

FEATURES

Bioblitz goes to deep south

ALEXIS
MARIANES AND
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TT Field Naturalists' Club (TTFNC), along with the University of the West Indies Zoology Museum, will once again run their annual BioBlitz this weekend. This year marks the sixth bioblitz (an intense survey of biodiversity in a particular area). Previous years have taken the event to Tucker Valley, Arima Valley, Nariva Swamp, Charlotteville and Port of Spain.

It is a common complaint that southern Trinidad, especially the "deep south," is overlooked by event organisers, so a decision was made to go as far south as possible, all the way down to Trinidad's "big toe" - Icacos. The southwest peninsula is the home of mangroves, forests, coconut plantations, mud volcanoes, gas seeps, beaches, rivers, and swamp habitats that support a myriad network of organisms. The area has been heavily affected by humans over the years, with much of the original forest replaced by cocal (extensive coconut plantations). The coastline has also been affected by more natural forces, with erosion in some areas and accretion in others. Despite this, there is still much to be discovered. Owing to its close proximity to Venezuela, only seven kilometres away



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
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across the Columbus Channel, Icacos has often been an entry point for all sorts of interesting animals and plants, which raft across on mats of vegetation.

The bioblitz brings together scientists, naturalists, nature lovers and the public in an exciting recreational setting, ideal for learning, exploring and liming. Around 100 specialists will gather at the base camp at the Icacos Government Primary School not only to survey for wildlife but also to share those findings with the public.

The 24 hours of surveying will begin at noon on Saturday, when teams of scientists and volunteers will begin collecting data on all the plants, insects, fish, algae, fungi, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, and birds they can find. For some, like the plant and fungi teams, it will be a case of walking through the forests and photographing or identifying what they see right in front of them; some specimens may be collected and taken back to base camp for a closer look.

For other teams, more specialised equipment is used. The mammal group

has set up trail cameras to see what can be found walking through the forests at night and mist nets to temporarily catch bats so they can be identified and then released. The aquatic team will use a variety of nets, grabs and traps to find fish, crustaceans and molluscs, as well as some of the small-

er marine creatures like plankton. Other groups, like those looking for snakes, frogs and scorpions, will get their best results at night by walking the forests to look for these nocturnal creatures by torchlight.

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The beautiful Icacos coastline has been affected by natural forces, with erosion in some areas and accretion in others.

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FEATURES

Bioblitzers to explore Icacos

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Normally for a bioblitz a 5km-radius circle is used to identify the area that will be surveyed, but this year the teams will add a little extra. As well as surveying the Icacos peninsula, bioblitzers will also travel to Soldado Rock, a wildlife sanctuary 10km off the west coast.

This one-hectare island is home to many seabirds, such as the sooty tern, brown booby and the magnificent frigatebird. Terrestrial animals, including a subspecies of the common cane mouse, only found on Soldado, also live there. In the seas around the islands there are rocky reefs which are home to a myriad of fish species.

Sampling will continue through the night



Soldado Rock, a wildlife sanctuary, will also be surveyed as part of the Icacos bioblitz by the Field Naturalists Club.

and into the following morning and will stop at noon on Sunday. At this point the teams will have about an hour to finalise their species lists before the total number of species found is announced around 1 pm.

While some bioblitzers are exploring outdoors, others will be at the base camp interacting with the public. There will displays by the TTFNC, exhibits of preserved animals by the zoological museum and the Serpentarium

will have terrariums with live reptiles and amphibians found during the surveying.

Once again the bioblitz is being generously sponsored by First Citizens, with help from Bermudez with snack supplies.

The Department of Life Sciences at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine will also be contributing vehicles and equipment.

The public part of this free event will run from 7 am to 2 pm on Sunday

at the Icacos Government Primary School. For more information, e-mail tbioblitz@gmail.com or like the Facebook page T&T Bioblitz.

For more information on the environment, you can also contact the Field Naturalists' Club at admin@tfnf.org or visit our website at www.tfnf.org and its Facebook or YouTube pages.

Photos courtesy MIKE G RUTHERFORD



Some of the bioblitz team members on reconnaissance at a mud volcano near Icacos.

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