



**Questions and Answers from the webinar  
“Partner Showcase: Learn how other groups are using *Nature’s Notebook*”  
September 2, 2014**

**Thanks to our four partner organizations who presented their efforts:**

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[Jaime Morin \(jmorin@nybg.org\)](mailto:jmorin@nybg.org) with New York Botanical Garden’s [Living Collections Phenology Program](#)

[Mary Goshorn \(Mary.Goshorn@botanicgardens.org\)](mailto:Mary.Goshorn@botanicgardens.org) and [Becky Kao \(Rebecca.Kao@botanicgardens.org\)](mailto:Becky.Kao@botanicgardens.org) with Denver Botanic Gardens [Phenology Program](#)

Susan Sachs ([susan\\_sachs@nps.gov](mailto:susan_sachs@nps.gov)) with Great Smoky Mountains National Park ([Tree Phenology Monitoring](#) for High School)

**Resources that might help you get started:**

Workshop, Shared Site and Phenology Trails: <https://www.usanpn.org/partner/project>

- Instructions for admins on Shared Sites: [https://www.usanpn.org/shared\\_sites](https://www.usanpn.org/shared_sites)
- Instructions for group members on Shared Sites: <https://www.usanpn.org/nn/guidelines/shared-sites>

Geographic Affiliates: [https://www.usanpn.org/partner/geo\\_affiliates](https://www.usanpn.org/partner/geo_affiliates)

**Education Resources**

- By audience: <https://www.usanpn.org/education>
- Nature’s Notebook curriculum and project planning resources: [https://www.usanpn.org/educate/nn\\_curriculum](https://www.usanpn.org/educate/nn_curriculum)

**To keep the conversation going, join the Local Phenology Leaders listserv:** To subscribe: send a message to [list@list.arizona.edu](mailto:list@list.arizona.edu) with the following in the subject line of the message: "subscribe local-phenology-leaders [First Name] [Last Name]" The subscriber should use their own name in the subject line and delete any signature lines contained in their message body. The rest should be left blank.

## Specific Questions in Q&A Session

**1. How do you handle maintaining data quality? We have a phenology site at our Nature Center where visitors can make observations, but sometimes visitors make observations that are clearly wrong. Do you throw out observations that don't make sense, or enter the parts that do make sense?** Partner groups mentioned several techniques, from reviewing volunteer datasheets themselves, to having well-trained staff and volunteers collecting data weekly on the same plants, for identifying and culling low quality records. More information on how the USA-NPN works to ensure data quality is found in this [information sheet](#). Thinking about how you intend for the data to be collected, why you are collecting them, and which audience you would like to engage (e.g. one-time visitors, science & management staff, or education and outreach) may also provide a way of presenting the project with appropriate education materials in mind to get your observers up to speed, ensuring the highest quality data.

**2. Could the 3 partners that showed their data collection pages share these as examples to help us set up a volunteer data sheet with multiple species on one page? Thanks.** Partner websites listed above have their custom datasheets and materials. Please let us know if you'd like the Great Smoky Mountains Tree Phenology datasheets, as they are not yet online.

Don't forget, Nature's Notebook allows you to print out a day-by-day data sheet that reflects the species in the order they may appear on your walk on the ground. Remember, if you are going to design your own datasheets, be sure to use the EXACT protocols and phenophase definitions that are found in Nature's Notebook. We want to make sure that everyone is contributing to our standardized database as accurately as possible. Let us know if you have questions about how to accomplish this.

**3. How do you enlist families? How to you sustain the monitoring program?** Susan Sachs explained that the families came to the program, though they weren't specifically recruiting for them. She's noticed that having family members keep each other engaged, so it does help with retention! Hosting family events at your site and planning education materials and activities that can be done as a family can also help achieve the engagement of the whole family or multiple generations.

**4. As a small non-profit, I am curious how some of these groups have recruited and retained "long-term" volunteers. I am also jealous of a data entry volunteer (mentioned by the NYBG)!** Jaime Morin mentioned that having pre- and post- season meetings helps to keep people up to date on protocols, and also the feedback they provide helps her adapt the program, and keep people engaged.

Here at the USA-NPN, we've found that having regular communication with volunteers, fostering community among volunteers, and regularly communicating the meaning of their contributions is key to retention. We've also found that targeting our recruitment

to folks who are already “backyard naturalists”, works better than widely broadcasting our program. (And, of course, working with local phenology leaders like you, to provide in-person support, makes a huge difference!) Working with volunteers can be challenging, especially if doing so is not part of your job description! Remember to be sure to let the volunteers know how important the project is to YOU, the leader, and how excited YOU are about it (we hope you are!), regardless of the goals you’ve outlined. Volunteers will not be interested or engaged if no one from the site is interested and engaged in the project. Keep it fresh and check in with them often and show your appreciation. If you are answering local science or management questions, be sure to host meetings or events where you share what their data are showing.

5. **Whenever I bring the topic of phenology, the question is always, "How much time does this require?" for the set-up, maintenance/input, volunteer commitment in hours and frequency of observations. Has anyone collected data on this?** “It depends” seems to be the takeaway message here – on how big a project you are setting up (i.e. how many sites, species, individual plants), on whether you already have a system for volunteering (like docent programs at botanical gardens), on the level of interest in your community. Several folks mentioned that it is more work to get the project set up, and generally easier to sustain it.

**Check out our list of future webinars to see what’s next!**

**[www.usanpn.org/nn/connect/Webinars2014](http://www.usanpn.org/nn/connect/Webinars2014)**

**Helpful links:**

Become an Observer: <https://www.usanpn.org/nn/become-observer>

Learn How to Observe: <https://www.usanpn.org/nn/guidelines>

Join a Nature’s Notebook Campaign: <https://www.usanpn.org/nn/campaigns>

Frequently Asked Question page: <https://www.usanpn.org/nn/faq>

