

Bat Blitzzes 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). Blitzzes 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 blitzzes on national forests in five states (Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee). The value of survey efforts at all Blitzzes combined (175 sites) is over \$262,000. Blitzzes are efficient, allowing collection of data in three days that would usually require an entire season of surveys. Blitzzes 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 Blitzzes 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 Blitzzes, 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 Blitzzes have generated numerous local and regional print and television stories favorable to bats. Furthermore, participation at SBDN bat blitzzes has stimulated state working groups to organize local Blitz events. Similar efforts may be successful for other taxa and SBDN Bat Blitzzes could serve as a model.

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