

ENVIRONMENT

How well do we know the natural world around us?



MTRI PHOTO BY J. BBO.

Keji National Park BioBlitz looking for dragonflies and butterflies July 15 2017.

Not very well, says Professor Andrew Balmford of Cambridge University. "It appears that conservationists are doing less well than the creators of Pokémon, he says, at inspiring interest in their subjects: during their primary school years, children apparently learn far more about Pokémon than about their native wildlife..."

While ecologists worry, here in South West Nova Scotia we seem to be eager to get out into the wilderness to learn. Sacha Begg, co-owner of BillyGoth Farm in Carleton, leads foraging excursions.

"People are really keen to learn about wild edible herbs, medicinal herbs and wild mushrooms. They have a natural hunger for that kind of knowledge," she says.

Perhaps we just needed people like Sacha and others, like those wonderful folks at the Mersey Toboatic Research Institute, to show us the way.

This year, 56 people plus many volunteers descended on Keji National Park over the July 15-16 weekend to observe and count as many species as they could, from lichens to dragonflies, beetles to shorebirds. This was the first ever BioBlitz at Keji, organized by Parks Canada and the MTRI. In total they made 1145 observations and identified 485 different species at the inland park and the estuary, a few of

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Environmentally yours



them rare.

iNaturalist.ca is the tool that made this possible. All the observations were recorded on this App, which you yourself can download onto your cellphone.

Now, if you cannot

name that butterfly, take a picture of it, send it in with description and someone will help identify it.

David Clark, National Coordinator for the BioBlitz 150 program, says Parks Canada chose the BioBlitz as a way of celebrating our 150th anniversary "because it involves all ages, all levels of experience and promotes ways to facilitate those meaningful connections with nature. These events support improvements to the integrity of Canada's national park network and allow people to discover, explore and learn."

Begg agrees, saying that initially people are interested in what plants they can actually eat or use, but once introduced, they become fascinated with the plant itself. That goes for other organisms too.

As Balmford says, "People care about what they know." Someday our lives may depend on this knowledge.

Nancy Robinson is an avid supporter of the environment and loves to share her ideas for nurturing it. To contact Nancy, email: nrobbyn@gmail.com