

[Colliers Reserve BioBlitz](#) - March 24th, 2008

[Colliers Reserve Country Club](#) in Naples, Florida

*"The World's First Audubon International Signature Sanctuary"*



# How to Organize and Run a BioBlitz

by Peter W. Thayer

## Here is what our group learned when we ran our first BioBlitz We hope this information will help others

There is a lot more planning required than you think -- so **get all the help you can.**

It is very important to have an initial meeting where everyone "gets on board" and understands what you are trying to do.

You can form committees to handle each major task, but make sure one person on each committee accepts final responsibility.

1. **Select a site** for the BioBlitz. We had a well-defined 450 acre site and it worked very well. Select a site where you will have an automatic sense of community and civic pride. A local park, nature center or neighborhood would be ideal. An entire county would probably be way too big.

2. **Select a date** for the BioBlitz. We selected the Monday after Easter since we are a resort community in Florida and there were many visiting children and grandchildren here that day. A Saturday or Sunday may be better in most cases. Earth Day, Memorial Day or Labor Day may work for you. It helps if there is a lot of nature activity -- such as spring migration -- on the day you select. It also helps to have your event when the weather is nice since you may be out most of the day.

3. **Decide who will participate** in the BioBlitz. Are you limiting participation to club or organization members? Is it open to the public? Do you need to pre-register to participate? Are children welcome and are there any age limits? We limited ours to the members of Colliers Reserve Country Club and their friends and families. There are 300 families here that are members. We had about 65 that participated.

4. **Organize outings during the day.** We structured outings based on scientific Classes such as birds, plants, reptiles & amphibians, insects, fish, etc. We had an "expert" lead each group. The goal was not only to find as many species as possible, but to educate, inform and inspire the others in each group. This worked very well for us. There are other ways to organize outings. You could have a leisurely general nature outing for kids and their parents and other specialized groups that moved much more quickly. You could divide the area into sections and have a group count everything in their section. You could have individual experts go out on their own to quickly see as many species as possible. Or you could have a combination of all of the above.

5. **Set up a BioBlitz headquarters.** We found that it was important to have a central meeting place. Most of the outings left from the headquarters and the results were tallied here. We had a large whiteboard with updated

results. We also had checklists for each Class of species. It is important to have someone at the headquarters at all times. A variety of Field Guides, reference books, insect nets, magnifying glasses and other equipment were kept here. Local nature organizations had free literature available at the headquarters as well. We also had drinks, snacks and a light lunch available.

A 3x8 foot [BioBlitz headquarters banner](#) made it all seem quite "official". Take local photos for your banner with a digital camera. Assemble them in Photoshop and set the dimensions for your new file to 3 feet by 8 feet. I know this sounds crazy, but it works.

**6. Create checklists for the BioBlitz.** This was **by far the most time-consuming part of the entire BioBlitz.** We created checklists using the [Birder's Diary software](#). There are checklists available for birds as well as many other classes of living things. We used Birder's Diary to create checklists that included just those species that were likely to be seen in our local area. We already had a [bird checklist](#) for Colliers reserve with 140 species that had been compiled over the past ten years. We even has a ["Bird Hit List"](#) that told folks were to look. But everything else was created from scratch. Our [dragonfly/damselfly checklist](#) included many species seen in Collier county, Florida -- but we spotted only a few species on the day of the BioBlitz. This pointed out the need to keep updating the checklists over the entire year!

We knew a lot about the birds and virtually nothing about anything else!! The insect checklist was impossible to create ahead of time, other than for about 20 common insects. We added many species to the Insect checklist after the BioBlitz was over -- the University of Florida later helped us identify some of the more obscure discoveries such as *Predatory Stink Bug*. We quickly realized that many insects can only be identified to the family or genus level rather than the species level. We made a mistake with the checklists. We listed things in taxonomic order and we should have listed them in alphabetic order by common name -- especially the plants and trees. Our plant and tree list is still being updated a month after the BioBlitz ended. We were able to find most taxonomic information by going to [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and typing in the common or scientific name along with the word "taxonomy".

**7. Invite local experts to help you.** You need experts in plants, insects, birds, etc. The bird expert is usually easy to find -- the others are not. Start by asking local university professors, county wildlife/insect control staff, nature center or state park staff, Audubon Club officers, landscape designers, etc.. Ask them each if they have any recommendations. Some may volunteer or their job may involve doing things like this as part of a community outreach mandate. Others may require a fee for their time.

Once they agree to help, set up a specific time when they will be able to attend. Make sure that someone is there to meet them when they arrive for the BioBlitz. Someone should also introduce them to the group before their outing starts. After their outing, have them record the species seen -- and be sure to have them make corrections to your checklists so next year will be much easier! You may want to arrange to have someone take them to lunch or dinner. Be sure to write them a thank-you after the event and let them know the results of your BioBlitz.

**8. Gather Field Guides, reference books and equipment needed for collecting in the field.** If folks bring their personal copies of Field Guides, be sure each has their name written on the inside cover. You may want to have insect nets, special buckets to collect pond life or insect collection jars available for the insects. [BioQuip](#) is a good place to get these. For a big selection of field guides, try [Online Nature Mall - Nature Books](#). [FYI, Pete Thayer, the author of this article, owns [OnlineNatureMall](#) and [Thayer Birding Software](#)]

You will also need to arrange for tables, chairs, easels, whiteboards, pens, extra checklists, food and drink, shovels, fishing poles, zip-lock baggies and more. A day before the BioBlitz, you may want to set out insect traps baited with sugar water or cookies. A week before the BioBlitz we got some 1 3/8 inch PVC pipe, cut it into 4 foot sections, and pounded them into the mud near the lakes. In southern Florida, Tree frogs are attracted to these. (Look INSIDE the pipe for the frogs!!)

**9. Let folks know about the BioBlitz.** Publicity is very important. Make sure the folks who are eligible to attend know about the BioBlitz. Emails and newsletter articles starting up to a month before the big event are a good idea. Posters at the site of the BioBlitz may also be possible. We set up a web site at [www.WildBirds.com/BioBlitz](http://www.WildBirds.com/BioBlitz) to give folks more information about the Colliers Reserve BioBlitz. We also put posters in our golf carts that said "Ask Me About the BioBlitz." You may want to have articles in the local newspaper or even talk to local TV stations about sending a crew out to cover the action. (Little kids with butterfly nets are a good visual for TV, as are little old ladies holding snakes). Follow up with the press -- they may want to do additional articles about your results. Be sure to

have plenty of good digital photos that you can provide to the newspapers or local magazines (They will need to be 300 dpi for print work).

10. **Build excitement by having a Guess the Total Species contest.** We had a contest where folks could put their guess in an envelope, along with \$5. The winner took home half of the pot and the other half was used to buy Field Guides and equipment for the members of our community. These books are now kept in the club's library where anyone can borrow them for a few hours.

11. **Review your results.** Have a post-BioBlitz meeting to go over what went right and what went wrong. What can you do next time to improve your results. We have decided that we may want to do another BioBlitz six months after our original attempt -- different seasons would make it easier to see a different group of insects and birds. We may also want to do a two-day BioBlitz. Yes, this sort of defeats the purpose of seeing how many species you can see in 24 hours, but one day was just too hectic. Some of the outside experts did not have the crowds of people with them that we had expected. A two-day event also helps if the weather is bad one day (it was too windy to attract any moths the evening of our BioBlitz.) Finally, we discovered that most of our insect trap bait was eaten by racoons, so we will use a special insect trap that looks like a test tube next year. And next time we will look for the tree frogs INSIDE the PVC pipe.

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