



It was all Tom Stevenson's idea. The rest of the Education Team at the Ewelme Watercress Nature Reserve had never even heard of a "BioBlitz". So when Tom came across it, he sold the idea to us –

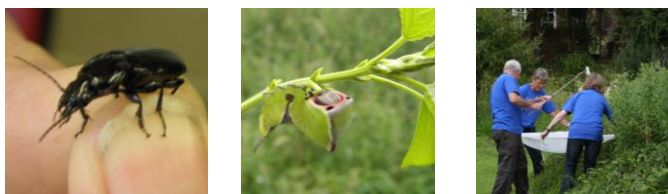
and we always agree to his ideas.... The aim of a BioBlitz is to organise an intense 24-hour event finding and identifying different species of plants and animals on a specific site. It engages both scientists and the public in a massive identification exercise, and this is what we wanted for Ewelme. Between 5 pm Friday 13<sup>th</sup> July and 5 pm Saturday, we hoped not only to add new knowledge to the existing biological records, but also to educate interested members of the local community in the biodiversity of the nature reserve.



Clearly, such a large event would need detailed planning; if we wanted visitors to come in and take part in the surveying and monitoring, they would need to know where to go and what to do. They would also need refreshments, not to mention the right equipment, much of which was funded by the Big Lottery. Plus, if children arrived at the site, which we hoped they would, we also wanted to provide some exciting activities for them. A visit to the Oxford BioBlitz three weeks prior to ours, gave us plenty of tips, **and** the opportunity to poach a number of "experts". These were scientists who could tell the difference between similar-looking fungi, microscopic insects, bees, lichens or moths, and hence increase our species count.



Knowing that such specialists would be essential to the success of our BioBlitz, we advertised the event widely to relevant organisations, as well as personally inviting keen naturalists - and the word was spread. Apparently, there is nothing that dedicated scientists like more than to spend a wet weekend on their knees in a damp meadow looking for wildlife, and we were delighted to welcome a number of wonderful people who joined us for the Big Hunt.



Anyone arriving on site was given recording sheets on which to note down what they had found, and directed towards a "BioBlitz Outpost" – a gazebo equipped with hand lenses, collection pots, and ID guides. The "Basecamp" (the Centre) had microscopes and a library of ID books, and the place was buzzing! The joy of having so many specialists among us was that there was always someone whose advice we could seek when we found something. And because they were all interested in each others' areas of specialism, there was a fantastic atmosphere of bonhomie – helped by the fantastic home-made meals and refreshments kindly provided by the "Friends of the Watercress Beds".



On Friday evening we set up the traps and infra-red cameras, hoping to discover which moths, mammals and insects were active at night. The next morning (yes, Tom made us set the alarm for 4.30am) we examined what we had caught. The cameras were disappointing: July being very wet, the only passing mammals discovered were muntjac, cat – and humans setting traps! And when the 12 mammal traps were opened, we only found 2 massive slugs! However, the pond and stream organisms were not upset by the rain(!), and, luckily being a warm, still night, we had a very good moth count – 980 individuals of 146 different species were unpacked in the morning. Once identified they were, of course, returned unharmed to their habitats.



Despite clashing with the Ewelme School's summer fete, some children did drop in, and worm-charming was high on their list of popular activities. The weather brightened by Saturday afternoon, and by the time the deadline of 5 pm arrived, we had identified 513 different species of plants, fungi, lichens and animals. Because some species needed microscopic identification, some of the experts had to finish their identification at home, and our final total was a terrific **593** different species collected in 24 hours, with 64 people attending the BioBlitz.

