MYDIATOMS: A CITIZEN-SCIENCE INITIATIVE TO RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF DIATOM DIVERSITY

Andrew J. **Alverson**1, Taylor Dagenais2, Steven Giles2
1Department of Biological Sciences, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR USA
2BigRose Web Design, http://bigrosestudio.com

Although microbes constitute most Earth's biodiversity, public awareness of this diversity is generally limited to pathogens and medically relevant taxa. Unlike macroorganisms, however, microbes are often trivial to collect and transport—a single soil or water sample can contain hundreds or thousands of microbial species. To increase public understanding of diatom diversity, we are launching a citizen science initiative called *myDiatoms* in which participants will be encouraged to collect samples from local water bodies and ship them to our lab at the University of Arkansas where we will process the samples and photograph diatoms in their samples. A project website will display a map of all the project samples. Users can click on their sample site to view a project-specific page that includes a photo and user-provided description of the of the location and its local importance, as well as a gallery of light microscope images of the diatoms in their study system. Each image will be linked to its corresponding page on the Diatoms of North America website where the citizen scientists can see additional images and learn more about each species. Participants will be able to visualize sampling sites with similar diatom floras as well as follow a project feed that highlights samples of exceptional diversity, rare taxa, and other metrics. The program is set to launch in fall 2019.