



## **Overfelt Gardens Nature Exploration (BioBlitz) Report** **Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society** **San Jose Parks Advocates**



### **Introduction:**

Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society (SCVAS) has a legacy of environmental education, advocacy and conservation since our founding in 1926. We are dedicated to promoting the enjoyment, understanding, and protection of birds and other wildlife by engaging people of all ages in birding, education, and conservation throughout Santa Clara County and beyond. Recently, we partnered with San Jose Parks Advocates to offer a nature exploration event, or “BioBlitz”, in Overfelt Gardens Park, San Jose.

A BioBlitz in its family-oriented version is an event where naturalists guide participants and teach them how to use the iNaturalist and/ or eBird applications on their smart phones to observe and record all living things in an area. BioBlitzes engage people in nature exploration while inspiring an enjoyment and understanding of birds and their habitats. A BioBlitz can also be used as a conservation tool by generating data that can be utilized to show decision-makers the biological diversity and integrity of an area - especially in places that are threatened by development - and by involving community members in advocacy efforts.

This report focuses on our September 23<sup>rd</sup> Bioblitz at Overfelt Gardens Park. Fifty people (including children) attended the event. Participants submitted over 900 observations comprising 194 species during the two hours of nature exploration at the park!

## Why Choose Overfelt Parks Gardens for a Bioblitz?

Overfelt Gardens is a unique urban park situated in a relatively low-income, Latino neighborhood of East San Jose. Maintenance here has been lax, but the gardens' previous glory and natural beauty are evident. Currently, the City of San Jose is looking to activate the park.



*Participants identifying wasp galls on a Valley Oak tree*

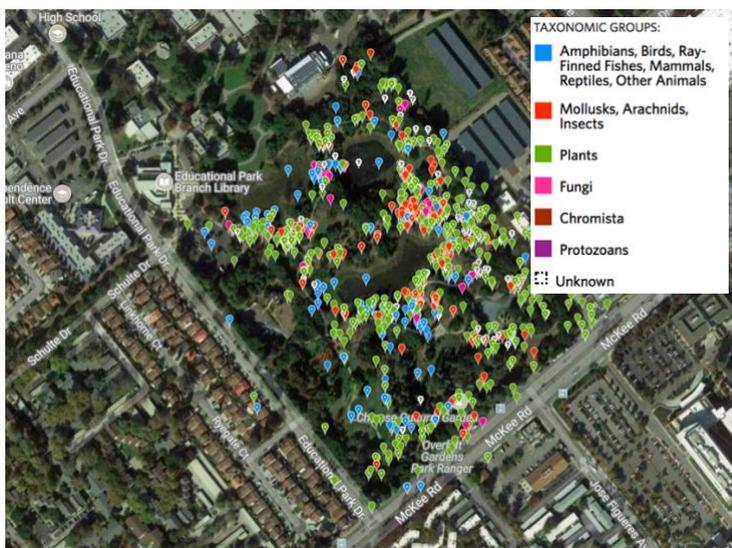
With the anticipation of change coming to Overfelt Gardens Park, and an interest in highlighting the biodiversity and uniqueness of the park, San Jose Parks Advocates sponsored the event. San Jose State University Environmental Studies lecturer Ada Marquez, encouraged her students to participate, and San Jose Vice Mayor Carrasco's office helped advertise the event to the local community of District 5.



*Young participants identifying duckweed on the lake*

## Participation and results

The event was well attended and very engaging. Fifty people joined us, including local community members, San Jose State students and naturalists from near and far. We divided into small groups and explored the park's history and biodiversity. Along the way, we used iNaturalist and eBird applications to document every plant and animal species that we found.



*An aerial map of the iNaturalist entries made during the BioBlitz*

The diversity of life forms at Overfelt Gardens was astonishing; we documented 211 species in just 2 hours! This comprised 97 species of plants and trees, 50 species of insects and spiders, 41 species of birds, 13 lichens and mosses, 10 wasp galls, four mammals and one reptile. The observations documented during the event are available to the public at <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/overfelt-park-bioblitz>.

*Interesting species*

Overfelt Gardens Park includes a rare yet critical resource for wildlife – water features. In September, one of the lakes in the park was covered with a green layer of duckweed (*Lemna* sp.) – a small floating flowering plant. Canada Geese, Mallard Ducks, and American Coots were abundant.



Some of the parks special insects and spiders: Top left: Western Forktail damselfly; right: leafcutter bee; bottom left: Bolas spider; right: Fiery Skipper

We documented several rare, beautiful and well-loved bird species such as the **Black-throated Gray Warbler**, **Belted Kingfisher**, **Wilson’s Snipe** and **Willow Flycatcher**. Sub-species of Willow Flycatchers are endangered in California, so it was a treat to catch a glimpse of this rare bird. Probably the most spectacular discovery was that of a **Bolas spider**, a species which looks like bird droppings, emits insect pheromones to attract moths, and then captures the moths shooting slime balls at them. **This is the first record of a Bolas spider in Santa Clara County in 100 years!**



Left: Willow Flycatcher; right: Wilson's Snipe (photos: Tom Grey)

## **Moving forward**

Bioblitz participants were amazed by the diverse forms of life in the park, and expressed the desire to learn more about the natural communities that exist in urban parks and the urban landscape. We hope that by introducing people to the iNaturalist and eBird applications, they can learn and contribute to citizen-science efforts that document biodiversity in their local parks, neighborhoods and backyards.

Overfelt Gardens is an exceptionally rich site for naturalists to explore! Native oaks may be one of the secrets to the impressive biodiversity found here, supporting a variety of insects, birds and mammals with their dense canopies and nutritious acorns. Water is equally as important for biodiversity; ponds scattered throughout the park help create a diverse ecosystem teeming with life.

From a naturalist point of view, Overfelt Gardens is a spectacular park that merits tender loving care. As the City of San Jose looks to revitalize the park, it is imperative to preserve its biodiversity and explore opportunities to educate the public about the natural assets of the park.

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## **Acknowledgments**

We thank San Jose Vice Mayor Magdalena Carrasco and San Jose Parks Advocates for sponsoring the event. Special thanks to our lead volunteer, Merav Vonshak, for recruiting volunteers and organizing the event, and to Ada Marquez and the students of San Jose State University. We would also like to thank our expert volunteers for their incredible help: Arnel Guanlao, Chris Johnson, Debbi Brusco, Jennifer Rycinga, Keith Wandry, Leslie Flint, Mackenzie Mossing, and Robbie Lamons.

