



# CITIZEN SCIENCE

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## Citizen science is taking the world by storm and the Kootenays are no exception.

"People love volunteering in the Kootenays," says Avery Deboer-Smith, Program Manager for the Friends of Kootenay Lake Stewardship Society (FOKLSS). "And it's such a great way for us to engage them in something that's not only fun, it also helps us to collect useful data that we can use to benefit the surrounding area."

**The definition of citizen science can be a bit flexible, but generally it refers to community members collecting data that professional scientists can then use in their research.**

FOKLSS has trained roughly 90 community members to monitor osprey activity during mating and breeding seasons and to submit that data to its Osprey Nest Monitoring program. Citizen scientists are also involved in the society's year-round Water Quality Monitoring program, collecting information that can then be used to assess the health of Kootenay Lake.

"It creates a sense of commitment and awareness and it gives community members an opportunity to take charge of something they really care about," Deboer-Smith says.

Rachel Darvill, Program Biologist with Wildsight's Columbia Wetlands Waterbird Survey, agrees.

"One of the reasons I created this survey was so there would be an opportunity for people to become engaged in a science project and contribute to real conservation objectives," she says. "It helps to build people's appreciation for nature."

Darvill trains people of all ages and from every walk of life to identify and count birds at survey stations throughout the

Columbia wetlands on three specific dates during both spring and fall migration in an effort to establish critical baseline data that's currently lacking for this important ecosystem.

"Everyone is out there at the same time on the same dates so that we avoid double counting. We're basically trying to get an overall snapshot of how many birds are utilizing the habitat on any given day during the migratory periods."

This fall, 87 community members participated in the count and their observations are invaluable to Wildsight's efforts to get the Columbia wetlands designated as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA).

Citizen science is also increasing our collective understanding of plant distribution throughout the region. Valerie Huff, co-founder of the Kootenay Native Plant Society, relies on community members to supply data for several research interests, but she's especially pleased with the role they've played in reporting locations of indigenous camas populations.

"We had no misidentifications. We were astounded. No one sent us off into the wild having identified something else as camas," she says, adding, "It was both a way of confirming and expanding our understanding of the distribution of the plant. It was also a way of getting people really excited and involved about a plant in their local environment."

Snowfall doesn't stop the opportunities for Kootenay residents to contribute to science. Most notably, the popular Christmas Bird Count takes place each year in several communities across the region, allowing birders of all abilities to collect data that will then be used by scientists worldwide. ■