

THE ATLAS OF LIVING AUSTRALIA

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Space Photography of Australia
Photo credits: Johan – Elements of 3rd
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We all often have a sense of duty to take care and look after nature's wonders. What is challenging is how. There are many daily things we might do in our lives to make our world that more environmentally friendly. Whether that's using a recyclable bag whilst shopping, saving precious water, recycling items or removing rubbish from our streets. But, if you have ever wanted to be a part of something that immerses you into the realms of environmentally sustainability from a new angle, with possibilities like discovering a new species then you must know about The Atlas of Living Australia.

This environmental not-for profit is a Wikipedia king with all there is to know about Australia's biodiversity. A master in data collection, fact finding and analysis and the best yet, the amazing opportunity to be a part of a national Australian Environmental cause through practical activities encompassed in an approach called 'citizen engagement activities'. Read on to find out what tools and functions they have to offer and how you can be a part of something amazing working alongside international ecologists, archeologists, environmental scientists and much more.

WHO ARE THE ALA

ALA (Atlas of Living Australia) is a hub of free biodiversity data and the backbone of what they do to this data is simple - Collect → Share → Analyze → Re-use. Data is of two types based on either species or the environment and the impact this is making is impressive in areas such as;

1. Biodiversity Conservation
2. New Species Discoveries.
3. Sustainable Ecosystem Development
4. Taxonomy

AUSTRALIA'S ICONIC SPECIES

You can access and explore the incredible diversity of Australian species, plants, mammals, reptiles with nothing shy **over 100,000** to explore. There are all sorts of facts such as their conservation status, habitat and a visual geographical representation of their distribution in Australia. You can even adventure into your very own area you live and explore species hiding that you may or may not have known to have existed! For those wanting to dive deeper into the breadth of biodiversity data there is an additional advanced search engine to explore species.



Zebra Finch
Found Across Australia
Photo credits: Michael Lawton

BIO-COLLECT

ALA have developed a tool called Bio-Collect' which helps structure data that's unstructured. Part of Bio-collect is Citizen Science Central which gives you the chance to add your sightings of species and take part in digitization projects.



DIGITIZATION PROJECTS

Digital projects span across 3 key areas;

“Decipher our collections, discover hidden archives and contribute to knowledge”.

1. **Collection labels** – Help scientists to have better access to data by capturing data from specimens.
2. **Transcribe** – Help transcribe historical documents and digitally revolutionize them for the access of all.
3. **Wildlife spotter** – Examine digital photos of all sorts of wildlife to analyses for example, what species they are or how many there are present.

CITIZEN SCIENCE PROJECTS

You can engage with something the ALA calls citizen science projects which are essentially a doorway to you making fascinating discoveries or helping scientists with their research and so much more. Citizen science projects can be engaged

1. Create Your Own Projects

ALA give you the autonomy to design your very own project managing really important areas like how to do it and what to survey. They also give you the tools necessary to collect, analyze and share your data.

2. Join a Project

ALA has currently got as many as 429 listed opportunities to get involved in all sorts of fascinating areas depending on what captures your interest. Whether that's the environment, agricultural science, geology and so much else you decide where to go. What do you get to do? There is a breadth of activities you can get your hands into such as capturing beautiful images, surveying out in the outdoors, receiving training to advance your own skills in data collection and so much more.

All you have to do to get started is use the Australian Citizen Science Project Finder to explore the countless opportunities to make an environmental impact. Whether that's out and about in the Great Australian outdoors or in the comfort of your home.

Reef Check Surveyor



To give a taste of the current opportunities take the example of being a reef check surveyor for the reef systems in Australia. You get to learn about beautiful reef systems, boost your diving

skills, and receive training to survey the reef systems. Essentially it's a project that gives you an amazing opportunity to utilise your skills and knowledge to contribute to scientific research that could inform the solutions of the next generations to come. Here's what one of the volunteers had to say about the project;



“It’s great being able to do what you enjoy, gain new skills and be part of a long-term monitoring project. Participating in beach and dive cleans up has made me more mindful of my usage and consumption of plastics and rubbish in general, and now every beach trip is a mini clean up!”
Hannaleena Vaisaene, Sunshine Coast.

Butterfly Explorer

For those that get a kick out of something simpler like seeing the wondrous beauty and color of butterflies, you could help document and capture observations and images of these butterflies in your local area to aid Scientists in their research.



Priams Birdwing
Photo credits: Atlas of Living Australia

Summary

Overall, ALA gives all the support you need to be an effective science engagement citizen. Furthering such an important cause and ultimately helping society to make choices towards making an impact on something so much bigger than ourselves. If you would like to learn more about what ALA does and how you can get involved visit their website:

<https://www.ala.org.au/>