
News and Notes

BioBlitz 2007

The Biological Survey of Canada's 2007 BioBlitz was held July 16 to July 20 in Riding Mountain National Park in Manitoba. The park is located about 225 km northwest of Winnipeg, and consists of about 10,000 ha of aspen parkland, an ecotone between boreal forest and grassland. The participants consisted of nine keen entomologists (present for varying periods of time over the week), a substantial number of equally keen Park staff, and a smattering of the general public, invited to assist by Park staff.

The week started first thing Monday morning with an orientation meeting attended by both Parks Canada staff and entomologists. This allowed for an exchange of information and discussion of the plans and expectations for the week for each of the participants. The Park staff, including but not limited to Cam McKillop, Wybo Vanderschuit, and Ken Kingdon, were accommodating and keen. They helped in many ways, from providing GPS units to

those without their own, to printing up collection labels for collectors. They also had their own plans to enhance the week of collecting. Several of their staff participated in collecting, particularly of butterflies and dragonflies, using University of Manitoba equipment made available by Rob Roughley, the principal organizer of this year's BioBlitz. In addition, they organized two public collecting events, in which they invited Park visitors to participate. These events consisted of a morning of butterfly collecting in a lovely meadow near the townsite of Wasagaming, and an afternoon of dragonfly collecting around a nearby marsh.

The start of the week was not without its problems for some of the participants. Rob Roughley was returning on the Sunday before the BioBlitz from teaching a course at the Churchill Northern Studies Centre, and collecting in Wapusk National Park, north of Churchill on the shore of Hudson Bay. To get to the BioBlitz on time, he had to take the train from Churchill to Thompson, retrieve his



Bob Lamb surveys a typical Riding Mountain National Park scene of fescue prairie with spruce forest in the distance.

(photograph by P. MacKay)

car, and drive the 750 km from Thompson to Wasagaming where the Park office is. Unfortunately the train was late and therefore so was he. He and Jonathon Veilleux, who works with him, had the pleasure of a couple of hours' sleep in his car in the parking lot adjacent to the Park office. At least it was a short walk to the 9:30 meeting Monday morning.

The weather for the week was very nearly perfect: sunny, hot, and mostly dry. The one exception to the dry conditions occurred the second afternoon. A ferocious thunderstorm, with high winds, torrents of rain, and hail in some locations, tore through the southeastern part of the Park in the late afternoon. It hit the campground in Wasagaming particularly hard. Unfortunately that's where many of the participants were staying, but fortunately none of them were there at the time. They were all out in the far west end of the Park, where there was no rain, and so they stayed dry and unaware of any problems. However, on their return to their campsite after 8:00 pm, they were initially puzzled to find someone or something had wreaked havoc with their belongings. Eventually some



A blister beetle, *Lytta nutalli*,
on late yellow locoweed, *Oxytropis campestris*
(photograph by P. MacKay)



A viceroy butterfly, *Limenitis archippus*, the second
record for Riding Mountain National Park.

The first one was in 1928.
(photograph by P. MacKay)

still-frozen hail pellets solved the mystery. Some people spent a second night sleeping in their cars.

The BioBlitz provided an excellent opportunity for some positive publicity for entomology in general and the BioBlitz and the Biological Survey of Canada in particular. Throughout the BioBlitz, Rob Roughley met regularly with the Park staff to help them with their activities incorporating insects in Park programs. At the request of the Friends of Riding Mountain National Park, Pat MacKay gave a public presentation, illustrated with lots of pretty pictures of Riding Mountain insects, explaining who we are and what we were doing over the week. Then on Friday afternoon, Bob Lamb and Pat MacKay were interviewed by the Brandon television station, and filmed making one of the many collections of aphids that they were successful in finding over the week. The television folks considered it all strange but very interesting!

In the beautiful surroundings and beautiful weather, collecting was both fun and successful. Insect nets were probably the major

collecting tool, based on number of collectors if not necessarily number of specimens, and were used to focus primarily on butterflies and dragonflies. Microlepidoptera were collected at light traps, aphids were collected into tiny vials with tiny forceps, bees were collected at “bee bowls,” water beetles and soil arthropods were given significant attention. A Malaise trap is still in operation at the time of writing. Over the next several months, the specimens will be prepared and identified. The resulting specimens will reside in publicly available collections and the resulting data will be provided to Riding Mountain National Park as a database. Anyone interested in the specimens or the data should contact Rob Roughley of the Department of Entomology, University of Manitoba at the email address below.

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A brachypterous bush katydid.
 (photograph by P. MacKay)

Biological Survey of Canada Curation Blitz 1: Working out the Bugs in Saskatoon

After the collecting and field work is finished; unit trays, collecting vials, and drawers fill up with fascinating specimens. Unfortunately individual researchers, or even groups of researchers at any given institution, do not have the time or expertise to identify all of them. Unsorted material builds up in all collections, not getting the attention it deserves. A wealth of faunistic information sits untapped in unsorted material in collections across Canada. We can all help make these data more accessible.

Join other curious entomologists for the first Biological Survey of Canada Curation Blitz in Saskatoon during the joint annual meeting of the Entomological Society of Canada and the Entomological Society of Saskatchewan meeting on Monday evening (1 October 2007) from 7-9 PM.

There are two major collections in Saskatoon, at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and at the University of Saskatoon. Doors will be open and entomologists will be encouraged

to sit down and sort to family, to genus, and to species where possible. The goal is to sort unidentified specimens and increase the level of curation for these two collections. Additionally, those of us interested in faunistics of Canadian arthropods will have a better idea of the material available in these collections. Thirdly, we should be able to connect specialists and specimens, so that the use and improvement of these collections are ongoing. Finally, and as important as the above, we will all be able to learn from experts in a variety of taxa.

Watch the notice board at the ESC meeting or the Biological Survey web site for more details.

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