

FEATURES

The urban jungle

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JUST how much wildlife can you find around the nation's capital city? Apparently quite a lot if you assemble an experienced team of nature enthusiasts. This is exactly what happened at the recent Port-of-Spain Bioblitz held from November 4 to 6.

For the fifth year in a row the University of the West Indies Zoology Museum and the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists Club organised a Bioblitz. This one was a bit different from past events as we decided to do it in a major urban area rather than out in the swamps or forests.

The Botanic Gardens was chosen as the base camp for the Bioblitz as it is a good location to survey and, more importantly, interact with the public. The Horticultural Services Division in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and the Friends of the Botanic Gardens of Trinidad and Tobago were delighted to help with hosting the event. The Orientation Centre at the front gates of the garden was filled with displays and the equipment needed for the surveying and identification. On the lawn nearby were several marquees to host the Nature Fair part of this year's event. The fair was an opportunity for over 20 organisations, groups and charities to spread the message about the work they are doing to help the environment.

They included groups that promote eco-tourism and conservation work like Asa Wright Nature Centre, Turtle Village Trust, Nature Seekers,



Students of the St Francois Girls College, Belmont, check out the display at the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists Club (TFNC) tent at the Botanic Gardens during Bioblitz 2016.



President Anthony Carmona interacts with some schoolchildren visiting the Bioblitz event.



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

Pointe-a-Pierre Wildfowl Trust and Paria Springs Tours.

There was also participation from the Environmental Management Authority, the Institute of Marine Affairs and the Environmental Policy and Planning Division. Youth groups were represented by the UWI Biological Society and the Caribbean Youth Environment Network. Groups promoting a sustainable future like Fondes Amandes Community Reforestation Project, Caribbean Permacul-



A Bioblitzer discovers a manicou crab during the Bioblitz held in Port-of-Spain from November 4 to 6.

ture Consultants (who run Wa Samaki), and aQuaTT had some fantastic displays including live fish and bees. Animal-focused groups put on some great displays including lots of snakes, caiman and lizards at the Serpentarium tent and a variety of birds of prey at the El Socorro Centre for Wildlife Conservation tent. Trinibats showed visitors different ways of surveying for mam-

mals and the National Herbarium and the TT Orchid Society showcased some of the nation's botanical wonders.

Marine aspects were covered by the TT Eco Divers Club, the University of Trinidad and Tobago Marine Sciences unit and the Environmental Research Institute Charlotteville (ERIC).

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FEATURES

Bioblitzers identify 730 species around PoS

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Other groups like The Council for Presidents of the Environment (COPE), Water aCCSIS and the Erasmus Mundus Association also did some great outreach.

Over the course of the Friday we had many school groups visit the nature fair. There were trails and quizzes that took the children all over the Botanic Gardens learning about the biodiversity of TT and what had been discovered in past Bioblitz events.

On Friday afternoon the nature fair had a

special surprise when the President Anthony Carmona dropped by to have a look around. He spent almost an hour speaking with schoolchildren and exhibitors, viewing the displays and being asked to pose for many, many photographs.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, Clarence Rambharat also dropped by to see the displays and talk with those attending.

Friday evening saw the beginning of the surveying as Bioblitzers assembled in the gardens. The mammal team set up



A team carries out a surveying at the mouth of the Maraval River.

mist nets to catch bats and over several hours managed to find nine species including the uncommon white-winged vampire bat. Some of the reptile and amphibian group searched by torchlight all through the gardens whilst several small groups searched for insects, spiders and scorpions. One interesting find was a boa constrictor in the vegetation at the top of

the gardens. Saturday was the main day for the Bioblitz groups to survey all over the city. The birders were up early doing some banding in the gardens whilst others searched the nearby forests. The aquatic group headed to Invader's Bay and the mouth of the Maraval River to search the waters and then headed up to sample the St Ann's River near Fondes Amandes.

The mammal team retrieved camera traps from Caroni Swamp, the St Ann's peak trail and around the Botanic Gardens. The plant and fungus groups searched all over the city and up into the hills. On Saturday night the herpetology and invertebrate groups headed out again to find nocturnal species.

One interesting addition this year was the Microbe Team who had collected air, water and soil samples from around the city. They then cultivated the samples in a lab to see what species of bacteria and microfungi they could find and they got some great results.

Sunday morning

found many of the Bioblitzers identifying their last few specimens, using hand lenses, microscopes, books and their vast range of experience. Surveying stopped at noon and the final total was announced around 1.30 pm by this writer, organiser of the Bioblitz.

The result was an unexpectedly high 730 species! This included 16 mammals, 97 birds, 19 reptiles, nine frogs, 15 fish, 245 invertebrates, over 60 fungi, 20 bacteria and 246 plants. As always happens after a Bioblitz a few more species came to light as photos were checked and as specimens were identified so the total for the final Bioblitz report will be even higher than the 730 reported on the day.

By 5 pm on the Sunday most of the groups and displays had packed up after a long but rewarding weekend and it was the turn of the Green Screen Environmental Film Festival to take over the Botanic Gardens. Organised by Sustain T&T the festival ran from November 1 to 12. No sooner had the crew set up the outdoor screen and

chairs than the weather, which had been great all weekend long, suddenly changed and heavy rain battered the city. The screening was moved inside the Orientation Centre which filled up very quickly as many guests came. After the first few short films the skies cleared and a screen was hastily erected outdoors once more and over 120 guests stayed to watch the feature film.

The event was sponsored once again by First Citizens along with Atlantic, and Bermudez donated snacks to help fuel the Bioblitzers. Thanks from the UWIZM and the TTENC to all of the survey teams, the groups who joined in the nature fair and all the members of the public who came along to see what was going on.

The location for next year's Bioblitz is still to be decided but wherever we go in TT I'm sure there will be exciting new discoveries to be made.

For more info: see the T&T Bioblitz, TTFNC and UWIZM Facebook pages or visit the Bioblitz website at sta.uwi.edu/fst/lifesciences/BioBlitzHome.asp

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