

Response to Cooper *et al.* 2007. “Citizen Science as a Tool for Conservation in Residential Ecosystems”

## Using Citizens to Do Science Versus Citizens as Scientists

*Shyamal Lakshminarayanan*

---

Key Words: *citizen science*

---

Cooper *et al.* (2007) make a distinction between “citizen science” and “participatory action research” based on spatial scale, and it appears that the former is defined as the “use of citizens” by scientists. Cooper *et al.* (2007) also discuss the implicit contract that the scientists need to provide results back to the citizens.

It must be pointed out that using a distributed network of data gatherers is not new and was perhaps at its height in the collection era. Field collectors indeed submitted their specimens to centralizing influences such as wealthy collectors or museums. These agencies were able to observe patterns and produce treatises in ways that the individual field collectors could not.

This difference naturally produced conflict. An early example may be seen in this plaint by Brian Hodgson, a naturalist in India who sent specimens back to Britain: “Whilst the face of our land is darkened with skin hunters, deputed by learned Societies to encumber science with ill-ascertained species, no English zoological association has a single travelling naturalist (...) nor has one such body yet sought to invigorate local research” (Hodgson 1873 quoted in Johnson 2005).

Citizen science should ideally move away from using citizens on unequal terms and toward treating citizens as scientists on equal terms. Indeed, if anything, acts of information centralization should embrace the concepts of open access and freedom, allowing all to conduct science (Shyamal 2007). Data compilers should make use of centralized data to produce scientific results in exactly the same way as anyone else should be allowed. After all, science should be verifiable and repeatable.

[Erratum](http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol12/iss2/resp2/errata.html) added 10 November 2008 (see <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol12/iss2/resp2/errata.html>)

Responses to this article can be read online at:  
<http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol12/iss2/resp2/responses/>

---

### LITERATURE CITED

**Cooper, C. B., J. Dickinson, T. Phillips, and R. Bonney.** 2007. Citizen science as a tool for conservation in residential ecosystems. *Ecology and Society* 12(2): 11. [online] URL: <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol12/iss2/art11/>.

**Johnson, K.** 2005. Type-specimens of birds as sources for the history of ornithology. *Journal of the History of Collections* 17(2):173-188.

**Shyamal, L.** 2007. Opinion: Taking Indian ornithology into the Information Age. *Indian Birds* 3 (4):122-137. Available online at: <http://www.indianbirds.in/download/IB.3.4.122-137.pdf>.