







Biosphere

# **URBAN** Kit OTTAWA **GATINEAU**



Environment Canada Biosphere Environnement Canada Biosphère



# Four Seasons of Fun for the Whole Family!

# The Biosphere in Montréal Exploring biodiversity in Andrew Haydon Park

Photo: © Palvashah Durrani

# URBAN ECOSYSTEMS IN CANADA'S CAPITAL REGION

Are you familiar with the animals and plants near your home? How much do you know about the biodiversity in your neighbourhood? To help you explore your surroundings, the Biosphere, environment museum is pleased to present this urban activity.

Environment Canada's Biosphere encourages citizens to take action and get involved in environmental issues.

In addition to presenting exhibits and special events, the Biosphere offers educational and awareness-raising activities.

Situated on the edge of the Canadian Shield, the Ottawa-Gatineau region features stunning natural areas like Gatineau Park and the National Capital Greenbelt; the Ottawa, Rideau and Gatineau rivers; and wetlands such as Mer Bleue and the Masson Marshes, as well as numerous parks. Local residents and visitors take advantage of the region's rich natural and cultural heritage.

Biosphere: ec.gc.ca/biosphere



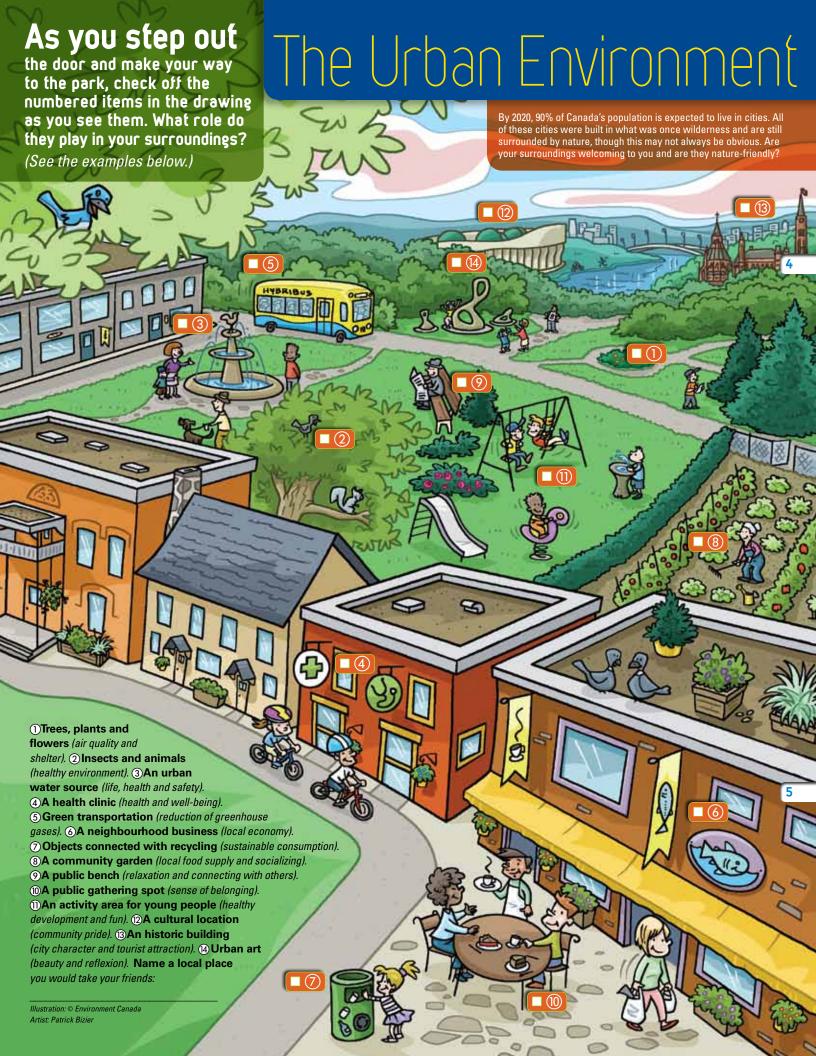
Reconnect with your environment...

# How the BioKit Works

- 1. Choose a nearby park or green space.
- **2.** Gather up your equipment: GPS unit (optional), magnifying glass, binoculars, camera, pocket-size mirror, pencil and clipboard.
- **3.** Step out your front door and consider your surroundings in order to answer the questions on the following two pages.
- 4. Walk to the park or green space you chose in step one. Once there, continue observing the environment around you (follow along with the questions in the following sections of the BioKit).
- **5.** Upon your return, discuss your outing with friends and family. Explore other BioKits and complementary activities by visiting ec.gc.ca/biotrousses-biokits.

In the electronic version of this document, available on the BioKits website, the highlighted words are hyperlinks to external websites.

Photo: © iStockphoto.com/kaisphoto



# Between your home and the park, did you observe green spaces?

Imagine you are a bee or a squirrel. How do you cross the neighbourhood? Where do you stop to rest or eat?

Wildlife corridors: In cities, the parks, treed walkways, green alleys, flower boxes, balcony planters and gardens can serve as urban wildlife corridors. These environments provide pathways to connect animals and plants with food, shelter and breeding areas.

Park visited:	
Date:	
Departure time:	
Return time:	
GPS coordinates:	
(optional)	

Photo: © Ron Rowan Photography/Shutterstock.com

### **WEATHER**

°C Temperature:



□ Sunnv



□ Rainy



☐ Partly cloudy



☐ Snowy



☐ Cloudy



☐ Windy



☐ Foggy

### • Do not pick **plants** (including flowers, ferns, etc.) during your outing.

Eco-friendly tips

Spring peeper

 Obey any signs asking you to stay on pathways.

for urban nature explorers:

Photo: © Dave Huth

- Leave nature the way you found it.
- Observe wild animals from a distance and do not feed them.
- Put vour **trash** in waste containers or take it home with you.



### Did you know...

Thanks to the many green spaces, the Ottawa-Gatineau region has good air quality. The little air pollution that the region does experience is mostly from wood smoke and vehicle exhausts.



### TAKE A BREATHER!

Take a deep breath and look around you. What is your first impression?

Talk about what you see with your companions.

### **CRICK, CRACK, TWEET!**

The sounds in our environment affect our well-being.

Close your eyes and listen. Write down the sounds you hear:

From nature:

From human activity:

Circle the sounds you would prefer to hear less often.

# A Certain Something in the Air

### Catch the Scent!

The atmosphere is an ocean of gases that we live in and breathe all the time. Describe the odours you can smell in the air:

☐ Fruity?

☐ Floral?

☐ Diesel?

Other: \_

What direction is the wind blowing from?

What did you do to find out?

The atmosphere plays an important role in how our planet functions. It protects us from the sun's rays and regulates our climate, making our survival possible.

# SEE ANY CLOUDS IN THE SKY? HOW ARE THEY SHAPED? WHAT DOES THEIR SHAPE TELL YOU?



☐ Cirrus: Located high in the sky, cirrus clouds sometimes indicate that rain is coming.

Cloud pictures: © Jacques Pelletier



☐ **Cumulus:** Located low in the sky, these clouds often appear in good weather. In the hot, humid days of summer, they can transform into cumulonimbus clouds.



☐ Cumulonimbus:
These are large grey clouds, taller than they are wide; in summer, they are a sign of stormy weather.



Stratus: Usually sitting fairly low in the sky, stratus clouds often cause grey days and can herald storms or drizzle.

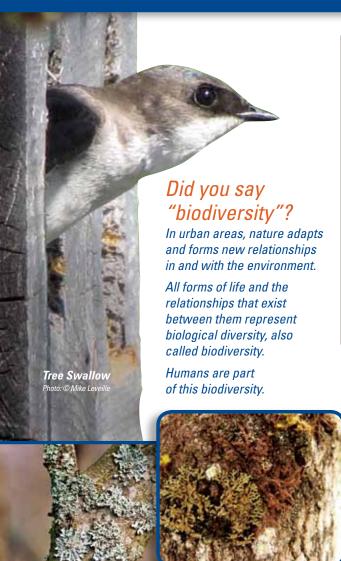
Photo: Photodisc

# Eco-friendly tips for clean air:

- Walk, take your bicycle, use the Bixi selfserve bicycle, participate in car-pool services, or use public transit.
- Avoid idling! Turn off the engine when you are in a stopped car.
- Check the Air Quality
   Health Index when you are planning your next outing.

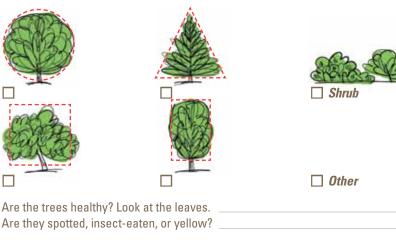
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# Urban Biodiversity



### **SHAPE GAZING**

Generally speaking, the more species there are, the healthier the environment. How many different shapes of trees can you find?



### Did you know...

Over 250 000 trees have been planted in Ottawa and Gatineau since 2006!

Canada, but the National Capital

of Canada's Capital, plants close

to one million tulips that bloom in

the spring.

Commission, the official gardener

### Ottawa-Gatineau bursts into colour each spring

with the arrival of tulips, lilacs and trilliums. It is the time for sugar maple delicacies and native plants like strawberries, trout lilies and bloodroots to start flourishing.



# Take a look at the tree trunks around you. Do you see any lichens? Are there different types? Lichen: It is a type of partnership

hoto: © iStockphoto.com/AYImages

(symbiosis) between a fungus and an alga. You can find clumps of lichen on tree trunks and rocks. Sometimes a lichen has various colours.

Prowling for Lichens

worsen health problems like asthma.

Did you know that the type and amount of lichens growing on tree trunks can tell us about air quality? Most lichens are sensitive to air quality and deteriorate when air pollution levels are high. Air pollution can



oto: © National Capital Com

# Hide and Seek!

### A healthy ecosystem

- · cleans the air and water;
- · produces oxygen;
- · traps carbon dioxide gas;
- · controls insects and animal pests naturally;
- encourages pollination;
- helps control flooding and erosion;
- produces fertile soil;
- plays an important role in our economy, health and food safety.

These are services that the public would otherwise pay for.

something else (sometimes unusual) in its mouth or beak, follow it from a distance and, with a little luck, it might lead you right to its nest. Take care and remember, do not disturb the occupants!

If you see a bird or a

squirrel pass by with a twig, a string, or

The Secret Life of Trees

Take a closer look. There could be a nest hiding in that hollow tree trunk! Look closely at treetops too. See any nests made by:

- Squirrels?
- Birds?
- Wasps?

Or any cocoons built by insects?

Look for animal tracks in the snow or mud. Notice the different shape and arrangements of pawprints or footprints and follow the trail.

American



Red squirrel

Some key things to look for:

- Does it have two feet or four?
- Are the footsteps close together (maybe indicating a smaller animal) or far apart (a bigger animal)?
- How many toes are there?
- Where are the tracks heading?

# Winter... a great season to play the detective

Follow that trail! Try to find other signs of life, like leftover food, scratch marks and dung. What can you see?

a picture of the tracks you find so that you can identify them when you get back home.

Did you know that the red squirrel makes its own maple syrup? It bites the bark to get at the woody tissue and lets the sap flow. Once the water evaporates, the squirrel returns to harvest the "syrup"!

# Look Up, Look Down!

### Did you know... Scientists have discovered that some birds in urban environments have changed their song so that they can be heard over all the human noise!

### **Birdsong!**

What sounds tell you that spring is here? While you may see a bird in a tree or soaring through the air, the best way to identify birds is through their song.

# Close your eyes. Now listen for any birdsong you may hear.



□ Killdeer Song: kill-deah Photo: © Mike Leveille



Downy Woodpecker Song: teekcheek-chereek

Photo: © Mike Leveille

☐ Black-capped Chickadee Song: chick-a-deedee-dee-dee

Photo: © National Capital Commission



Blue Jay Song: jeer

Photo: © Frank Miles/USFWS



# Fun-qus Fun

Over 1000 different mushrooms have been identified in Ottawa-Gatineau! Start looking for them in April and all the way to December, especially after it has rained.

**Ready?** You have three minutes to find as many differently shaped mushrooms as you can. But be careful not to touch them! While some mushrooms are edible, many are poisonous.

The best places to look for fungi are on the ground, on tree trunks and on rotting wood.



hoto: © Sylvain Deland





Once you find a mushroom, use your pocket mirror to observe its underside.

Then draw side and bottom views of your discovery.

Side:					

Bo	tto	m:					

# Mammals, Reptiles and Friends!

# **HOW MANY DIFFERENT TYPES OF ANIMALS CAN YOU SEE?**

Include pets, street animals, farm animals and wild animals:



**Amphibians** 



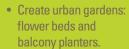
Mammals

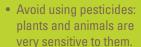




**Others** 







- Grow a butterfly or pollinator garden.
- Join a community organization to help identify local birds and fungi, or to help keep the rivers healthy.













Raccoon

Scientists have identified up to a million species of insects so far, but estimate that there may be as many as 30 million. Insects differ from other animals by their three pairs of legs. With or without your magnifying glass, scour the ground or search among the flowers for insects. Who knows, you might discover a new species!

Jumping spider Photo: © Henri Goulet

Spiders and millipedes may not be insects, but they still belong to our environmental family!

### **Pollinating Insects:**

These insects carry pollen from flower to flower. Bees, wasps, butterflies, beetles, ants and flies are among these beneficial insects.

We owe them credit for over 70% of the food we harvest.

These days, pollinating insects are threatened by:

- loss of habitat:
- use of pesticides;
- competition with other species (often invasive species);
- disease and parasites;
- · light pollution.



Honey bee Photo: © iStockphoto.com/arlindo71



☐ Butterflies and caterpillars



☐ Bees, wasps and ants



□ Dragonflies and damselflies



☐ Ladvbugs and beetles



Flies and mosquitoes







# Species at Risk in the Region



Photo: © Mike Leveille

### **RARE SPECIES**

The Canadian Shield and the St. Lawrence Lowlands are two important geographic features that meet at the Eardley Escarpment in Gatineau Park. This long cliff is home to over half of Gatineau Park's at risk and rare species of plants and animals.

Did you know...
80% of the eastern red cedars in Quebec are found on the Eardley Escarpment.

Photo: © Howard F. Schwartz, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org

Some plants and animals are at risk because their habitats are disappearing or are being split up. When this happens, animals lose their homes, food and places to breed and mate. Pollution, disease, invasive species and climate change can also affect animal and plant populations.

Channel darter

Illustration: © New York State

Blanding's turtle
Photo: © USFWS

Department of Environmental

**Little brown bat** Photo: © iStockphoto.com/-AZ-

Conservation

If you were one of these animals, could you safely move 10 steps straight ahead of where you are now standing?

What about 25 steps?

Or 50 steps?



**Snapping turtle**Photo: © National Capital Commission

Common Nighthawk Photo: © Gary Kramer/USFWS

Photo

Photo: © Megan McCarty

Ecopassages!

These are walkways or tunnels that humans have built under or over highways, to allow animals to cross them safely. For example, you can find eco-passages under Terry Fox Drive in Kanata.

Due to their similar colours, the **juniper hairstreak** can hide, or camouflage itself, in the eastern redcedar (also called the red juniper), on which this butterfly's larvae feed.

# Find the Invader



### Did you know...

The native Wild Turkey disappeared from southern Ontario in the early 1900s. The turkeys were successfully reintroduced to this area in the mid-1980s, and have continued to expand their range ever since.

# **INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES**

Brought into a region either accidentally or on purpose, these plant and animal species are a major threat to biodiversity and are very difficult to control.

Which of the following are considered an invasive alien species in the Ottawa-Gatineau region?



**a) Garlic mustard**Photo: © David Cappaert, Michigan
State University, Bugwood, org



**b)** Common carp
Photo: © Duane Raver, US Fish
and Wildlife Service, Bugwood.org



c) Red-eared slider (popular pet shop variety!) Photo: © Greg Hume



d) Reed canary grass

Photo: © Richard Old, XID

Services, Inc., Bugwood.org



e) Emerald ash borer

Photo: © Klaus Bolte,

CFS-SCF. NRCan-RNCan

[Answer: All of them!]

# Moving in Look around you.

Now imagine this is your new home. How will you adapt? How will you eat, drink, sleep, stay warm and stay safe in this new environment? Share your ideas with the other people in your group.



hoto: © Palvashah Durrani



Photo: © Biodiversity Conservancy International

# The Slack Sand Dune

This unique ecosystem is a "leftover" from the last Ice Age 10 000 years ago! To protect its native plants and animals, volunteers are working to restore the dunes to their natural state.

### Did you know...

The ghost tiger beetle still calls the Slack Sand Dune home. This beetle, which has disappeared from other sites in Canada, relies on the sand to stay camouflaged and safe from predators.



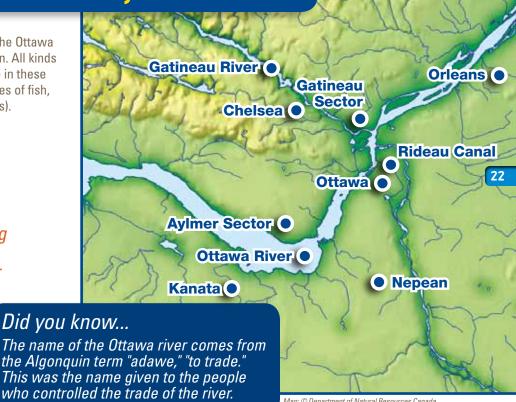
# Water, Water Everywhere!

The Rideau and Gatineau rivers meet up with the Ottawa River in the heart of the National Capital Region. All kinds of aquatic plants and animals make their home in these rivers, including 14 types of mussels, many types of fish, muskrats, turtles and waterfowl (such as ducks).

# A Drippy Adventure!

Find out where you are on the map. Imagine you are a lonely drop of water. How are you going to get from where you are to a river, in order to join all the other water droplets? Once you are in the river, where do you go?

Draw your path on the map.



# Wetlands

Wetlands are areas that are wet all year long or just seasonally.



# Wetlands are important because they:

- Provide homes and food for many types of plants and animals, including thousands of migratory birds.
- Act like sponges: they soak up extra water from heavy rains or snowmelt and release it slowly, reducing floodings.

The Mer Bleue in the city of Ottawa

Remove pollution from water.

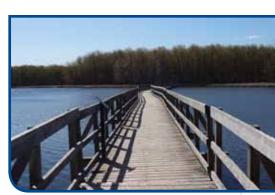


Photo: © CREDDO

The city of Gatineau's Green Fund is helping to rehabilitate McLaurin Bay.



Photo: © Mike Leveille

Visit the Macoun Marsh in the Beechwood Cemetery in Ottawa to learn about biodiversity year-round!

### **HEAD FOR THE HILLS**

Over time, humans have transformed the natural landscape. Look for some high ground in the park, and divide what you see into groups:

### Natural features:

hills, waterways, fields, forests and lakes

Do you see any wildlife corridors that animals could use to move from place to place in the city?

Photo: © iStockphoto.com/macky\_ch

### A DIFFERENT ANGLE!

Sometimes, just looking at something from a different angle can lead to surprising discoveries.

- Take out your pocket-size mirror and walk backwards. Does the landscape look any different?
- Bend over and look back through your legs, to see everything around you upside down. Describe what you see.
- What is your favourite point of interest?
   Ask your fellow biodiversity explorers
   to guess what they think your favourite is.



# Urban Landscapes

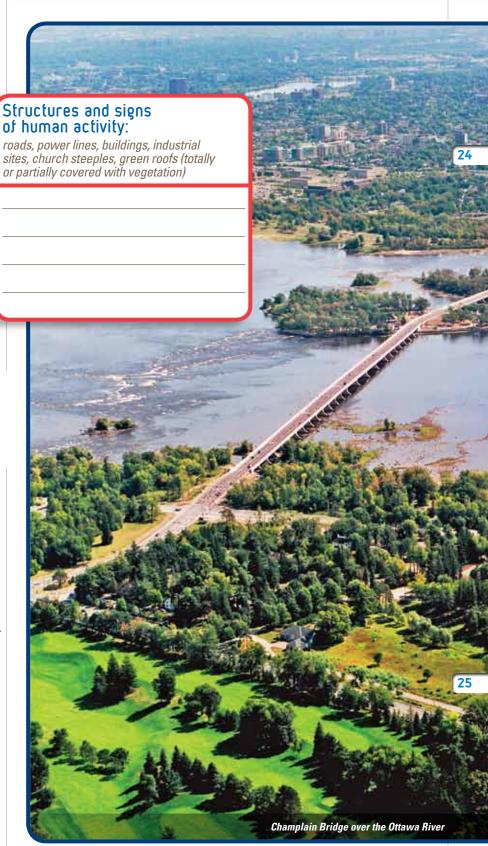


Photo: © National Capital Commission

# Green Spaces

The Ottawa-Gatineau region is full of magnificent green spaces, from wooded areas and parks to the National Capital Greenbelt and Gatineau Park.

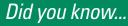
# As you leave

Before leaving your chosen park or green space, close your eyes and feel the environment around you. Is it warm? Cool? Wet? Dry? Sunny? Shady?

Now cross the street or parking lot, and close your eyes again. Does it feel any different?

### Green Spaces

- · cool the urban environment;
- slow the water runoff from rainfall and snowmelt;
- · provide habitats and wildlife corridors for animals and plants;
- are places to relax and have fun.

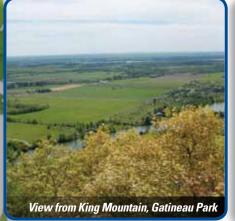


There are more than 300 kilometres of recreational paths in the Capital region to walk, cycle and roller blade, linking superb natural areas, parks and attractions!











Bird feeder Photo: © iStockphoto.com/PrairieArtProject



Tree cavity Photo: © Palvashah Durrani



Water feature Photo: © iStockphoto.com/SteveByland



Vegetable garden Photo: © iStockphoto.com/Maica



**Bushes** Photo: © Palvashah Durrani



Tree-lined street Photo: © iStockphoto.com/charrongolf



Green alley Photo: © Baty Arnaud, Alex Hartunian



Photo: © iStockphoto.com/igorr1



Balcony garden Photo: © iStockphoto.com/HeikeRau



# Living with our Wild Neighbours



Photo: © Craig Koppie, USFWS

Peregrine Falcons living in the urban areas nest on tall buildings.

Check out the falcon cam, at the Ottawa Delta City Centre!

We have changed the environment around us. We clear land to build homes, farms and places to shop and work. Some animals and plants have adapted to live with us in an urban setting.



Photo: © Ann Dacres

Some plants will grow out
of any small space or crack.

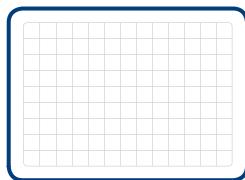


Photo: © iStockphoto.com/PapaBear

Deers and other animals use rail and power line corridors as pathways at night.

### **URBAN GROWTH!**

Find a plant growing in an unusual spot. What does this plant need to survive in the urban jungle? Draw it in the box below!

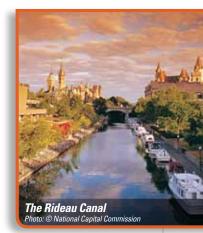




Who are your wild neighbours?

Who is the most unusual wild neighbour to visit your urban environment?

What are one positive and one negative thing about having wild neighbours?



thing about having wild neighbou

The Chimney Swift once nested in large hollow trees in old forests, but when those forests were cleared, it started using chimneys and other similar structures instead. Fortunately, this bird only needs them during the spring and summer when we are not using our fireplaces.



Downtown, the Canal is full of fish like largemouth bass and bluegills. You might even see a muskie!

# Did you know...

Sometimes, animals can adapt too well to an urban environment. For example, Canada Geese are attracted to waterfront parks and golf courses, where they have access to food and shelter and are safe from their main predators like the fox. They multiply too fast for the environment, and their overpopulation and droppings create problems.

Remember not to feed any wild animals, including Canada Geese.

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# Urban Environment: My Diagnosis

Now that you have gathered an abundance of observations, use them to reach your own diagnosis about the health of your urban environment by filling in the chart opposite.

This diagnosis can be printed from the BioKits website and be used for other park visits.

Check the boxes that apply	Excellent!	Not bad but	Things must improve!	
Trees, bushes, balcony planters and gardens providing a biological corridor between your home and the park				-
First impression of the park				30
Surrounding sounds				-
Air quality				-
Biodiversity: plants and trees				
Biodiversity: animals				
Presence of pollinators			Mer Bleu	е
Invasive plant control			Photo: © Natio Capital Commis	
Waterways, ponds, lakes or wetlands				31
	T.		1	-

# Recommendation: Enjoy your environment Choose one thing

Enjoy your environmen and help preserve threatened species in your area. you would like to improve and think up a possible solution.

Many heads are better than one! Talk to people about your concerns; they might join your improvement efforts.



Black swallowtail caterpilla Photo: © iStockphoto.com/arlindo71

# Encourage Biodiversity

# Now it is your turn

to promote biodiversity! If you have access to a yard or just a balcony, you can take action!

What actions will you take?

### Legend

- Website for Ottawa
- Website for Gatineau

Take part in your city's composting program.



Support local agriculture, organic when possible.





Naturalize, your garden or a community space: grow native species to provide food and shelter for wild animals.



Care for your lawn in an environmentally friendly way.



Grow vegetables in a community garden, a vard or containers.

Learn about vulnerable species and how you can help them.

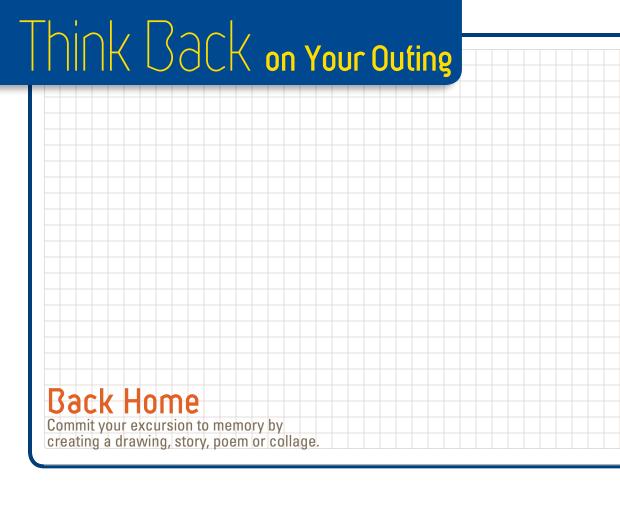
It is estimated that several million birds fall prey to cats each year in Canada. To help make your neighbourhood more bird-friendly:

- Consider keeping your cat indoors, particularly from dawn until dusk.
- Place a colourful collar around your cat's neck.
- Set up safe birdhouses and feeders that cats cannot easily reach.
- Promptly report any stray or feral cats.
- Turn off any unneeded lights at night.



Participate in community tree-planting and shoreline restoration projects.

Photo: © iStockphoto.com/erminaut



# Biodiversity at Your Doorstep

For your next expedition, choose one of the following places where you can further discover the region's unique biodiversity!





Photo: © iStockphoto.com/Orchidpoet

### **PRODUCTION TEAM**

The Ottawa-Gatineau Urban BioKit is an adaptation of the Urban BioKit.

Production: Biosphere, Environment Canada

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Triptych photo on cover: © National Capital Commission

Blue-spotted salamander photo on cover: © Michieldewit | Dreamstime.com

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Organizations represented on the Ottawa-Gatineau Urban BioKit steering committee:

Friends of Gatineau Park

City of Ottawa Ville de Gatineau

Parks Canada Agency

St-Laurent Academy, grade 6 and 7 classes 2011–2012

Explore other BioKits and complementary activities by visiting ec.gc.ca/biotrousses-biokits.

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