

CITIZEN SCIENCE

WHERE CURIOUS MINDS COLLABORATE

by RYAN WAGNER | CONTRIBUTING WRITER, DIVISION OF WILDLIFE



The average reader may be surprised to learn that you don't need to be a scientist to participate in important research. All you really need is a curious mind and the ability to follow the basic steps of the scientific method. These steps include making an observation, asking a question, developing a hypothesis, testing that hypothesis, and evaluating the results. With a little practice, repeating these steps can be as easy as following a cooking recipe.

In recent years, citizen scientists have become invaluable partners to researchers working to understand trends in the natural world. Thanks to citizen scientists, research can be accomplished in a fraction of the time that it would take a single team of professional scientists to complete. Citizen scientists are helping to discover new celestial bodies, track water quality, and understand wildlife population trends. In 2020, for example, thousands of reports from citizen scientists helped the Ohio Division of Wildlife to find and monitor 707 bald eagle nests in the state, an increase of more than 150% since 2012.

There has been a major boom in the number of citizen scientists participating in research projects. Today, close to 4 million people are taking part in citizen science projects worldwide. How can you get involved and become a citizen scientist? Here we present six great opportunities for beginner-level enthusiasts of all ages to get involved with science. For most, all you need is Internet access afterward so you can submit your information.



FROGWATCH: Frogs and toads are among our most familiar local wildlife, but also among our most at risk. By reporting local frog calls, members of Frogwatch contribute to a national database that tracks frog populations and aids in their conservation. Self-selected and pre-registered sites, such as your home or a nearby park, are used for recording purposes.

TIME COMMITMENT: Three minutes, twice per week in the evenings, February through August

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Clipboard and datasheet

LEARN MORE: aza.org/frogwatch

iNaturalist

INATURALIST: Have you been wondering what that bird, bug, or wildflower is you spotted on your recent hike? Snap a picture and upload it to iNaturalist, a community of naturalists and scientists who will identify it for you. Your sightings can then be used by researchers to understand when and where plants and animals occur.

TIME COMMITMENT: As much or as little as you want at your convenience

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: A smart phone or camera and computer

Learn more: inaturalist.org



GLOBAL BIG DAY: From your home or local park, you can join birders around the world for a day of bird identification and counting. Information from this yearly event is used to understand and track bird populations worldwide.

TIME COMMITMENT: As little as 10 minutes, or as much as all day on a selected date in May

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Binoculars, Internet access

LEARN MORE: ebird.org/globalbigday



Audubon

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT: Consider joining a citizen science project that has been going strong each December for more than 100 years. This annual bird census is used to track bird populations over time and contributes to conservation efforts. Survey locations are designated throughout North America.

TIME COMMITMENT: A few hours on a designated day between December 14 and January 5

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Binoculars

LEARN MORE: audubon.org/conservation/join-christmas-bird-count



Project FeederWatch

PROJECT FEEDERWATCH: From the comfort of your backyard or local nature center, you can help scientists track what species are visiting feeders, changes in bird abundance, and shifts in winter ranges. Observations can be recorded from your yard, nature center, or community area. Project Feederwatch data is regularly published in scientific journals.

TIME COMMITMENT: Any amount of time during two consecutive days, or once a week, from November to April

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Internet access (a feeder is not required)

LEARN MORE: feederwatch.org



DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

REPORT WILDLIFE: Have you seen an interesting species of Ohio's wildlife that you think biologists might want to know about? You can report your sightings at wildohio.gov to help Ohio biologists track everything from black bears and bobcats to wild turkeys and trumpeter swans.

TIME COMMITMENT: Just a few minutes, anytime

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Internet access

LEARN MORE: wildohio.gov

