

Schodack Island State Park BioBlitz

May 4-5, 2013

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On May 4, 2013, 25 scientists gathered at Schodack Island State Park in Schodack Landing, NY for a BioBlitz, a 24-hour inventory of the park's biodiversity. Our objectives were to look for rare species and significant natural communities in the park and document as many of the animals and plants living there as possible. This was a collaborative effort between the NY Natural Heritage Program (NYNHP)

of the State University of NY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF); the Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (State Parks); and Parks & Trails New York, who enlisted the help of scientists from various agencies, organizations, and universities. Participants included biologists with varying expertise and affiliations including NYNHP, State Parks, NYS DEC, SUNY Albany, Paul Smith's College, Cornell, consulting biologists, and knowledgeable naturalists.

The main survey period was from 9am to 5pm on Saturday May 4th, but a couple of dedicated participants stayed to survey throughout a 24-hour period (until 9am the following morning). Scientists formed small teams across affiliations and taxonomic expertise, targeting habitats in different areas of the park that could harbor rare species or high biodiversity. Teams enjoyed sunny weather as they visited Schodack Creek, the



A Floodplain Forest Community.
Photo by Greg Edinger

Hudson River, and wetland communities such as floodplain

forests, freshwater tidal marshes and mudflats, vernal pools, and an oxbow lake. Upland habitats visited included successional northern hardwoods and successional old fields. Our main targets – determined by the time period and the expertise available – were freshwater tidal and floodplain forest communities, birds, reptiles and amphibians (herps), plants, invertebrates, and invasive species. Night surveyors focused their efforts on animals that could be easily detected during nocturnal hours including moths and frogs.

This event was a great success at partnering professionals from various organizations to reach a common goal. We documented a

total of 273 plants and animals in the park during the BioBlitz, and updated observations of the 4 NYNHP significant natural communities here and several common communities. The break-down by taxa was as follows: at least 171 plants and 102 animal species including 52 birds (resident and non-resident), 16 fish, 6 herps (amphibians, reptiles, and turtles), 4 mammals, and 24 invertebrates. The list of species included entertaining names such as pumpkinseed (a fish), clover looper (a moth), deer tongue grass, and zig-zag goldenrod (plants). A few experts targeted undersurveyed taxonomic groups such as beetles, and aquatic invertebrates. This BioBlitz was a great way to bring in experts to catalog these species, most of which are not part of typical biological inventories.



Some BioBlitz participants (from left): Ezra Swartzberg, Jenn Dean, Katherine Storms and Greg Edinger. Photo by Steve Young



Left: Doug Carlson with Channel Catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*) Right: Ted Mack with White Catfish (*Ictalurus catus*). Photo by Casey Holzworth

One highlight was the discovery of a rare plant in the park, Yellow Giant-hyssop (*Agastache nepetoides*, S2S3, G5), a state threatened species. Currently, there are only 12 known populations of this species in the state. Yellow Giant-hyssop can be found in a variety of habitats, including upland or floodplain forest edges or gaps, as well as in meadows or clearings.



Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*). Photo by Lee Karney

Preventing invasive species and shrubs from crowding out or shading this population may help maintain this small population in the park and hopefully more will be found in the future.

The bird diversity observed during the BioBlitz was impressive – in part due to participation of some of the region’s top birders. Not all of the 52 species found are considered breeding residents. Due to the timing of the survey to coincide with I Love My Parks Day on May 4th, the BioBlitz occurred during bird migration and we therefore detected more species than those that breed in the park. However, Schodack Island State Park is a state bird conservation area and we therefore expected and were delighted to see many species. We observed known residents such as Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), and Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*), but we were apparently too early to happen upon Cerulean Warblers (*Dendroica cerulean*), which are also known to nest in the park.



Yellow Giant-hyssop (*Agastache nepetoides*). Photo by Steve Young

At least 19 non-native invasive plant species were observed in the park. Many of these species and sites were previously known thanks in large part to Dr. George Robinson and his students from SUNY Albany. They are currently studying the invasive Asiatic bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) in the park. Their research is focusing on how past disturbances may have played a role in the plant’s invasion of the park, as well as practical research into the best management techniques for keeping bittersweet under control to protect native habitats and wildlife.

The BioBlitz was an extension of the long-standing partnership between NYNHP and OPRHP to document rare species and natural communities on State Parks & Historic Sites across the state. Not only did the scientists have success in documenting known and new targeted taxa and habitats at Schodack Island State Park, and finding a new rare plant for the park, but also enjoyed collaborating with one another on this lovely spring day.

We hope to continue these valuable efforts to bring experts together to share their knowledge and add to our understanding of the biota of NY’s state parks, and to encourage other opportunities for park staff to engage the public and share highlights.



Top: Multiflora Rose (*Rosa multiflora*) Bottom: Asiatic Bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*). Photos by Steve Young

