
Technology and Access: Naturalists in the Backyard

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Abstract

Available technology has continually enabled the democratization of observational field biology and natural history. This paper seeks to highlight the influence of citizen participants in the naturalist history tradition, beginning with the establishment of a standardized scientific nomenclature in the 18th century, through the present-day naturalist activity resurgence made possible by new and developing smartphone apps. Topics covered will include artisan participation in collection and identification of specimens in the age of gentlemen naturalists, the increase of popular interest in natural history in the 19th century due to naturalist essays and museum dioramas, present-day uses of mobile technology for recognizing and recording data, and a problematic position of the naturalist tradition as both a leisure pastime and a pursuit of scientific understanding. I intend to show that natural history science obtains real data benefits from work done by amateurs, but that we should be sensitive to the double-edged sword of popular interest. Although the enthusiasm of amateurs collecting data is beneficial, it does not cater to the research interests of professional scientists but to the passions of the amateur.

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