

## *Giving citizen scientists a voice improves engagement in initiatives* Catriona J. MacLeod & Karen Scott

Encouraging and empowering people to engage with citizen science is one way by which caring and action for nature can be grown, and public wellbeing improved. However, in recent decades citizen science has tended towards initiatives run by scientists to which members of the public can only contribute data. Unfortunately, such an approach can reduce the breadth of engagement to the detriment of the deeper and broader benefits to people and nature.

Hence, the challenge now is to enable participants and the public to better shape citizen science initiatives to meet their interests and needs, enhancing their engagement and empowering them. Giving citizen scientists a voice in the governance of such initiatives and creating the right enabling environment for engagement are critical steps to meeting this challenge. Here we worked with New Zealand Garden Bird Survey participants to make this step.

We worked collectively with over 15,000 respondents to develop a new look for the survey and design new results resources, tailored to deliver the information wanted in the way it was wanted. To do this, we drew on concepts of democratic processes and purposeful design, to elevate citizen scientist voices over institutional perspectives, and produce more user-friendly and accessible resources.

Through this process, the level and nature of engagement with this citizen science initiative was enhanced, with the number and diversity of participants increasing to involve people from a wider range of backgrounds and roles, ethnicities and ages. We discuss the learnings from our efforts that can help drive similar achievements in other citizen science initiatives.



*Credit: Catriona MacLeod.*

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