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### Top News

## Counting on Nature

Friday, May 14, 2004

**By Mark Weiner**  
Staff writer

Scientists, students and volunteers will descend upon one of Onondaga County's most popular nature preserves today in a 24-hour effort to catalog every living species they can find.

Organizers from the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry say they expect to find at least 1,100 distinct species during their "bioblitz" at Beaver Lake Nature Center in Lysander.

The idea of the survey, starting at noon today, is to draw attention to the biological diversity of the 650-acre park operated by Onondaga County, said Neil Ringler, one of the organizers and chair of ESF's faculty of environmental and forest biology.

"This is meant to be an introductory survey," Ringler said. "Clearly, it's too large a park to turn over every stone. These bioblitzes are really intended to excite and inform. They're not intended to be full-blown quantitative surveys."

The surveys are called bioblitzes because anything biological is accounted for - every animal, plant, tree, fish, insect, worm and fungus, Ringler said.

It is the second consecutive year that ESF scientists have sponsored a bioblitz. Last year, in Central New York's first bioblitz sponsored by the college, 661 species were counted at Elmwood Park in Syracuse.

In that event, scientists said they were impressed by the environmental health of the 68-acre park in the southwest corner of Syracuse. The survey found 237 species of trees, shrubs, grasses and plants.

Ringler said the group of scientists, students and volunteers from the community expects to find even more plant species at Beaver Lake.

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"Here, I think we have greater diversity," he said during a visit to Beaver Lake Nature Center this week. The preserve includes the 206-acre Beaver Lake, a glacial lake where scientists have previously documented at least 10 species of fish.

Ringler said the bioblitz will document those fish, as well as the insects and other tiny critters that they feed on.

As the weather warmed this week and temperatures topped 80 degrees, large groups of whirligig beetles whirled in a circular motion on the water's surface. The beetles have one eye that looks into the water and one eye that looks out above from the surface of the water.

Below the beetles, dozens of pumpkinseed sunfish could be seen in shallow water, some preparing their spring nests.

Away from the lake, a red admiral butterfly made a brief appearance before darting behind a row of trees. A pileated woodpecker could be heard calling from the trees.

Those are a few of the species ESF scientists found during a brief visit this week.

Andrew Saunders, an ESF research associate, said the Onondaga County Parks Department is partnering with the college in the bioblitz, an important relationship he hopes will continue with the college.

"It's a privilege to have a resource like this and give our students a chance to practice their craft," Saunders said. "We see this facility as an important resource in training young professionals."

Saunders said ESF is likely to strengthen its ties with Beaver Lake Nature Center now that the college has established a major in natural history and interpretation. The major will be offered for the first time this fall.

The bioblitz will end at noon Saturday. The public is invited to join or observe a game of "Biological Jeopardy" at 1 p.m. Saturday, while scientists catalog results. The results and an interpretation will be presented in a talk at 3 p.m. at the center's main building.

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