WORKING PROJECT TITLE	Assessing the current and potential value of iNaturalist data for invasion science in South Africa
CORE TEAM MEMBER	Dave Richardson
ACADEMIC LEVEL OF THE PROJECT	MSc (with potential for upgrade to PhD)
PROJECT BACKGROUND	Knowledge of the current and potential distribution and abundance of introduced species is crucial for many aspects of invasion science. South Africa has major problems with invasive alien species from most major taxonomic groups. Information of the current distribution of different taxa comes from diverse sources, including formal collection records, results of systematic surveys of particular taxa or areas, atlassing projects, and from records of management agencies and research projects. The comprehensiveness and accuracy of such data vary considerably between taxa. Some taxa are easy to see and identify in the field whereas others are inconspicuous and/or difficult to identify. Citizen science is recognized as offering exciting opportunities for adding to our knowledge of the distribution of biodiversity. **iNaturalist** is the citizen science platform with the greatest global uptake and has already proved hugely useful for research in many ways. South Africa is in 5th place globally as a contributor of observations to INaturalist and has a growing team of active contributors. This project will aim to assess the extent to which iNaturalist observations already reflect the national-scale distribution of naturalized and invasive species in selected taxonomic groups, and to provide guidelines for how the platform could become more valuable for different purposes in the future.

	Strong analytical skills and some experience with geographical information systems are required for this project.
FURTHER READING	White, R.L. et al. (2015). The next generation of action ecology: novel approaches towards global ecological research. *Ecosphere* 6(8) DOI:10.1890/ES14-00485.1 Spear, D.M. (2017). Citizen science as a tool for augmenting museum collection data from urban areas. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 5 DOI: 10.3389/fevo.2017.00086
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