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Central Park Gets BioBlitzed

By **Deborah S. Morris**
Staff Writer

June 27, 2003, 8:38 PM EDT

Most wildlife in Central Park is visible, but the scientists participating in BioBlitz want to find the species that are not so easily seen.

Hundreds of scientists, naturalists and volunteers descended upon Central Park Friday for a 24-hour scientific exploration of the 843 acres.

"The idea of a BioBlitz is for scientists, in a finite amount of time, to come up with and catalog some base numbers of species," said Richard Wiese, president of the New York-based Explorers Club, which organized the event. "It gives you a very good inventory of wildlife in your area."

Why Central Park?

"It is the world's most famous urban park. I think in any backyard in America there are interesting things to be found. Central Park is the backyard for a lot of people and there is diversity of life to be found," Wiese said.

He added that by setting a benchmark about how many species are currently in the park, 10 years from now scientists can measure how healthy the park is.

Scientists from all over the city, as well as a world-renowned underwater expert, were volunteering their time. The youngest is just 5.

"I want to find bees, wasps and maybe a few yellow jackets," said Henri Reiss-NaVarre, who lives on the Upper West Side. He was on the hymenoptera team, which was looking for exactly what interests Henri. An insect in the hymenoptera order typically has four wings and lives in a complex colony. An hour into it, he got his wish. His team found two wasps, one of which had never been recorded in the park.

Sylvia Earle, Time magazine's first "Hero for the Planet" in 1998 and an underwater expert, was on the team diving into Central Park Lake in search of insects, plants, frogs and snapping turtles.

"Where there is water there is life. Some of the life won't be as scary as, say, a shark, but there could be microbes that are also to be feared," Earle said of her

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dive into the slimy green waters. She believes her team will help celebrate the unity of land and water as well as the biological diversity between the two.

Writer George Plimpton, who was on the birding team, had some personal hopes to achieve.

"I understand the need and value of something like this. It helps you understand how much life is in the park. Plus maybe I'll see the Swainson Warbler. ... It's been seen once or twice here, but it would be a rare sighting."



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