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## BioBlitz: A 24-hour diversity checkup

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 By Dev Meyers



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Maria Wheeler, of LaVale, Md., left, Laura Howell, of Pittsburgh, and Stephanie Dowell, of Cana, Winchester, Ohio, look in a seine, a type of fishing net, that contains samples from Turtle Creek, which will be cataloged later. Students, science professionals and the general public participated in BioBlitz in Duff Park, Murrysville.

Despite heavy acid mine drainage, some species of fish are managing to survive in Turtle Creek.

That was just one of the discoveries made at the BioBlitz last weekend at Duff Park, Murrysville.

The event ran from 6 p.m. Friday to 6 p.m. Saturday. It was hosted by Friends of Murrysville Parks and sponsored in part by Duquesne University, Bayer School of Natural and Environmental Sciences and the Center for Environmental Research and Education.

The BioBlitz was organized by Dr. Kyle W. Selcer, associate professor of biology at Duquesne University, and the Friends of Murrysville Parks.

Scientists, volunteers and community members joined forces to identify as many living organisms as possible over a 24-hour period. This was done because different organisms are found at different times of the day and night.

"This BioBlitz hopefully brought attention to Duff Park as a natural resource that needs to be preserved and protected, as well as enjoyed," Dr. Selcer said.

Information gathered could help focus attention on potential problems or opportunities for preserving biodiversity in the park.

There were 142 people participating in activities that included a twilight nature tour, a demonstration of small mammal trapping by Dr. Selcer, a demonstration of bat mist-netting by Steve Pernick, and a talk on how to track endangered bats using modern technology.

Bat mist-netting involves setting up fine-mesh nets to capture bats that are then recorded and released.

On Saturday morning, Dr. Brady Porter and his graduate students from Duquesne demonstrated how scientists collect fish using electricity. And there was a nature tour along Turtle Creek that afternoon.

Dr. William Powers, president of Pix Controller, led a team of 20 who took more than 400 photos of Duff Park wildlife over three days. They used high-tech, motion-activated digital cameras and video cameras to shoot red fox, opossum, deer and raccoons.

Pix Controller equipment is used worldwide for photographing rare and hard-to-find species.

Some species found are still being identified. But the preliminary count is 154 -- 70 plants, 40 birds, 17 mollusks, 13 mammals, six amphibians, one reptile and seven fish.

Dr. Porter found more species of fish in Turtle Creek than were found previously.

Dr. Tim Pearce, of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, indicated that the proportion of native mollusks to introduced mollusks was quite high for a municipal park, indicating that Duff Park is in a good natural condition for a municipal park.

The term BioBlitz was coined by the National Park Service in 1996. In 1997, the Carnegie Museum of Natural History conducted the first BioBlitz in the Pittsburgh area, at Riverview Park on the North Side.

The goal of the BioBlitz is to establish the degree of biodiversity in an area. It must take place over a 24-hour period.

For more information on wildlife videography, go to [www.pixcontroller.com](http://www.pixcontroller.com)

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