

Ideas for BioBlitz activities

A BioBlitz is a 24 hour race against the clock to find and record as many living things as possible within a defined area. Below are a range of ideas for activities that will help you and your participants to find the wildlife at your site. All ideas were gathered during BioBlitz workshops at the OPAL East Midlands Environmental Education Conference in February 2012. Thank you to all the workshop delegates for sharing your fantastic ideas!

Worm charming

Spend 15 minutes trying to get as many worms out of the ground as possible. Equipment – plastic pint glasses to put the worms in, tent pegs and hazard tape to mark the grid, worm charming equipment e.g. garden fork, musical instruments. More info at www.wormcharming.com

Sweep netting

Ask park rangers not to cut an area of grass for a month or so before the event to give you a good area to sweep net in without damaging any valuable habitats. Cordon off the area with bunting so people can't run off with sweep nets or other equipment.

BioBlitz Hoopla

Throw a hula hoop, then spend time trying to find all the living things in that circle.

Kitchen roll 'microscope'

Use a kitchen roll cut in half (toilet rolls are best avoided for health and safety reasons) and ask children to look through it – makes them look slowly and closely at things.

Tom Thumb's Valley

Or Thumbelina's Valley for girls! Tie a piece of string between two cocktail sticks in the ground. Children have to look for all the living things along that line.

Plant picture

As an alternative to finding different species in a BioBlitz, for younger children focus on finding as many different colours or textures as possible. Stick a strip of double sided tape on a piece of card and ask the children to pick tiny bits of plants to make a picture. 'Caterpillar munches' is a good way of explaining how to take only a tiny piece of a plant – think of the size a caterpillar would bite.

Minibeast pledge

At the bottom of any activity sheets, add a 'minibeast pledge' which the children have to sign. This will help to ensure careful treatment of the animals and to encourage children to empathise with them. "I promise to return this bug to where I found it, unharmed and with all its legs".

Pond dipping

If a pond isn't safe for children to dip in, do the dip yourself in advance and empty the water and contents into large plastic storage boxes. Children can then pond dip in the boxes, using small goldfish nets or tea strainers.

'Pond dipping pirates' is a fun way to engage children with pond dipping. Assign different values to each type of invertebrate – the children have to collect as many different coins as possible.

Tree beating

Use a white sheet or pale coloured umbrella (upside down) to catch the invertebrates as you tap the branches of a tree. For hedges, use a pale coloured dustpan and brush. 'Brush' the hedge, catching any invertebrates in the dustpan.

Identifying poo

A gruesome sounding title always attracts children! A recommended book to accompany this kind of activity is 'The Story of the Little Mole Who Knew it Was None of His Business'.

Indoor minibeast safari

Great to prepare children for how and where to look for minibeasts, and what they might find before going outdoors. It also works well as a wet weather activity.

Paint a large cardboard box brown and green, and fill with leaves, logs etc. Cut out laminated pictures of invertebrates (or other creatures that may be found) and hide them in the appropriate places in the box.

Paint a large cardboard box blue. Cut out laminated pictures of pond invertebrates (e.g. from Field Studies Council guides), attach a paperclip to each and place them in the box. Give the children a cane with string attached and a magnet on the end, so they can 'go fishing' for the invertebrates.

Pitfall trapping

Set pitfall traps in advance – a plastic drinks cup set in the ground so that its top is flush with the soil. Ground dwelling invertebrates will crawl along and fall in. Collect some on the morning of your BioBlitz so you have something instant to add to the species list and to display on the show and tell table. Collect the rest on guided walks throughout the day. If working with children, you could ask them to help you set them up the day before, to better engage them with the process.

Sand trap

In advance of a BioBlitz you could set up a sand trap alongside a fence or wall, or in a likely pathway. The paw prints of any mammals passing by will be shown in the sand. Alternatively use clay. Keep it moist by standing it on top of a layer of oasis which is sitting in a tray of water.

Anabat remote sensing

If a local bat group or university has an Anabat detector, it can be used to remotely sense bats and record their presence overnight. Data can then be looked at the following morning.

Fur traps

Some mammals can be detected using fur traps. Contact your local mammal group or the Mammal Society for more information.

Eye-shine surveys

Use torches at night to survey in ponds for frogs and toads, and elsewhere for small mammals.

Rap or paint your BioBlitz results

Rather than just create a list of all the species found, encourage participants to create a rap or poem of the findings, or to paint the species list instead.

Meet the Species Medal Challenge

To tie in with the Olympics, the Meet the Species project involves surveying 2012 different species this year. There is also a 'top 12' list. Use this, or make your own 'top 12' list for your event. Award children gold, silver and bronze medals depending on how many of these species they can find. See <http://www.bnhc.org.uk/home/meet-the-species.html> for more information.

Flower folklore trail

Cut out a picture of a particular flower and hang it near the living flower on your site. Parents are given a card with folklore tales about each flower. Children have to find the flowers, and when they find one, the parent reads out the folklore story.

Log piles

Involve your participants in making a log pile six months or so before your BioBlitz event. On the day, you can explore what has moved in!

BioBlitz one habitat at a time

If covering your whole site at once will spread your volunteers too thin, concentrate on one habitat at a time. Focus all your staff, volunteers and public in one area (e.g. woodland) for an hour, then all move round together to the pond, then on to the grassland etc. Throughout the day you will cover your whole site, just not all at once!

OPAL surveys!

With all the resources available to download and each activity taking around an hour, OPAL surveys are ideal activities for BioBlitzes. Use them to survey the earthworms, lichens, pond life, hedgerow plants and invertebrates.

www.OPALexplorenature.org.