

Acton WildAware Beacon article
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Acton Bioblitz 2016 planned for June 17th - 18th

A bioblitz is an opportunity for biologists, naturalists and environmentalists to work in collaboration with the general public to gather in a given area and—in a 24-hour period—complete a directed survey of all living species while seeing first-hand the importance of a healthy, active ecosystem in their own community.

In an interview with *Audubon Magazine*, Edward O. Wilson, famed environmentalist, was asked about the inspiration for the first ever bioblitz; where it was held and how he came up with the concept. “Peter Alden, who lives in Concord, Mass., and is one of the most extraordinary general naturalists, first conceived of the idea of Bioblitz in the summer of 1998. I had been in touch with him for a long time, and together we pressed forward on the first bioblitz, working around Walden Pond. It was an enormous success, and within three years every school system in Massachusetts was engaged in bioblitz.” It was held on July 4th 1998, commemorating the day Thoreau moved into his cabin at Walden Pond. The first U.S. National Park Service-National Geographic BioBlitz was held at Rock Creek Park in Washington, D.C., in 2007. National Geographic has helped conduct a bioblitz in a different national park each year leading up to the U.S. National Park Service Centennial on August 25, 2016. Here in Massachusetts, Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area will team with Harvard University.

Families are invited to be citizen scientists in Acton, on June 17th and 18th for the Acton Bioblitz! From their participation in the Bioblitz, residents will learn about identifying animal species that they see often or discover for the first time, and contribute to creating a town inventory of wildlife within our local ecosystems. We are including our neighbors in Boxborough since our children share the same school system as well as some wetlands and conservation lands (like Guggins Brook, for example). But we request that you survey animals in Acton for mapping purposes. Acton will enlist some specialists to be on hand to explore and identify animals, including Natural Resources Director, Tom Tidman; biologist Brian Butler from Oxbow Associates; and Conservation Commissioner Andy Magee. The results of the 2016 Acton Bioblitz will be published in The Beacon newspaper and shared with local conservation organizations such as Mass Audubon, Mass Division of Conservation and Recreation, Mass Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Acton Conservation Trust and Sudbury Valley Trustees.

Our Bioblitz will be a fun, family-friendly endeavor that encourages connection to the natural world while learning about our own area’s biodiversity, distribution and abundance. Everyone is invited to explore their own backyard, Acton conservation lands and recreation areas for all manner of insects (such as bees, ants and butterflies); turtles; birds; amphibians such as frogs, toads and salamanders; aquatic mammals like beaver and otters; terrestrial mammals such as squirrels and woodchucks, and raptors like hawks and owls. People will

keep a list of the animal species they record, and location by home address or title (ex. NARA, Great Hill, Veteran's Field, a school, Bruce Freeman Rail Trail at Great Road). We will make a map with red dots indicating each and every location of the Bioblitz data collection.

During the next couple of months leading up to the Bioblitz you can take note of the animals you see around home, at the bus stop and while driving around town. Keep a clipboard, pencil, magnifying glass and binoculars handy. Borrow books from the library or get out all your home wildlife guides. Get out your cameras and smart-phone cameras to take pictures to help identify animals. In September, Acton Natural Resources will host a public gathering and celebration at NARA Park with a wild animal handler, a WildAware cake, free buttons and games. Posters from the past year demonstrating public photo submissions will be on display as well as the resulting inventory and town map identifying survey locations generated from the Bioblitz.

More information about the 2016 Acton Bioblitz will be shared in future articles leading up to the event.

To learn more about Bioblitz and biodiversity:

E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation: <http://eowilsonfoundation.org/>

Interview with E.O. Wilson about the first Bioblitz; Audubon Magazine: <http://archive.audubonmagazine.org/features0707/bioblitz-webexclusives.html>

National Park Service 100th Anniversary Bioblitz information: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/biodiversity/national-parks-bioblitz.htm>

Paula Goodwin is a member of the Acton Conservation Commission who introduced WildAware with Acton Natural Resource Assistant Bettina Abe. WildAware is a program sponsored by the Town of Acton Natural Resources Department that began in September and will continue through the summer of 2016. The purpose of WildAware is to educate the community about the existence and habits of wild creatures, and the goal is increased community awareness of shared habitats. For information, call 978-929-6634 or send email to nr@acton-ma.gov.