

The Sea Grant Files Become a Citizen Scientist

April 10, 2018

Jesse: Hi! I'm Jesse Schomberg and you're listening to the Sea Grant Files. In the next 5 minutes, I'm hoping to convince you ... you and your family and friends ... to join in the process of scientific discovery. I want you to become, or at least consider becoming, a citizen scientist!

Marte Kitson, Environmental Literacy Extension Educator for Minnesota Sea Grant, is here in the studio to help me.

Welcome to The Sea Grant Files, Marte!

Marte: Thanks for inviting me!

Jesse: Can you tell our listeners what a citizen scientist does and what kind of person can be a citizen scientist?

Marte: Citizen scientists can be anybody who has an interest in science or the natural world around them...school age kids on up to senior citizens. Citizen scientists do several things. They collect data, using standardized protocols. They can provide input for research projects, and even provide quality assurance in some cases. They also educate other citizens, build community engagement, and collaborate with professional scientists. Citizen scientists can contribute to local efforts or participate in large scale-projects, engaging in world-wide data collecting networks.

Jesse: So Marte, I know you've been helping to organize the Twin Ports City Nature Challenge for Superior, Duluth and the surrounding area. It starts on April 27 and finishes up on April 30th. Tell us about the Twin Ports City Nature Challenge and how you are hoping listeners will participate.

Marte: Minnesota Sea Grant and the Superior Citizen Science Collaborative are leading the Twin Ports City Nature Challenge. The goal of the City Nature Challenge is to add as many photos of wild, living things to the Twin Ports City Nature Challenge project on iNaturalist as possible. Participants join the project and use their smartphones or cameras to take photos. If you use the iNaturalist app to take the photo, the image is automatically added to the project.

Jesse: The Nature Challenge started as a friendly competition between San Francisco and Los Angeles in 2016 and has spread. In 2017 there were 16 cities competing and now in 2018 there are 70 cities signed up from Ahmedabad (India) to Waterloo (Ontario) including Duluth-Superior and the surrounding area! The Twin Ports competed last year...has anything changed since then?

Marte: Last year there were 46 participants. Collectively, they made 234 observations and identified 92 species. This year, 23 people have already joined the local project and the challenge doesn't begin until April 27. I am hopeful that we will have many more participants and that we will increase the number of observations and species identified this year.

Jesse: This is a friendly worldwide competition so I must ask... how is the winner determined and what does the winner get?

Marte: The winners are determined a couple of ways. Which city makes the most observations and which city identifies the most species. The winners get the satisfaction of knowing they live in a biologically diverse urban area.

Jesse: And how can people who want to be involved sign up for the event?

Marte: Anyone who has an iNaturalist account can join the Twin Ports 2018 City Nature Challenge. If you are interested, but would like a little more guidance, there is an iNaturalist training at Boulder Lake Environmental Learning Center on April 14th, which is Citizen Science Day.

Jesse: Thank you for joining us, Marte. The Twin Ports City Nature Challenge sounds like a fun way for people to learn about the nature that surrounds us.

Marte: You're welcome.

Jesse: Citizen scientist opportunities are a terrific, fun and really useful way to get involved with research. Love birds? Participate in a Cornell Lab of Ornithology project. Are you a fisherman? Trout Unlimited wants data about stream temperatures and aquatic invasive species. Locally, Muskies Inc. members have been helping a Minnesota Sea Grant-funded researcher collect information in the St. Louis River.

If you are interested in learning more about some of the opportunities, visit the Superior Citizen Science website... superiorcitsci.org , that's "superior-c-i-t-s-c-i dot o-r-g. There, you will find a list of what's going on locally and in the state. Or call Marte Kitson at Minnesota Sea Grant.

Marte: **Yes! Call me! My number is (218) 726-8305.**

Jesse: Also, watch for a new projects, like the ice app Jay Austin, Professor and Department Head for the Physics & Astronomy Department at the University of Minnesota Duluth, is developing. Dr. Austin hopes ice fishermen and others will use the app to help collect ice thickness data to build an understanding of changing winter patterns.

Citizen Science Day falls on April 14, 2018 ... what a perfect time to get involved with science in your community. Citizen scientists are informing research in an unprecedented way. Hope you can participate in the Twin Ports City Nature Challenge!

This episode of the Sea Grant Files was produced by Rachel Wachtler, Sharon Moen, Maija Jenson, KUMD, and me, Jesse Schomberg.

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