

PROFILE

Ben Clark, Biodiversity Youth Ambassador

By Sally Plumb

THROUGH POURING RAIN in the redwood forest at Muir Woods National Monument, 14-year-old Ben Clark is grinning from ear to ear. He is participating in a predatory beetle inventory during the 2014 National Park Service–National Geographic Society (NGS) BioBlitz at the parks geographically associated with Golden Gate National Recreation Area (California).

Ben is an NPS Biodiversity Youth Ambassador. Initiated in 2010, the ambassador program has the mission of cultivating youth leadership that inspires next-generation environmental stewards in schools and communities. To date, five ambassadors have been selected by the host parks of the NPS-NGS BioBlitzes, while a sixth, Ben, was selected by the Natural Resource Stewardship and Science Directorate.

Ben's interest in biodiversity began during the 2011 Rocky Mountain National Park BioBlitz. While looking for amphibians in an alpine pond, Ben found a damselfly larva and learned that it was not native to the area. He became fascinated with the question of how it came to be there. In Ben's words, "It was that one little fly that opened my eyes to biodiversity."

Since that time, Ben's work to further biodiversity awareness has been inspiring. While attending the 2013 bioblitz at Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve in Louisiana, he was selected as an interviewee in a minidocumentary by the E. O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation, *Inspired by Nature* (<http://eowilsonfoundation.org/nps-biodiversity-youth-ambassadors/>). At his school, St. Ann Academy, Ben helped implement a schoolwide bioblitz at a local estuary,

with an accompanying biodiversity festival featuring exhibits on the biodiversity of 38 national parks. This growing awareness of biodiversity resulted in 42 students, parents, and teachers traveling from Ben's home community of Bridgeport, Connecticut, to participate in the Golden Gate BioBlitz. Ben was recently selected as an "Everyday Young Hero" by Youth Service America, an organization that engages young people to change the world and that sponsors Global Youth Service Day, the largest volunteer event in the world.

Sally Plumb: *Why is biodiversity important?*

Ben Clark: Biodiversity is important because it is the life and world we live in. So the more we learn and discover about biodiversity, the better we can improve the quality of human life.

SP: *Why is it so important for youth today to connect with nature?*

BC: "Youth" means the next generation, so if we can get them excited and enthusiastic about learning and conserving biodiversity, the better we can conserve it and the better we can control what we're doing.

SP: *You've participated in several bioblitzes. Which was your favorite and why?*

BC: My favorite bioblitz was the 2014 Golden Gate BioBlitz because when I was there, I learned more about how the ecosystem and the organisms in the ecosystem interact with each other to sustain the environment. And I found that really fascinating and really interesting—and I really liked learning about that.



Ben Clark collects a patent-leather beetle at the 2013 NPS-NGS BioBlitz at Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve.

SP: *As a Biodiversity Youth Ambassador, what have you done to promote interest and awareness of biodiversity?*

BC: As a Biodiversity Youth Ambassador, my friends and teachers and I organized a school bioblitz to promote youth involvement in biodiversity and to get youth excited about it. Change begins with one. At home in Connecticut, there are now 250 students waiting for the second annual school bioblitz. Just imagine how many people can be inspired by 250 students!

About the author

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