

Out and About with Outreach



BioBlitz in Poland

By **Róisín Nash and Barbara Maciejewska**

A BioBlitz is an event in which the participants race to find as many species as possible within a given time. It is way to bring together scientists, volunteers and the local community to discover, identify and learn about the flora and fauna at their back door, e.g. in a local park or natural area.

The emphasis in a BioBlitz is on recording the total number of species, not individually naming every creature that has been found. The BioBlitz is a tool for local biodiversity exploration, education and investigation which is usually coordinated by museums, botanic gardens or local authorities. The result of the race, which typically lasts 12 hours, is a new dataset on the distribution and occurrence of fauna and flora within a specific area. Associated with the taxonomy are a number of Outreach activities that help to raise public awareness of the vast array of species (biodiversity) living in an urban reserve and its relevance to everyday life.

The first Polish BioBlitz was hosted by the Institute of Oceanology PAS in Sopot, Poland, as part of a three-day science festival in May 2008 – the VIth Baltic Science Festival. The BioBlitz, which was supported by MarBEF, involved a four-hour competition between the terrestrial botanists and entomologists from the Institute of Biology, University of Gdansk, and the marine biologists from the Sea Fisheries Institute, Institute of Oceanography and the Institute of Oceanology. This event was a part of the Baltic Science Day held in Sopot and attracted a number of visitors from neighbouring primary and secondary schools.

The chosen study location was a dune with a nearby seaside park for the terrestrial study and a public beach with shallow bathing water for the marine study. Twelve scientists identified the flora and fauna (macro-, meio- and micro-organisms) which were collected by students and scientists, and even some of the visitors got involved. Each visitor had the opportunity to learn about the different collection techniques, how the organisms are identified and what the processed data looks like. Everyone had a chance to identify some of the organisms using taxonomic keys with the help of the scientists. This year, the competition was won by the terrestrial group, who found and identified nearly 200 taxa of plants and insects. The marine group identified 140 taxa within the same time.

The BioBlitz was a huge success and was enjoyed by all who participated. It is hoped that this will be an annual event in the Baltic Science Festival. This year, the festival took place in nine Polish cities, with 3,800 people from over 30 institutions involved in its organization. There was coverage on national and regional TV stations and radio stations throughout Poland. It is estimated that 75,000 participants took part in the Science Festival in 2008.

