

Congratulations on your interest in monitoring your yard. You will find it rewarding and fun. You may know more about this than we do, but we learned a lot of things the hard way, so we'll share our experiences just in case.

Could you please share your results with us? In return, we'll be happy to send you the templates we used that you can modify for your region. Just send an email to marc-a@columbus.rr.com and indicate which or both of the templates would help (you yard and/or the comparison between two yards).

Some of the things we monitored: http://backyardhabitat.info/what_is_the_impact.htm

Much of the resulting data is in the second link for the Extended White Paper. We include more of the data in our PowerPoint presentation. Here were some of the lessons we learned:

- Start with the end in mind - what meaningful reports do you want to create from the data? Decide what gives an accurate picture of what is happening in the habitat. We captured a lot of information in the beginning we never used. We've decided the most important thing was the species diversity rather than the count of each species for our purposes (in such a small space, we really don't want a lot of biomass or we'd have a sink hole).
- We observed biodiversity in our own yard across a year's time, and then started over the next year (not a life list like most people make). We did not have the opportunity to do this in comparison with the adjacent yard, so we got their permission in advance to do observation periods.
- We found out later that optimum observation periods are 6 to 10 minutes per Cornell Lab, shorter than we had thought it would be. We observed multiple short periods rather than a single long period.
- We found birds best viewed with binoculars from a distance, bugs up closer with a monocular and butterflies back farther with close-focus binoculars. Therefore, they needed to be monitored at separate times. We used close-focus, fast lens photography and videos for identification with many guides and experts to consult.
- Various scientists told us to monitor randomly over multiple years at around the same times with similar weather conditions to get a trend. Sun and no wind seemed the best way.
- How detailed of an ID is enough? Entomologists often need to trap and kill the specimens for closer ID purposes. We decided that was not necessary for the purpose of our study. We were happy we didn't freeze our bees when they had so much trouble with the drought last year. We were satisfied to stay at the label 'Large Carpenter Bee' but you may have different needs.
- Bioindicator species are excellent for determining the health of your ecosystem - those species that absorb toxins through the skin and give early warning of pollution, etc. You will probably have toads and frogs, but we don't, so we had nematodes studied. The results gave us a lot of valuable information.
- Do you want to do night surveys - with black lights and sheets with white light behind them for night creatures? Chunky peanut butter on a tree for flying squirrels? We are early morning people so we didn't include any night observations.
- Compiling all that data - We kept our data in Excel spreadsheets with multiple sheets: one for our yard data and the other for the data comparing the two yards. This way we can automatically total things and easily create charts of the results.
- Please email marc-a@columbus.rr.com and request Blank Excel Spreadsheets (with some sample entries) to help standardize data collection.

Best wishes and enjoy!