BOOKS

A Primer for Citizen Science Engagement
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Review of: Be the Change: Saving the World with Citizen Science; Chandra Clarke; (2013). CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, Seattle, WA. 85 pages.

You do not need a well-funded lab, a doctorate degree, or even a background in science to contribute to scientific progress in important ways. Citizen scientists participate either directly or indirectly in research projects organized by professional scientists. This is not merely a hobbyist movement. Global problems require large-scale data collection and processing. Dedicated citizen scientists can help with the heavy lifting, accelerating the pace of discovery. In Be the Change: Saving the World with Citizen Science, Chandra Clarke has produced a useful primer for would-be citizen scientists.

This slim volume assumes no prior experience with citizen science and no science knowledge. The author, who is not a scientist, has made the information thoroughly accessible to the novice. The book opens with a good introduction to citizen science, exploring its roots in the amateur naturalist era through the beginnings of the Audubon bird count in 1900 to today’s large-scale internet-based projects. The author explains why citizen science is important, focusing on how it benefits both society and the individual participant. This may be especially helpful in winning over colleagues or students who doubt the value of getting involved in citizen science.

The bulk of the book is devoted to descriptions of a wide array of current citizen-science projects. The entries are conveniently arranged by type of project and level of commitment required. Involvement ranges from donating money to directly gathering and reporting field data. In between these extremes are a number of technology-based options including distributed computing programs that use your computer in the background to help analyze large data sets, and web- and application-based projects that require data collection and/or analysis on the part of the citizen scientist. This book’s collection covers a variety of science disciplines: astronomy, biochemistry, drug discovery, environmental science, psychology, and zoology.

The final section of the book, bonus resources, provides an annotated list of science magazines, free science education resources, and open-source software and hardware. These lists have a random quality; for example, the science magazine section, which mostly lists popular science publications, includes Nature but not Science. Many of the listed resources, especially in the open-source section, seem irrelevant to the topic of citizen science. Nonetheless, the body of the book should prove useful for choosing potential projects for individual students or for service-learning classes. All of the information is available on the internet, but the book’s organization and clear explanations will save a great deal of time and make project selection easier, especially for K–12 educators. As new citizen-science opportunities are always arising, the author has both a website (www.citizensciencecenter.com/) and newsletter that will continue to update readers with new projects.

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