

Citizen science increases environmental awareness, advocacy

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Citizens who get involved in science become more environmentally aware and willing to participate in advocacy than previously thought, according to a new study by researchers at Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment. Citizen science projects can lead to broader public support for conservation efforts.

The study, led by PhD student McKenzie Johnson, appeared in November in the journal *Global Environmental Change*. It surveyed 115 people who had recently participated in [citizen science](#) projects in India with the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Centre for Wildlife Studies.

The researchers found that in addition to gaining environmental knowledge and skills such as population monitoring and species identification, participants in the projects often became environmental advocates, sharing their knowledge within their social networks.

"Citizen science is having an impact in creating environmental advocates, many of whom are able to diffuse knowledge and create a network of people interested in [environmental conservation](#)," said Dr. Erika Weinthal, Lee Hill Snowdon Professor of Environmental Policy.

Previous studies have shown that citizen science helps boost environmental literacy and raise public awareness, Weinthal noted, but this is the first to demonstrate that it also helps build environmental networks. Fifteen of the 115 people surveyed reported that they had gone on to create their own conservation organization after participating in citizen [science projects](#). Others changed careers to become full-time wildlife conservationists.

"This shows the wonderful possibilities of experiential learning and the ways it can motivate people to drastically alter the path they believed themselves to be on," said Johnson.

"Getting the public involved in the scientific process goes a long way in building public support for [wildlife conservation](#)," said Krithi Karanth, adjunct assistant professor at the Nicholas School and associate conservation scientist at the Wildlife Conservation Society.

"I hope this study demonstrates the potential for citizen science to not only engage individuals in scientific activities and learning, but to have an advocacy impact that could potentially reverberate in communities far beyond the actual project participants," Johnson said.

Weinthal said she hopes that citizen science continues to connect

scientists and non-scientists. "What I learned from this study was how important it is to engage larger segments of the population in research," Weinthal said. "We often assume there's a dividing line between those who do science and those who are recipients of science, but there's a lot more room for interaction between the two."

More information: "Network environmentalism: Citizen scientists as agents for environmental advocacy," McKenzie F. Johnson, Corrie Hannah, Leslie Acton, Ruxandra Popovici, Krithi Karanth, and Erika Weinthal, published November 1, 2014 in *Global Environmental Change*. [DOI: 10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2014.10.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2014.10.006)

Provided by Duke University

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