

## Niagara College's BioBlitz takes a biodiversity snapshot of NOTL campus

Melinda Cheevers

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**NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE** — It was an interesting way to spend a Saturday. For 12 straight hours, students and professors, volunteers and naturalists, worked together to conduct an intensive field study of Niagara College's Niagara-on-the-Lake campus.

Dubbed a bioblitz, about 60 people came together for an intensive period of biological surveying, attempting to record all of the living species within a designated area. From the plants on the ground to the birds in the air, all living species and creatures were part of the count, said Brenna Thompson, a post-graduate student in the environmental management assessment program and one of the organizers behind the first-ever bioblitz on a Niagara College campus.

"It's a relatively new survey but they're happening all across the province," said Thompson, who said they've been working on organizing this one since August.

The blitzes can range in scope and length, for example some might capture a 24-hour period and others could be for just one part of a day. Saturday's blitz was 12 hours, running from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., allowing the bugs and creatures that roam in the morning be counted, as well as those that come out at night.

"This gives us the best picture of the whole day," she said.

The goal, said Thompson, is to catalogue as much as possible on campus. In the past, she said there have been surveys done on specific areas of campus, but never a general overall snapshot.

"Now we'll have a living record," she said, adding in the future if they continue doing bioblitzes, they can compare the results from year to year.

Group hikes had groups of students, professors, and volunteers heading out to different parts of the campus to evaluate different species. Thompson said it wasn't just about identifying all of the different varieties of ecology on campus, it was about counting how many of each specific thing they saw too.

Animals, plants, mosses, lichens, birds and more were all being documented and catalogued. When applicable, samples were taken to be catalogued and evaluated as well.

Members of the Niagara College Student Administrative Council were present to not only help with the bioblitz but for a tree planting in the morning and campus cleanup throughout the day. Community partners like Walker Industries, Brock University, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority and Heartland Forest were also on hand to help out with the blitz.

Amy Brunning from Heartland Forest spent the morning doing surveying and going birding.

"This is a great way for citizen scientists to learn the value of collecting data," she said.

Brunning and other representatives from Heartland Forest also had an informational display up in the event tent about the nature centre in Niagara Falls. Attending Saturday's event also provided Brunning an opportunity to see a bioblitz in action, which will come in handy when Heartland Forest hosts their own on June 12. Theirs will run from 6 a.m. to noon at the nature centre, 8215 Heartland Forest Rd., Niagara Falls.



Al Unwin, associate dean of environment and horticultural studies at Niagara College, leads a hiking group on Saturday during the college's BioBlitz event. The hikers were on the lookout for birds to be documented and counted as part of the daylong event.



Brenna Thompson, a post-graduate student in the environmental management assessment program, looks over the list of what had been documented on campus during the BioBlitz at Niagara College's Niagara-on-the-Lake campus on Saturday.



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