



Volunteering at a BioBlitz

As a volunteer or naturalist at a BioBlitz you are the first point of contact for visitors to the event so it is important that you are able to give them some context and explain what a BioBlitz is and why we are doing it! Here are some frequently asked questions and top tips to prepare you for your BioBlitz experience. For details specific to your BioBlitz, please ask the event organiser.

What is a BioBlitz?

"Bio" means 'life' and "Blitz" means 'to do something quickly and intensively'.

A "BioBlitz" is a great outdoor, family event where expert naturalists and members of the public work together to do a fast and intensive survey of all forms of life in a natural space. It's a race to find as many different species of plants, birds, insects, fungi, mammals, fish, and everything else as possible in 24 hours (or shorter for a mini-BioBlitz)! Everything you find is written down to make a list of 'species records' which feed into national databases that monitor our wildlife!

The first ever BioBlitz was in Florida in 1996 and BioBlitz first reached the UK in 2006. In 2009, the National BioBlitz Network was established and since then there have been hundreds of events run by groups across the country.

What is a species record?

A species record is a documented record of a particular species, in a particular area, on a particular date. Often recorders will only note the rare or interesting species but a BioBlitz aims to record everything, common or rare, to build up a full picture of the biodiversity of a site on the day. Most BioBlitzes have printed sheets on which to record data.

The most vital components of a species record are who, what, when and where:

- **WHO** – who identified the species? Once the record is submitted it may need to be verified by an expert and this process is made far easier if the person who identified/confirmed the species has been noted.
 - **WHAT** – What is the name of the species? Give a common and scientific name if you can, otherwise note down the higher group level e.g. spider, then seek help with your identification. Take a photo or collect a specimen if you can, to support your record. Remember that the closer to species level identification that you can get, the more useful the data, but don't guess if you're not 100% sure.
 - **WHEN** – the date of the record
 - **WHERE** – to mark the location of the record a grid reference is required. This is usually a six figure grid reference noting the 100 metre square in which the species was recorded. Grid references can be found on a variety of websites but in the field you can use a GPS, mobile phone app or a marked map provided by the event organiser. If you find the same species in a different location, that is a separate record so you can have multiple records for each species on your list. This is more useful than only recording each species once.
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What if I can't identify a species?

- If you cannot identify an organism to species level, don't worry. Just note it down at whatever accuracy you are confident of, take a photo or collect a specimen and ask a naturalist colleague to help.
- Your BioBlitz organiser may have a selection of paper and online field guides and keys available for identifying species, although it is always worth running your IDs past a friendly naturalist colleague as often only a tiny selection are illustrated in the guides. Don't just pick the picture that looks closest!
- iSpot is an online platform from the Open University that allows you to upload photos of species to be viewed by an online community of naturalists who can help with identification. iSpot have worked with several BioBlitzes and your BioBlitz may even have its own tag – ask the organiser. There is also a mobile app version that can be used in the field. www.ispot.org.uk
- Some organisms will need to be dissected or taken away to be identified. Check with the event organiser that this is permitted, but don't shy away from explaining the need for it, or for collecting specimens. You can send additional records to your event organiser after the event although don't leave it too late as they will want to do a big announcement and inform the press of the final tally.
- Records that are very vague, e.g. 'Snail' or 'Spider' have little scientific value but getting children involved in identification at this basic level is invaluable to cultivating an interest and appreciation of nature. If collected in a pot or photographed, more detailed identification may then be done by the adults later.



Who are the naturalists and who are the volunteers?

Everyone who volunteers at a BioBlitz usually has an interest in wildlife and biodiversity and as such the public will view all of you as 'experts' – whether you feel comfortable giving yourself that title or not. Remember that whatever your chosen role at the BioBlitz, it is a learning opportunity for everyone and you will have something to offer from your own experience. The lines between naturalist, volunteer and visitor frequently blur so don't worry if you have to say "I don't know".

We generally distinguish naturalists as environmental professionals or experienced amateurs and their role is to lead activities such as walks and surveys and/or confirm species identification. Many will have a specific taxonomic group that they specialise in and may wish to conduct their own individual survey.

Volunteers are usually less experienced amateurs or complete beginners in recording who take on a variety of roles such as helping on stalls, assisting with activities, traffic marshalling or helping visitors with basic species identification.

Working with the public– 10 Top Tips for BioBlitzers

1. You (both naturalists and volunteers) are on hand to ensure each session provides a fun, interactive, and accessible activity. Give participants the chance to touch, smell, pick (depending on the plant), and use all their senses to experience the outdoors, and give them the confidence and freedom to shake a tree branch or pass a net through a wild meadow.
2. Empower participants to go home and have a go themselves or return to 'their' green space another time.
3. Introduce the session, what the BioBlitz is about, and what the group will do. After the activities but before the group disperse, finish the session with a summary/plenary. Go over what you've done, found, etc. and suggest things to do next (visit other sites or events, visit a website, or make your own 'something' at home).
4. Never assume knowledge or skills - participants may have never been to the green space before. Some may not know what a daisy or a stinging nettle is or only know it in their own language, while others may be able to tell you about wildlife or plants from their part of a city, or another part of the world.
5. Enable your language to be accessible, clear and simple. There is nothing wrong with using big or complicated words, as long as they are explained. Latin names can be used sparingly, and if used, used in context and explained. For some groups, simply calling something a beetle or worm will do, even if on the recording form its full name will be used.
6. Be the eyes and ears of your audience - if you are unable to hear or understand your naturalist or volunteer colleague during the introduction, the main activity or the plenary, your participants won't either. Ask questions on their behalf to provide some clarity.
7. If working with school groups, be clear with the teacher or adult what their role is right from the start so expectations are clear. With families, be clear that the activities are for parents/carers and their children to do together.
8. With school groups, some may be dominated by a few individuals who are confident and knowledgeable. To enable others to contribute, ask open-ended questions which can be discussed in pairs in the group, so everyone has the chance to think about the question and answer it (and also helps those more introvert, or unable to speak English very well).
9. The public will perceive you all as experts, whether you are designated a volunteer or a naturalist. They will be interested in what you do, how you got to be there, and ask questions. If you don't know the answer, just say so - and it is good practice to sometimes bounce questions back for people to answer when they get home (or seek out another naturalist at the event).
10. Keep a holistic overview of your group - ensure parents are with their children, everyone keeps relatively close together when dispersing during an activity, and ensure children are not left by themselves, or that you are not left alone with them.

Have fun, be confident and ooze passion and interest. This will rub off on to others taking part!

What will happen to our data?

The data that you collect at BioBlitz should be passed on by your BioBlitz organiser to contribute towards local and/or national datasets that can be used by scientists, local authorities and surveyors to research, manage and protect your local wildlife and green spaces.

They may be stored long-term by your Local Environmental Records Centre or on the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Atlas. The vast majority of data collected by these groups is recorded by volunteers and amateurs so your contribution can make a huge difference.

Why not ask your BioBlitz organiser if you can get involved with data management after the event?

How can I do more of this?

You can find a directory of all of the BioBlitz events that register with the National BioBlitz Network online at www.bioblitzuk.org.uk. If you are feeling inspired, you can also find advice and tools for running your own event.

You can record wildlife wherever and whenever you find it! In your local park, on your commute, or in your own garden! Use online tools like iSpot (species identification) and iRecord (records submission), or use the Nature Groups Near You directory to find a nature club in your local area and get involved.

Some useful websites

- National BioBlitz Network – more about BioBlitz and directory of events - www.bioblitzuk.org.uk
 - NBN Atlas – national species data - www.nbn.org.uk
 - iSpot – get help identifying species - www.ispot.org.uk
 - iNaturalist – submit your species records online – www.inaturalist.org
 - iRecord – submit your species records online - www.brc.ac.uk/iRecord
 - OPAL – environmental surveys and identification resources - www.opalexplorenature.org
 - Nature Groups Near You – searchable directory of nature groups – www.nhm.ac.uk/naturegroups
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If you use social media, post photos from the event during the day! Ask your BioBlitz organiser if they have a specific hashtag and make sure you copy in the national BioBlitz team @bioblitzuk.



This guide is a resource for volunteers and naturalists attending BioBlitz events written as a supplement of the Guide to Running a BioBlitz.

National BioBlitz Network – www.bioblitzuk.org.uk

Robinson, L.D., Tweddle, J.C., Postles, M.C., West, S.E., Sewell, J. & Drewitt, E. (2013) Guide to running a BioBlitz: volunteers supplement. Natural History Museum, Bristol Natural History Consortium, University of York and Marine Biological Association.

Updated in 2018 - Postles, M.C., Payton S.G. (2018) Natural History Consortium