

Bat Blitzes in the Southeast: High Impact Volunteer Surveys

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Abstract: The “Bat Blitz” is a program of the Southeastern Bat Diversity Network (SBDN; www.sbdn.org). Blitzes are intensive surveys that sample the bat community in an extensive area. The first Bat Blitz was held in 2002 at Great Smoky Mountains National Park as part of the All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory organized by the Park. Since then, SBDN has sponsored five additional blitzes on national forests in five states (Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee). The value of survey efforts at all Blitzes combined (175 sites) is over \$262,000. Blitzes are efficient, allowing collection of data in three days that would usually require an entire season of surveys. Blitzes also bring together bat biologists, students, and interested persons from across the nation (>20 states), providing opportunities for participants to work together in teams sharing ideas, information, and field techniques. Participation has increased from 26 volunteers in 2002 to 105 in 2007, with representatives from universities, agencies (local, state, and federal), private industry, zoos, museums, and grade schools. Bat Blitzes allow collection of echolocation calls, specimens for museums, DNA, hair, feces, and ectoparasites. These events have yielded valuable data on status and distribution of 14 bat species in the Southeast. Over 1,600 bats have been captured at the Blitzes, including two species of concern and two federally-listed species. Blitz data are available for use by researchers, meet inventory requirements for land managers, and result in snapshots of the bat community in an area. Bat Blitzes have generated numerous local and regional print and television stories favorable to bats. Furthermore, participation at SBDN bat blitzes has stimulated state working groups to organize local Blitz events. Similar efforts may be successful for other taxa and SBDN Bat Blitzes could serve as a model.

Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies 61:120