

Great Barrier  
Reef Foundation



*Research for a resilient Reef*

# ReefBlitz 2014: A bioblitz case study



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# 1 ReefBlitz 2014

ReefBlitz is an event designed to engage the community (including citizens, tourists, industry and government) in the collection and communication of reef data that are relevant to reef science and management.

ReefBlitz 2014 was piloted at Cannonvale Beach (Airlie Beach) on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> October 2014. It attracted 389 participants (247 for the schools program and 142 from the community) and 35 volunteers and staff.

Over the course of the weekend, 23 surveys and a beach clean-up were undertaken by members of the Airlie Beach community. A tailored schools survey program was also held for 3 local schools and 2 Police Citizen Youth Clubs. The total number of species identified was 191 (from 656 observations), recorded in iNaturalist, within 48 hours.



## 1.1 Introduction

Recognising that there is strong national and international interest in the protection and preservation of the Reef, but a lack of opportunities for people to contribute in practical ways that enhance the scientific and management outcomes, the Foundation developed the 'ReefBlitz' concept.

This was built on the National Geographic 'BioBlitz' model that has subsequently shaped 'Bush Blitz' in Australia. A BioBlitz is an event during which participants are invited to catalogue all of the plant and animal species over a specified time period, usually between 24 and 48 hours.

ReefBlitz is an event that focuses on engaging the community and tourists in the collection of real, meaningful data that is relevant to Reef management and research. The event offered several plant and animal surveys, to catalogue the biodiversity of the area, as well as beach clean ups and other scientific activities.

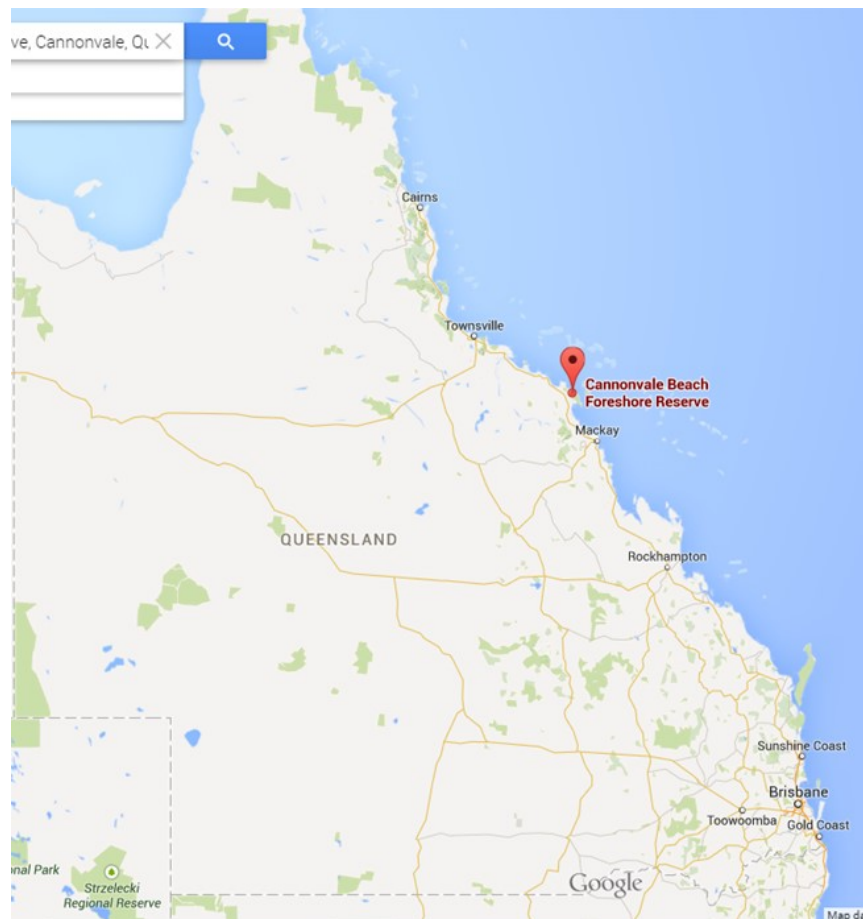
The objectives of ReefBlitz were:

- 1) To harness community interest in the protection and preservation of the Reef by providing a real, practical mechanism for people to contribute positively
- 2) To gather data and information that is relevant to the community, reef managers, users and policy makers

- 3) To build a committed 'ReefBlitz' community of trained volunteers who can contribute both on and off Reef
- 4) To engage the broader community (and society generally) in the ReefBlitz effort through user-friendly tools and communication products

## 1.2 Basecamp

ReefBlitz was piloted at Cannonvale Beach, which is part of the Reef Catchments (Mackay Whitsunday Isaac) NRM catchment, (see Figure 1) on 24 –25 October, 2014.



*Figure 1: Cannonvale Beach, near Airlie Beach, North Queensland. This is part of the Reef Catchments (Mackay Whitsunday Isaac) NRM region.*

The basecamp was set up at Cannonvale Beach. The basecamp was the hub of the ReefBlitz festival, with all surveys leaving from here. Several community-based citizen science groups had stalls set up at basecamp. The local school also ran a fundraising barbeque at the basecamp.



*Figure 2: Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service display at basecamp*

There were a range of species identification tools at basecamp, such as microscopes, species ID guides, and a live feed of biodiversity observations through the iNaturalist website.



*Figure 3: Species identification at basecamp*

### 1.3 Surveys

The event attracted 389 participants and about 35 volunteers and staff. Of these, 247 took part in the schools program, and 142 were participants from the broader community.



Figure 4: Tide pool survey

Over the course of the weekend, 23 biodiversity surveys and a beach clean-up were held for the general public. Additionally, a tailored schools program was held for three local schools and two PCYC youth groups. A total of 191 species were identified (from 656 observations) during the event.



Figure 5: Rocky shore survey at ReefBlitz 2014



Figure 6: Official launch event of ReefBlitz, with Hon. Andrew Powell

## 1.4 Results

A range of plant and animal species were observed during the event, including 118 animals and 72 plant species.



Figure 7: PCYC group participating at ReefBlitz 2014

There were several interesting species recorded, including:

- The resident shorebird, the Beach stone-curlew (*Esacus marnirostris*), which is listed as vulnerable in Queensland
- A pair of migratory Pacific golden plovers, *Pluvialis fulva*. These birds stop over at the Great Barrier Reef on their migration from Siberia, where they nest each year





Figure 8: School children in action at ReefBlitz 2014

- An undescribed species of hover fly from the Family Syrphidae, collected by net, which will make its way to Canada to be part of evolutionary and taxonomic studies of the world syrphid fauna.
- A rare intertidal spider, *Paratheuma australis*. This species is more commonly recorded in Hawaii and other hot and humid climates.
- During their survey at Daydream Island, Reef Check recorded 82 burrowing clams at Mermaids Cove and 39 at Lovers Cove.



Figure 9: Bird watching survey

- Evidence of dugong presence, due to feeding trails
- Anecdotal reports of seagrass recovery since Cyclone Yasi Volunteer participation



Figure 10: Survey leader with whip snake

## 1.5 Partners

ReefBlitz was created by the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, and delivered through a range of community and corporate partnerships.

The major partners for the event were:

- Queensland Government
- Qantas
- Earthwatch Australia



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