



NATURE BLITZ



NATUREHOOD IN THE SCHOOLYARD
A How-to-Guide Toolkit for Educators



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ABOUT US



For over 75 years, Nature Canada has been your voice for nature. Together we defend wildlife and protect wilderness in your province and across the country— so you can spot wildlife and experience the joys of nature. And we inspire more Canadians to connect and value nature in their lives.

With the support of 70,000 caring nature lovers like you, we've helped preserve 63 million acres of parks and wildlife areas as well as protected countless cherished species that depend on these habitats—from butterflies to birds to bears.

Learn more about Nature Canada

www.naturecanada.ca



What is **NatureHood**?



naturehood

A NATURE CANADA INITIATIVE

NatureHood is all nature in your neighbourhood. It's nearby nature—nature found right where people live: backyards, the park at the end of the street, a local green space.

The Goal of the NatureHood program is to connect urban Canadians to nearby nature, and get people — especially children — outside and active right where they live.

Through strong partnerships with grassroots nature clubs and allies across Canada, NatureHood promotes nature awareness at the local level and helps to foster a new generation of nature lovers.

Our NatureHood partners deliver on-the-ground, experiential nature-based learning opportunities. **Find a local NatureHood partner near you today!**

 www.naturecanada.ca/naturehood/



What is a **NatureBlitz?**

A NatureBlitz, simply put, is observing nature in a given area. It's quite easy to do, anywhere, anytime, by anyone. It's a time-bound event in which citizen scientists (i.e. the students!) try to identify and inventory as many different living things as possible in a given area.

By holding a NatureBlitz in your schoolyard, there's no need for permission forms, no need for bus/vehicle rentals, volunteer parent/guardian chaperones, etc.

It's a new, fun educational experience that puts you in control.



It's easier than you think.

Simply help students observe nature in a section of your schoolyard. Do you have a playing field or a lawn your students can safely explore?

There's lots of life to observe there!

Look for insects moving within the grass and take note of all the different types (species) of plants that actually make up a basic lawn.

Look closely!

The key thing is to adjust your scale of observation.

[🔗 Watch this video of Grade 4 students on a NatureBlitz in Ottawa](#)



HOW CAN I DO A NATUREBLITZ IN MY SCHOOLYARD?

Getting Started



NATUREBLITZ IN MY SCHOOLYARD

Getting Started

Start by picking a date and time that will work best for your schedule.

Pair or group up the students and determine the area for the NatureBlitz. Decide on the activities and how it can be incorporated into the lesson plan.

Nature-based learning can cross multiple subjects (science, math, geography, etc.).

 Review the NatureBlitz Code of Conduct with your students



WHERE can I do a NatureBlitz in my schoolyard?



ANYWHERE, regardless of how ‘natural’ your schoolyard is!

The images above are each ‘natural’ in some way – it’s just a matter of scale and perspective.

Ask your students what creatures/wildlife the space might contain if it were more natural.

What should be there? What’s missing? Why? How are humans involved?

Even common species like pigeons, raccoons, gulls, grass and dandelions are examples of nature. Don’t forget to get close to the ground and discover what insects live in the schoolyard.

WHEN can I do a NatureBlitz in my schoolyard?



ALL YEAR ROUND. In fact, doing repeated observations (weekly/monthly) allows students to begin to see changes and patterns in the natural world.

You can find birds – at least 3 or 4 species – in and around most Canadian schoolyards throughout the year.

Between mid-December and mid-January, you can include your bird sightings in a local Christmas Bird Count activity (<http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/cbc/>)

In mid-February, your sightings can be added to the Great Backyard Bird Count (<http://gbbc.birdcount.org/>)

May is when most of the migratory birds arrive back to Canada (learn more about World Migratory Bird Day at www.birdday.ca).

You can observe trees and shrubs, though dormant during the winter, throughout the year.

Look for signs of wildlife use, e.g. holes/cavities that birds, insects or small mammals could inhabit; signs of herbivory or insect damage; woodpecker holes; berries, seeds or cones on trees that could attract birds and other wildlife during the winter.

Look at patterns in snow or ice accumulation in your schoolyard.

Why/how does snow pile up in certain areas and not others? Are there any animal tracks in your schoolyard? Which types of tracks – wild or domestic animals?

WHY should I do a schoolyard NatureBlitz?



Value to students

This activity provides an opportunity for students to engage with nature in their schoolyard and learn about urban wildlife and habitats.

It helps promote and foster an appreciation for nature and hopefully encourages students to take home what they learned home and explore nearby nature where they live.

Value to teachers

You can tailor the NatureBlitz to any theme and focus on however many or few different types of organisms, habitats, human impacts/activities, natural processes, etc., as you like! You can meet one or more curriculum objectives and incorporate STEM learning.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, you don't have to leave the school grounds and you can easily fit this activity into a single class period/block. Give your students (and yourself) a whole new perspective on their schoolyard.

Materials needed for a **NatureBlitz**

At minimum each kid (or team of kids) will need a **species checklist** and **pencil** to mark down their observations.

- 🔗 **NatureBlitz species checklist**
- 🔗 **Nature scavenger hunt** (kindergarten-aged kids)

OTHER RESOURCES

- 🔗 **Nature Canada E-Book series of commonly found bird species in many parts of Canada**
- 🔗 **Junior Birder Guides**
(Nature Canada can mail these guides to you)

Field Guides of commonly found wildlife to help ID species (borrowed from library)



Helpful resources for a **NatureBlitz**

In addition to field guides, there are lots of great online plant and animal ID tools –and many free APPS – that can easily be used in your schoolyard:

PLANTS

- ↔ CWF's Native Plant Encyclopedia, "Quick Search"

BIRDS

- ↔ Cornell's All About Birds website, "Browse by name and shape"
- ↔ Cornell's Merlin Bird ID app

INSECTS

- ↔ BugGuide.net's "Clickable Guide" panel

MAMMALS

- ↔ Though antiquated, a valuable ID tool is McGill's Canadian Biodiversity website

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

- ↔ Canadian Herpetological Society's resources database

GENERAL WILDLIFE

- ↔ iNaturalist.ca - A great, free app and website that uses global crowd-sourcing to ID any organism, anywhere. You can map your sightings and upload pictures and inspire your budding citizen scientists.



Where to go for help

Invite an amateur naturalist or biologist to your school to act as the 'official species ID expert' for your activity.

Contact your board's outdoor education coordinator to see if they can recommend anyone to help.

↔ One of our NatureHood partners across Canada might even be able to help.

And don't underestimate the value of learning alongside with your students! It's also a great opportunity to encourage older students to partner up with younger students (and demonstrate their knowledge about habitats and biodiversity).



ACTIVITY IDEAS to incorporate into the NatureBlitz

Set a challenge for your students to guess how many different plant species can be found on the lawn/field – then find out through observation!

Use hula-hoops to define ‘sample areas’ and have the students compare numbers of plant species, % plant cover, number of insects, etc., between different sample areas around your schoolyard.

Look closely for all the flowering plants in your schoolyard – not just dandelions. See how many different colours of flowers you can find. Compare and contrast each flower and discuss why they might be different. Are the flowers only visible during certain periods? How might they be pollinated? Why might they differ?

Talk about why the plants you find might be well-adapted to your schoolyard. Why might other plants find it hard to live there?

Determine which plant species (and what percentage of the total) are invasive/non-native and discuss why that might be (hint: invasive species are typically much better adapted to marginal and disturbed habitats and aren't as susceptible to competition and herbivory as native species).

Look for different types of birds overhead or in nearby shrubs, or on buildings. How many different types are there? Can you hear more types of birds than you can see? Are the birds using more than 1 type of habitat? What are they doing? Why?

Compare your observations to the bird species observed at local birding hotspots using ebird.ca. It's a free and easy-to-use app!





More **ACTIVITY IDEAS**

Look for different types of insects in the grass, on the ground, on buildings/structures or on trees/shrubs and other plants. How many different types of insects are there? Are the insects using more than 1 type of habitat? What are they doing? Why?

Check <http://ebutterfly.ca> and <http://www.butterfliesandmoths.org> for moth and butterfly ID and information to further differentiate the activity.

Observe the different types of plants in playing fields. Grasses vs. broad-leaved plants; some are in flower; different growth patterns; different sizes. What portion of the ground in a given area is covered by each type of plant? Count the dandelions in a 1 metre square and determine how many would be in the entire schoolyard? (opportunity to incorporate fractions, percents)

Look closely at the different types of flowers around your schoolyard. Are the petals similar? Are the colours similar? How are the leaves organized on the stem? Does the flower look complex or simple? Is it hardy or delicate to the touch? Observe the different patterns (connection to math and visual art). Discuss what these differences might mean. Follow up with research in the classroom.

AFTER THE NATUREBLITZ

Back in the Classroom



TALK about what they saw – what was the coolest insect?

DRAW a picture of their favourite part of the NatureBlitz.

LEARN more about one of the species found.

COMPILE the full list of species observed.

BRING IT HOME – what can students do at home to help foster a positive relationship with nature?

 15 ways to be a good neighbour in your NatureHood brochure

Evaluation and Reporting

 Please let us know about your experience!

What you can do:

- Fill out a short survey telling us about your experience.
- Send us an email sharing the kids' experience (include some testimonials and/or photos).
- Have your school share a photo on social media using #NatureHood and tag @NatureCanada.

What's next?

Nature Canada also has a DIY Toolkit on:

- ↻ **How to run a Wildlife Migration Parade and obstacle course**
(available September 2018)

This is a fun activity to do in the spring or fall to help students learn more about migration:

- What species migrate (and why)
- Distance traveled
- Obstacles they face

Questions/Feedback?

Contact Nature Canada

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www.naturecanada.ca/naturehood

Thank you for your interest in NatureHood and helping get kids outside exploring Nearby Nature!

