weird-looking things with big eyes and they look almost alien," Luther said.

"Because they breathe through their skin, you have to be careful handling them because it's like putting a hand over someone's mouth."

Among the 55 species-experts, who are teamed with local residents, was a large contingent of moss experts — or bryologists — and that meant a large jump in the number of mosses found, Luther said.

"There's an interesting new moss called *Crumia*," he said. "As far as I know, it's not usually found on Vancouver Island, so when one group found it, they all traipsed down to the shore. The moss people got very excited."

With the help of algae experts from the University of B.C., the number of seaweeds almost quadrupled to more than 100.

The basic goal of the bioblitz is to record as many readily observable species as possible, said organizer Andy MacKinnon, an ecosystem scientist.

"But there are larger goals. We want to connect community members to the environment. Just having a fun day with fellow researchers in a competition against time and space is also part of the agenda."

The number of species shows Metchosin is special, said Coun. Moralea Milne, who originally came up with the idea of holding a bioblitz.

"We've got some of the rarest habitats in Canada here. Our Garry oak meadows are important remnants of a once-extensive, now endangered ecosystem."

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