

## 9. BIOBLITZ HAGLEY PARK/ BOTANIC GARDENS

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The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee of a proposal to host a Bioblitz in Hagley Park and the Botanic Gardens in April 2005.

### BACKGROUND

Earlier this year a team from the Council met with Alison Stewart and Steve Wratten from the Bio-Protection and Ecology Division, Lincoln University, to explore opportunities for joint projects and student research projects. One of the ideas that came out of the meeting was a Bioblitz.

### WHAT IS BIOBLITZ?

BioBlitz is a scientific race against time. The aim is to record as many species of plants, animals and fungi as possible in a 24-hour survey on a particular site. This would be carried out by organised teams of specialist biologists. There are opportunities for the public to go out with the teams and see what they are doing. Species that cannot be identified on the spot are taken back to other specialists at a "base camp". A Bioblitz is scientific, educational and excellent publicity for the environment and the organisations taking part.

A Bioblitz will benefit successful park management by identifying pest species that should be monitored or controlled, and native species that need looking after. The survey may reveal unique aspects that were not known previously. As we gain valuable information about urban environments, we can begin to understand the extent to which urban parks are sustaining the richness of Christchurch's biodiversity. Bioblitz is also a wonderful opportunity for raising awareness of nature in the city. They are generally an enjoyable experience for all involved.

This event would be the first Bioblitz in Christchurch. A Bioblitz was held in Auckland last year and they are regular annual events in parts of the USA. A Bioblitz is a unique opportunity for scientists, students and the public to experience the vast array of species (biodiversity) living in a healthy urban environment. It is rare (even in science organisations and universities) for so many different types of biologists to be working together in the same place, at the same time and on the same project. Bioblitzes elsewhere have even revealed new and previously unknown species. BioBlitz is an excellent opportunity to promote the Christchurch Biodiversity Strategy and various Botanic Gardens and Hagley Park initiatives. The Auckland event generated considerable public and media interest and enthusiasm.

### WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT ABOUT BIODIVERSITY?

We usually hear "biodiversity" associated with the vast number of species in natural wilderness areas. Yet the diversity of life in our own cities is phenomenal—there are hundreds of organisms. We all have many more neighbours than people realise! Most of these neighbours are essential. The clean water, fertile soil, and air to breathe that we take for granted are all the result of the vast network of species performing the special tasks that are their role in life. Some people call biodiversity the "web of life" because it supports us every minute of the day.

### WHERE?

A range of sites were assessed by staff for their potential to host a Bioblitz. These ranged from aquatic sites such Styx Mill to sites on the Port Hill reserves. The general feeling was that, for the first city Bioblitz, a high profile site like Hagley Park/ Botanic Gardens would be ideal.

Hagley Park and the Gardens are central, easily accessed, have the infrastructure on site to host events, [which keeps costs down], have a wide range of habitats, a known development history and are currently the subject of major forward planning exercises. It is significant that a Bioblitz has been conducted at Central Park, New York, a comparable area to Hagley Park and the Botanic Gardens.

## **WHEN?**

The BioBlitz would start at 3 pm on a Friday and finish exactly 24 hrs later at 3 pm Saturday. The count down to the final tally will start at midday, with the final number announced at 3 pm. The preliminary dates are 8 and 9 April, 2005. The dates have been suggested as a good compromise between peaks in summer invertebrate occurrence and the emergence of fungi later in the season, and are also outside the Summertime event period.

## **WHO IS ORGANISING BIOBLITZ?**

BioBlitz is being organised by Christchurch City Council, Lincoln University, Landcare Research (who organised the Auckland BioBlitz). Canterbury Museum and Canterbury University have also been approached. Teams of volunteer scientists will mostly be drawn from Landcare Research, NIWA, Lincoln University, University of Canterbury, the Canterbury Museum, and various retired scientists. In a few cases, experts may need to be brought in from outside Christchurch.

## **BASE CAMP?**

The Botanic Gardens/Hagley Park offer a range of facilities and venues that could potentially be used to accommodate the needs of the people who undertake identifications and record the total number of introduced and native species being tallied at hourly intervals. People will be working right through the night, as nocturnal animals are much easier to find during darkness.

During the day, the public are welcome to visit base camp to meet the scientists who are passionate about the environment. Visitors will be able to look down microscopes and share this hidden, unbelievable world — even the smallest creatures will be a source of interest.

## **COSTS OF A BIOBLITZ**

The scientists involved will be contributing their time free of charge. Approximately 50 were involved in the Auckland event.. The major costs involve provision of meals and publicity .

Based on the Auckland costs we estimate the following costs;

Catering costs:	\$1,650 +GST
Display Boards/posters:	\$600 +GST
T-shirts:	\$600 +GST
Travel Costs:	\$1,400 +GST
Publicity/ adverts etc:	\$2,000 +GST

Total approx                      \$6,250 +GST

A wide range of organisations will be represented who will be contributing staff time toward Bioblitz. We will also be seeking sponsorship as the project proceeds.

## **CONCLUSION**

Bioblitz is a unique opportunity to bring scientists from a wide range of disciplines and the public together. For the number of expert personnel involved, the costs will be very low. Hagley Park/ Botanic Gardens, are iconic, central, have good facilities for events, a long history of cultural input, and have a wide range of habitats suitable for examination. It would be extremely informative to find out what the range of organisms is that exists in such a highly modified urban environment in the centre of the City.

### **Staff**

**Recommendation:**            That the information be received.

### **Chairman's**

**Recommendation:**            That the public be invited to visit this project.