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A True Partnership

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Citizen science (CS), also known as participatory science, offers many exciting opportunities for scientists. As the papers in this issue of *Frontiers* demonstrate, empowering citizens to engage in ecological science can help scientists answer questions that would otherwise be impractical to investigate.

Citizen science is often misconstrued as principally a means to acquire data cheaply. This really misses a key opportunity. Not only can data with greater spatial and temporal resolution be gathered by CS participants, but a more diverse group of people can be engaged to work on and get involved in science through this approach. Citizen-science participants can offer scientists context for their research and can provide novel perspectives on scientific questions, including social and policy aspects. This collaboration can also lead to improvements in the translation of science into policy and action, not only in countries with the latest advances in technology but in developing nations as well.

This model of science is most effective when it is a partnership between professional scientists and CS participants. A CS approach to research also requires that investigators think very carefully about methodology and statistical approaches to ensure that a high level of data quality is maintained. Training is generally more thorough than would be required with professional scientists or technicians. The extra effort that may be needed to design a robust CS project is well worth the time and resources, given that it can create so many opportunities for addressing broad-scale issues as well as providing a unique means of engaging a more expansive demographic representation of the public in science.

Naturalists with a wide range of skills and interests played a key role in laying the foundations for modern ecology. It is time that we brought more of them back, as full partners in ecological science.