

Get Involved in Citizen Science!

Earth Day was founded on April 22, 1970 as a day of education about environmental issues. In 2016, Earth Day celebrated its 46th year and is celebrated world-wide as a day to talk, learn, and engage in current environmental issues. The organization Earth Day Network (<http://www.earthday.org>) coordinates global activities and events on Earth Day. In 2016, their theme was “Trees for the Earth” with a goal of planting 7.8 billion trees by Earth Day 2020, which will be the 50th anniversary of celebrating Earth Day. This is the first of five major goals the Network will undertake as they countdown to the 50th anniversary.

One way that you can get involved in environmental issues in your area is to volunteer with a citizen science monitoring program. Citizen science is “the involvement of the public in scientific research – whether community-driven research or global investigations” (<http://staging.citizenscience.org>). Citizen science projects are often times used to show how the environment has changed around us and can have years or even decades of information collected by the general public. A couple of well-known citizen science projects are the Christmas Bird Count organized by the Audubon Society. The Christmas Bird Count (<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>), which began on Christmas Day 1900, is the nation’s longest-running citizen science bird project. Another citizen science project found here in Florida is the Florida LAKEWATCH program (<http://lakewatch.ifas.ufl.edu>), which is a citizen volunteer lake monitoring program that started in 1986. It is now one of the largest lake monitoring programs in the country. There’s also an Aquatic Bird Survey that can be done in addition to the LAKEWATCH survey (<http://lakewatch.ifas.ufl.edu/AquatBird2.htm>). These are just a couple examples of citizen science projects that you can get involved with.

Do you want to get involved in a citizen science project? Check out the websites and programs below and hopefully you’ll find something that interests you. If not, you can easily search for citizen science projects in your area online. Look at websites for local environmental centers, colleges or universities, zoos and aquariums, since these all might have projects where you can get involved.

Birds

1. Celebrate Urban Birds – collecting data on how different environments will influence the location of birds in urban areas: <http://celebrateurbanbirds.org>
2. eBird – maximizing the accessibility of the vast number of bird observations made each year by recreational and professional bird watchers: <http://ebird.org/content/ebird>

[Get Involved in Citizen Science]

3. Jay Watch – measure annual nesting success and count total numbers of Florida Scrub Jays at more than 50 sites in 19 counties in Florida: <http://fl.audubon.org/jay-watch>
4. The Great Backyard Bird Count: <http://gbbc.birdcount.org>
5. Audubon EagleWatch – provide information on Bald Eagles, active nest locations, and possible disturbances or threats to nesting activities: <http://fl.audubon.org/audubon-eaglewatch>

Wildlife and Plants

1. JellyWatch – recording sightings of jellyfish and other marine organisms: <http://www.jellywatch.org>
2. Journey North – a global study of wildlife migration and seasonal change: <https://www.learner.org/jnorth>
3. Butterflies – help locate and track butterflies and larvae with one of these citizen science projects: <http://monarchjointventure.org/get-involved/study-monarchs-citizen-science-opportunities> and (specific to Florida) <http://flbutterflies.net/getinvolved.jsp>
4. FrogWatch USA – collect data during evenings from February to August about the frogs you here: <https://www.aza.org/frogwatch>
5. Nature's Notebook – a national, online program where naturalists regularly record observations of plant and animals to generate long-term data sets of seasonal changes: https://www.usanpn.org/natures_notebook
6. iNaturalist – a website and mobile app where you can record your observations of wildlife, share the information with fellow naturalists, and discuss your findings. The findings are shared with scientific data repositories to help scientists find and use your data: <http://www.inaturalist.org>
7. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Citizen Science Projects: <http://myfwc.com/get-involved/citizen-science>
8. REEF Volunteer Fish Survey Project – volunteer SCUBA divers and snorkelers collect and report on marine fish populations: <http://www.reef.org/programs/volunteersurvey>

Others

1. Microplastics – documenting where microplastics are found in our local waterways and worldwide: <http://www.plasticaware.org> and <http://www.adventurescience.org/microplastics.html>
2. Galaxy Zoo – help scientists classify galaxies right from your own computer: <https://www.galaxyzoo.org>
3. Phytoplankton Monitoring Network – promoting a better understand of harmful algal blooms by volunteer monitoring: <https://products.coastalscience.noaa.gov/pmn>