

Kids track climate change in Project BudBurst

Staff/news services

Monitoring global warming usually requires a Ph.D. and enough math to glaze your eyes. But Francisco Lopez and Ruby Nostrant track what climate change is doing to five plants in Tucson, Ariz., and they are just in second grade.

"We're collecting data because the weather is changing and the plants are blooming," Ruby explained.

Scores of other students at Borton Primary Magnet School and Sunnyside High School in Tucson are heading outdoors to be part of a new scientific push to figure out how the biological timing of Earth is changing. It's a research project that the average person, even a kindergartner, can join in.

The National Phenology Network is enlisting volunteers to help track early spring blooms and eventually changes in animals caused by global warming. It's called Project BudBurst, and it grew out of a workshop held in 2006 at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, National Science Foundation and NASA funded the workshop. When Project BudBurst debuted last year, thousands of people participated in 26 states.

"All people can contribute to it by tracking the timing of flowering events or leaf-out events for plants and animals in their back yard," said phenology network director Jake Weltzin. He calls the

volunteers "citizen scientists."

The idea is that tracking flowers blooming, especially lilacs that everyday people have helped track for decades, is fairly simple. The Web site gives directions on what to look for in different parts of the country.

University of Maryland professor David Inouye said it's so easy to figure out what's blooming that a lack of expertise isn't a problem.

University of Arizona ecology graduate student Lisa Benton coordinated the Tucson high school students as they looked at creosote plants five minutes from their high school. Each student has specific guidelines, and she's been happy so far with the data she is getting.

For his part, second-grader Francisco said he has fun helping out.

"I like going out in the desert," he said. "I want to be an Einstein."

Project BudBurst:

www.windows.ucar.edu/citizen_science/budburst

Wisconsin Phenological Society:

www.naturenet.com/alnc/wps (You can download a phenology guide and data reporting form.)

The Friends of Pheasant Branch has a 2008 phenology calendar with color photos, checklists of animal and plant events, climate and sunrise/sunset data and monthly nature notes: www.pheasantbranch.org



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Alysia (left), a second-grader at Borton Primary Magnet School, uses a magnifier to look at desert wildflowers in the school's desert sanctuary earlier this month in Tucson, Ariz., while classmate Amanda records data. The students are participating in a new scientific push by the National Phenology Network to help track early spring blooms and changes in animals caused by global warming.