

## **One decade later, Connecticut State BioBlitz returns to Hartford's Keney Park to assess changes in region's biodiversity**

Hartford, CT. – During the summer of 1999, scientists from the University of Connecticut and across the state converged on Hartford's Keney Park. Large white tents were constructed as makeshift labs furnished with rows of microscopes and identification guides. Then, armed with nets, headlamps, and myriad other collecting tools, the scientists ventured into the 695 acres of urban park, canvassing the mix of hardwood, pine, and hemlock trees, the vernal pools, and the remnants of an ancient sand dune. Thus was the beginning of the first Connecticut State BioBlitz. Now, ten years later, the scientists are returning to Keney Park on June 12th and 13th and will explore the changes in plant and animal life occurring over the past decade. Specimen sorting and identification will take place at "BioBlitz Central" in the newly constructed Goodwin College campus on Riverside Drive in East Hartford. Counters will also be sampling the Connecticut River and inventorying the floodplain forests adjacent to the College.

The internationally recognized Connecticut State BioBlitz is a distinctive scientific endeavor—part contest, part festival, and part educational event. It will bring together school children, college students, and scientists from a number of universities and scientific institutions in a race against time to see how many species they can count in a 24-hour biological survey. "The BioBlitz generates interest in the sciences by offering the public a chance to interact with scientists conducting research in their community," says Jeremy Teitelbaum, dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at UConn. "At the same time it provides important data on the sustainability of our urban environments and helps us understand Connecticut's complex biodiversity."

Ten years ago, 91 scientists from the University of Connecticut's Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and around the state identified a total of 1,369 species of plants, animals, and fungi during a 24-hour survey of Keney Park and nearby Riverside Park. A number of species listed as endangered, threatened or of special concern by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection were found including the Bald Eagle, Red Bat, Brown Thrasher, and Brotherly Clubtail Dragonfly.

"The BioBlitz offers a snapshot of the rich biodiversity found in Connecticut's metropolitan areas like Keney Park," says Leanne Kennedy Harty, Director of the Connecticut State Museum of Natural History. "It remains an excellent opportunity to encourage curiosity about science in children and adults, and over the years we have heard countless children say 'I want to be a scientist when I grow up!' after working alongside the researchers. This year we are excited to partner with Goodwin College, the Friends of Keney Park, and other Hartford-based groups to present variety of BioBlitz-centered education programs for the community."

The driving force behind BioBlitz is its scientific mission to survey the diversity of animal and plant life in an urban area. "What's particularly special about this BioBlitz is we finally have the opportunity to return to a previous blitz site, do a survey, and assess the differences," says David Wagner, Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Co-director of the Center for Conservation and Biodiversity at UConn, and the lead BioBlitz organizer. "This BioBlitz promises to yield dozens of

biological treasures, and allow local citizens to come and see firsthand a splendid representation of Connecticut's rich natural heritage.”

The 2009 BioBlitz is of special significance as it coincides with Year of Science, the worldwide celebration of the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth. The American Institute of Biological Sciences, the National Academy of Sciences, and more than 400 other organizations, including the University of Connecticut, have declared 2009 a Year of Science, initiating a national year-long celebration designed to engage the public in science and to improve public understanding about the nature and processes of science.

The Dorr Foundation, known for supporting the development of science curricula for students in grades 6-12 and special education projects relating to conservation and the environment, provided a substantial financial contribution to the Bringing Back BioBlitz to Hartford Fund. Other major financial and in-kind contributors for the 2009 BioBlitz include the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at UConn, Connecticut State Museum of Natural History, Center for Conservation & Biodiversity at UConn, Goodwin College, the Friends of Keney Park, the Cities of Hartford and East Hartford, the Connecticut Science Center, and the Department of Ecology and Evolution Biology at UConn. Significant partners also include Leadership Greater Hartford, Keney Park Trailblazers, Upper Albany Collaborative, and the VCB Association.

The Connecticut State BioBlitz has become the model for BioBlitz events all across the continent. Members of the public are encouraged to come the event on Saturday, June 13<sup>th</sup>, sign up for some of the mini-safaris, hear talks from the region's top-naturalists, and tour “BioBlitz Central,” a wonderfully eclectic display of the region's plant and animal life. For additional information please visit <http://web.uconn.edu/mnh/bioblitz/> or call (860) 486-4460.

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**Media Alert: Interview and Photo Opportunity**

Who: Members of the 2009 BioBlitz planning committee

What: Pre-BioBlitz site visit at Keney Park

When: Tuesday, April 14<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 a.m.

Where: Friends of Keney Park “Park House,” 183 Windsor Ave, Hartford.

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