iSpot: a citizen science platform for inclusive learning and teaching

Conference or Workshop Item

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The Open University launched the citizen science platform [www.iSpotnature.org](http://www.iSpotnature.org) (iSpot) in 2009. iSpot uses the challenge of identifying nature to engage people as citizen scientists; encouraging learning about wildlife while building species identification skills. It provides a multifaceted experience, incorporating participatory science research with e-learning opportunities. The website hosts an active online community of thousands of expert and novice users who support each other in answering identification questions.

Learning was always part of the design, incorporating innovative educational technology-based tools and features, along with activities which encourage public participation and engagement that help to facilitate teaching; creating a unique learning journey.

We are launching a new free course **Citizen science and global biodiversity**, which supports a pathway between informal, non-formal to formal learning. This is based on a five-step model which demonstrates that, through a citizen science platform environment, authentic inquiry facilitates learning.

**Five steps to learning through iSpotnature.org**

1. **EXPLORE:** see the thousands of species spotted so far
2. **IDENTIFY:** join the community; add your own observations and get help with identifications
3. **CONTRIBUTE:** a reputation system motivates & rewards; awarding badges for contributions
4. **PERSONALISE:** participate in citizen science challenges, design projects & filter your own learning
5. **RECOGNITION:** informal to formal learning is supported through quizzes, free online learning and courses

This model promotes a view that, in addition to the value of the data from citizen scientists, an inquiry process and how learning is supported are key. The methodology centres on a learning design, supported by iSpot, leading from exploration of nature through to recognised learning actions.

**Eight weeks of study**

1. What is citizen science?
2. Global biodiversity
3. Using biological keys for species identification
4. Biodiversity recording
5. Advanced techniques for species identification
6. Using web resources
7. Learning with iSpot: joining an online community
8. Citizen science and biodiversity recording around the globe.

**Would you like to help us?**

We are seeking external partners, involved in citizen science, to contribute to an extra study week in their own area of expertise, which would be added to the 8 weeks of study for this BOC. Interested? For more information or to get involved contact us.

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**References**