

Getting the best out of citizen scientists

December 12 2014

Can "citizen science" ever be as effective as the real thing? At the joint meeting of the British Ecological Society and the Société Française d'Ecologie, Earthwatch scientists will share their experience of harnessing the power of non-scientific communities for FreshWater Watch - a first-of-its kind research project to help identify the drivers of good and bad freshwater quality in small water bodies on a worldwide scale.

Over the last 18 months, more than 3000 citizen scientists in 32 urban areas worldwide have taken part in FreshWater Watch - testing ponds, streams and small lakes near their homes and workplaces - and patterns of behaviour have emerged, along with distinct regional and cultural differences. Earthwatch will highlight these early findings along with an overview of how participation is monitored and evaluated to identify best practice.

Dr. Charlotte Hall, Earthwatch Research Coordinator says: "The global nature of FreshWater Watch is not only providing some fantastic new insights into water quality on a scale never seen before, but it is also a brilliant opportunity to evaluate the motivations behind why people get involved in projects such as these and the part that geographic location and culture has to play."

FreshWater Watch is designed to cater for the evolving motivations of being a citizen scientist, from an initial interest and desire to learn more (egoism), to active collaboration, and then continued involvement (collectivism, altruism). A key focus has been to develop mechanisms

that keep both participants and scientists motivated to maximise the benefits of the project, through an online platform offering forums, blogs, leader boards and reward points (gamification). Additional learning opportunities and scientific updates help ensure that participants are aware of the value of their contribution.

FreshWater Watch [citizen scientists](#) have uploaded more than 5000 data sets to date, using a smartphone app, and online tools. Their findings are forming a global database of freshwater quality, which will be shared with governments, academics and policy makers to help understand how to safeguard this precious resource.

FreshWater Watch was developed as part of the HSBC Water Programme, a five-year partnership between the bank and three international NGOs - Earthwatch, WWF and WaterAid – to deliver freshwater provision and protection.

Provided by British Ecological Society

Citation: Getting the best out of citizen scientists (2014, December 12) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-12-citizen-scientists.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--