



CTA-108-Citizen Science & Coral Reefs

Join WFCRC

The World Federation for Coral Reef Conservation
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Get your feet wet to save the reef



Data collected by citizen scientists plays a crucial role in managing the Great Barrier Reef. Jennifer Loder reports.

The Great Barrier Reef needs plenty of eyes on it.
JENNIFER LODER

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The sheer size and diversity of habitats that make up the big beautiful Great Barrier Reef (GBR), also represent an extreme challenge to monitor and manage. To boost the extent and regularity of information about key vital signs, individuals and communities are joining a growing movement of citizen science for the Reef.

The Australian Citizen Science Association defines citizen science as public participation and collaboration in scientific research, with the goal to increase scientific knowledge. Reef-relevant citizen science programs offer options for different activities, covering what and how data is collected. This means there truly is an opportunity for everyone to get involved.

As a snorkeler or diver, you can contribute by collecting and reporting information from what you see on your reef visit. This might include information on the types of wildlife, habitats or reef health impacts you see through Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's [Eye on the Reef Program](#).

Or you can help monitor coral colour using the [CoralWatch Coral Health Chart](#) to track bleaching. If you see something unusual while out on the water, you can report unusual sea creatures using [Redmap's app](#), which helps to track species range shifts.

For those who want to elevate their skills, there are options to train to join survey teams that collect globally standardised reef health data with [Reef Check Australia](#).

The GBR is more than just coral, and includes other important connected habitats such as mangroves and sandy islands. So, you don't even need to leave the coast to get involved in programs such as [Tangaroa Blue](#) which allows you to report beach clean-up findings to track marine debris to the source. You can also help monitor indicators for other connected habitats, such as testing water quality in creeks and rivers that flow to the Reef with [Conservation Volunteers Australia](#), or recording the extent and condition of mangroves that filter run-off from land before it reaches the reef with [Mangrove Watch](#).

The GBR is under stress, and community contributions can help collect more information from more places to help inform management decisions. Getting involved in citizen science offers you the chance to turn your nature trip into a meaningful snapshot of reef health. Plus, it's the chance to boost your own knowledge and experience. The importance of citizen science contributions has been demonstrated through numerous examples, such as initial reports of mangrove die-offs in Far North Queensland in 2017, documenting coral bleaching and coral spawning events across the coast of Queensland, and collecting more than nine million pieces of marine debris data for the Australian Marine Debris Initiative to target litter solutions.

And citizen science programs are starting to team up for even greater outcomes. Recently, members and partners of the Reef Citizen Science Alliance collaborated for the fourth annual ReefBlitz citizen science event series. At more than 30 events from Port Douglas to Brisbane, 751 citizen scientists contributed 20,000 pieces of information through surveys of critical habitats, wildlife, and signs of stress. In addition to collecting data, participants lent a helping hand to restoration activities, such as revegetation and beach clean-ups.

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Coordinated events such as ReefBlitz can contribute to a snapshot of reef health from catchment to coral and help more people discover ways to get involved. A survey of 121 participants from events indicated that 42% had not heard of citizen science before taking part, and 71% indicated that they had learnt about a new behaviour to protect reefs and coasts.

But you don't have to wait for the next ReefBlitz. Every day, organisations are out there helping communities collect information, and you can get involved. 2018 is the International Year of the Reef, a global conservation campaign. Join the movement and find a citizen science program for you at www.reefcitizenscience.org.

For additional reading see [The WFCRC Document Gallery](#) for articles about:

- Public Service Announcements (PSA)
- Coral Alert Network (CAN)
- Emergency Reporting Reports (ERR)
- Call to Action (CTA)
- Marine Protected Areas (MPA)
- Marine Life Alert (MLA)
- Seismic and Oil Production Threats
- Natural Science Reports (NSR)
- Oil Spill Alerts (OSA)
- And other miscellaneous documents

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