

Why you became a PlantWatcher

March 30, 2012, by Jessie Roxby

Research unraveling the motivations of Citizen Science participants

You may remember an inconspicuous email appearing in your inbox last year where I requested your help. Nearly 130 of you responded, by completing either my online survey or participating in an interview. The information you provided helped me to complete one of my hardest tasks yet— my honours thesis!

As a part of my Honours degree in Science Communication at the University of Western Australia, I researched what motivates and prevents volunteer engagement with environmental Citizen Science programs. With the assistance of Elisabeth Beaubien and Marlene Doyle, PlantWatch became one of my case study programs. My second case study was [ClimateWatch](#), a similar, Australian program.

One element of my research was to explore why you decided to become a PlantWatcher. Along with my honours supervisors [Associate Professor Nancy Longnecker](#) and Rich Weatherill, I am now in the process of writing up my results to publish in a scientific journal.

Among my key findings was the identification of four main reasons for joining PlantWatch and ClimateWatch. These were:

1. Interest in and concern for the environment and the specific study species.
“Do a little bit in helping to monitor global warming.”
(PlantWatch survey respondent)
2. A desire to contribute to a worthy cause and to help make a difference.
“I like the idea that my tiny contribution could become part of a bigger observation.”
(PlantWatch survey respondent)
3. To personally learn through the process of engagement.
“Age 75. I was taught about plants as a child. I have always enjoyed watching the different species come into bloom and learning to identify them. I walk my dog every day and enjoy walking in fields and woods and exploring. My explorations are mainly of plants, different trees, different fungus, etc. I love it all.”
(PlantWatch survey respondent)
4. To use the program as a teaching tool and to help influence others.
“To get young people involved in protecting biodiversity and respecting nature. Also to teach math through science.”
(PlantWatch survey respondent)

“I teach a horticulture class, and decided it would be good for my students to observe, report and contribute to real research.”

(PlantWatch survey respondent)

Once published, this and my other research findings will inform PlantWatch and other similar environmental Citizen Science programs, helping them to attract and retain an active volunteer base which is essential for their success.

None of this would have been possible without the help of all the PlantWatchers who participated in my research. As such I would like to say thank you for responding to my emails, for sitting down and completing my online survey and for taking the time to talk to me over Skype and the phone at weird hours of the day and night. For this, I am incredibly grateful. As soon as the results are published I will let you know!