

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Chicago Wildlife Watch Recruits Chicagoans to Help with Urban Wildlife Science Research from Home or Classroom

Adler Planetarium and Lincoln Park Zoo collaborate on new web-based platform that engages the public in scientific research through photo identification technology

CHICAGO (Sept. 11, 2014) — Today, the Adler Planetarium and Lincoln Park Zoo launched **Chicago Wildlife Watch**, a new web-based citizen science initiative that provides an opportunity for students, teachers and members of the public to actively participate in Chicagoland wildlife research through photo identification technology. The platform is available at chicagowildlifewatch.org.

Chicago Wildlife Watch is a collaboration between the Adler Planetarium's Zooniverse team and Lincoln Park Zoo's Urban Wildlife Institute that began in early 2014. Faced with a year's worth of back logged research, the Urban Wildlife Institute enlisted the help of the Adler Planetarium's Zooniverse development team to create a citizen science platform that would empower the people of Chicago to assist researchers in classifying important data essential in assessing local wildlife and their habitats.

The Zooniverse, a project led by the Adler Planetarium and University of Oxford, is the world's leading - and largest - citizen science platform, which has engaged more than 1.1 million online volunteers as active scientists on more than 30 science projects. Urban Wildlife Institute is a research division of Lincoln Park Zoo focused on interactions between urban dwellers and wildlife.

Urban Wildlife Institute's Chicagoland Biodiversity Study

Cities can be hostile places for wildlife, with threats coming from habitat destruction, roads and traffic, humans, pets and large numbers of invasive species. However, with proper management, urban areas can house a number of important wildlife species, including carnivores and small mammals.



To assess the biodiversity of the greater Chicagoland area, Lincoln Park Zoo's Urban Wildlife Institute has established monitoring stations within city parks, forest preserves, golf courses and cemeteries in parts of Cook, Lake, DuPage and Will counties including downtown Chicago. Motion-triggered cameras are deployed four times per year at more than 100 sites to determine which species are present and to assess spatial and long-term patterns in wildlife communities.

Knowing where Chicago's urban wildlife is located will help researchers apply findings that will positively influence wildlife policy, conservation efforts and provide land managers with

pragmatic solutions for reducing human-wildlife conflict. To date, more than 1 million photographs of 65 different species of urban wildlife have been captured through this network.

With the launch of *Chicago Wildlife Watch*, the first Chicago-based Zooniverse project, anyone can assist researchers to identify the species spotted in each image. Everyone from middle-school aged children to adults, regardless of education-level, can participate and contribute to the scientific community thanks to the technology platform created by the Zooniverse.

“*Chicago Wildlife Watch* is exciting because it allows people all over Chicago to directly contribute to our research in a very significant way,” said Seth Magle, PhD, Director of the Urban Wildlife Institute at Lincoln Park Zoo. “By helping us identify the individual animals in the database, the public is helping to build the largest urban wildlife database in the world.”

David English, a teacher at Providence St. Mel in Chicago got a sneak peak at *Chicago Wildlife Watch* and offered these thoughts, “Last year, my students analyzed and recorded camera trap photo data by using a handwritten chart with codes. The *Chicago Wildlife Watch* website is more engaging for the students in recording the data for each photo,” he explained. “The filters provide interactive help to the students in identifying the animals. Overall, I think the site will increase student participation and performance in an activity they find interesting.”

“The Adler is about actively engaging people in doing science. This project offers Chicagoans the unique opportunity to become scientists and collaborate in a real research project that directly impacts their lives and environment,” said Laura Whyte, PhD, Director, Adler Planetarium Citizen Science Department.

How Chicago Wildlife Watch Works

From a user perspective, *Chicago Wildlife Watch* is clean, simple and easy. Users are shown a photograph and asked basic questions that narrow down the possibility of what species the animal could be. These questions focus on what the animal’s coat, tail and build look like, with options such as beaver, fox, rabbit, squirrel, coyote and more.

The technology uses a complex algorithm that removes images from the database and marks them as “tagged” only when there is substantial agreement about what species is present in a particular photo.

“The technology uses methods created by the Zooniverse that have been tested in more than 30 citizen science projects,” said Whyte. “The public can be rest assured that their efforts will produce scientifically valid results.”



“With public participation in this research, not only can anyone actively contribute to scientific research, but hopefully they may learn a little bit about our urban wildlife neighbors, and I hope, feel more connected to the urban ecosystem,” said Magle.

Visit chicagowildlifewatch.org to participate in the research or learn more.

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Editor's Note: Photos and video are available for download at chicagowildlifewatch.org/press.

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ABOUT LINCOLN PARK ZOO

Lincoln Park Zoo, a historic Chicago landmark founded in 1868, is dedicated to connecting people with nature by providing a free, family-oriented wildlife experience. A leader in conservation science both globally and locally, the zoo exemplifies the highest quality animal care and educational outreach. The not-for-profit zoo, managed by The Lincoln Park Zoological Society, is a member-supported organization and one of the nation's only free, privately managed zoos. For more information, call 312 -742-2000 or visit www.lpzoo.org.

ABOUT ADLER PLANETARIUM

The Adler Planetarium - America's First Planetarium - was founded in 1930 by Chicago business leader Max Adler. A recognized leader in public learning, the Adler Planetarium inspires young people to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and math. Scientists, historians and educators at the museum inspire the next generation of explorers.