

# BioBlitz chalks up diversity at San Elijo Lagoon

## More than 700 species of plants and animals recorded

By ELENA CRISTIANO - For the North County Times | Saturday, May 16, 2009 9:07 PM PDT [∞](#)



Field entomologist Jim Berrian holds a eriophora spider that he captured to be counted during the BioBlitz at the San Elijo Lagoon in Encinitas on Saturday. More than 700 species of plants and animals were identified during the day. (Photo by Hayne Palmour IV - Staff Photographer)

ENCINITAS ---- The first ever BioBlitz took place Saturday as part of the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy's annual Lagoon Day, and by all scientific and social accounts it was a huge success.

About 600 people, double the normal attendance, descended on the new San Elijo Nature Center to watch and learn as leading experts scrambled in a "biodiversity race against the clock," according to Ralph Achenbach of the conservancy.

The objective was to identify as many plant and animal species as possible during a 24-hour window that began at 3 p.m. Friday and culminated at 3 p.m. Saturday.

Attendees had the opportunity to guess the amount identified in a contest and estimates ranged from 200 to 2,000. Cuong Vu of San Diego won with a guess of 729, just six off the final species count.

Two surprises in the BioBlitz count were a species of "everlasting" (a flowering plant) and four species of bat that had never been found at the lagoon.

The hundreds of children on hand were excited to discover birds, reptiles, mammals and bugs up close and personal.

"I really like nature," said Alex Paul, a seventh-grader at Mesa Verde Elementary in Rancho Penasquitos. "My favorite was the Forster's tern, and how it dives into the water to get fish."

"The best part for me was when we pet the snake," said Melia Roswall, a 5-year-old kindergarten student at Carmel Creek Elementary. "And I learned that sage was turquoise green and could be a smelling plant."

Melia's classmate Kai Walsh said the most exciting thing he saw was a mountain lion track and her mother, Lynn Roswall, said that although the family had lived in the area for many years, they had never checked out the lagoon.

"We wanted to see the beautiful new nature center, and seeing the BioBlitz in action was really neat," said Roswall. "The docents were great ---- they were all very knowledgeable and helped us all see what a special, natural habitat we have around us."



Six-year-old Kathleen Robinson looks through a scope at fiddler crabs as her father, Marvin, Saturday during the San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy's annual Lagoon Day and BioBlitz at the San Elijo Lagoon in Encinitas. (Photo by Hayne Palmour IV - Staff Photographer)

A popular spot at the event was the display staffed by Susan Nowicke, president of the San Diego Herpetological Society. She had dozens of exhibits of snakes and reptiles, and people gathered in droves for the chance to pet the creatures.

"The BioBlitz is fantastic because we have the chance to introduce (people) to indigenous animals, and it's that education which will help in the ultimate goal of preserving them," Nowicke said.

In addition to the public awareness raised by the event, there was a practical reason.

"A win here is to be able to set a baseline," said Barry Lindgren, water quality specialist for the conservancy. "We are at the start of a big restoration of the lagoon, and these numbers will go into the environmental impact report."

Wetlands like the San Elijo Lagoon serve a vital role in ecology of the region. Doug Gibson, director of the conservancy, explained that "85 percent of all the fish we eat" utilize wetlands within their life cycle.

The San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve Nature Center is at 2710 Manchester Ave., Cardiff-by-the-Sea. Visit [www.sanelijo.org](http://www.sanelijo.org).