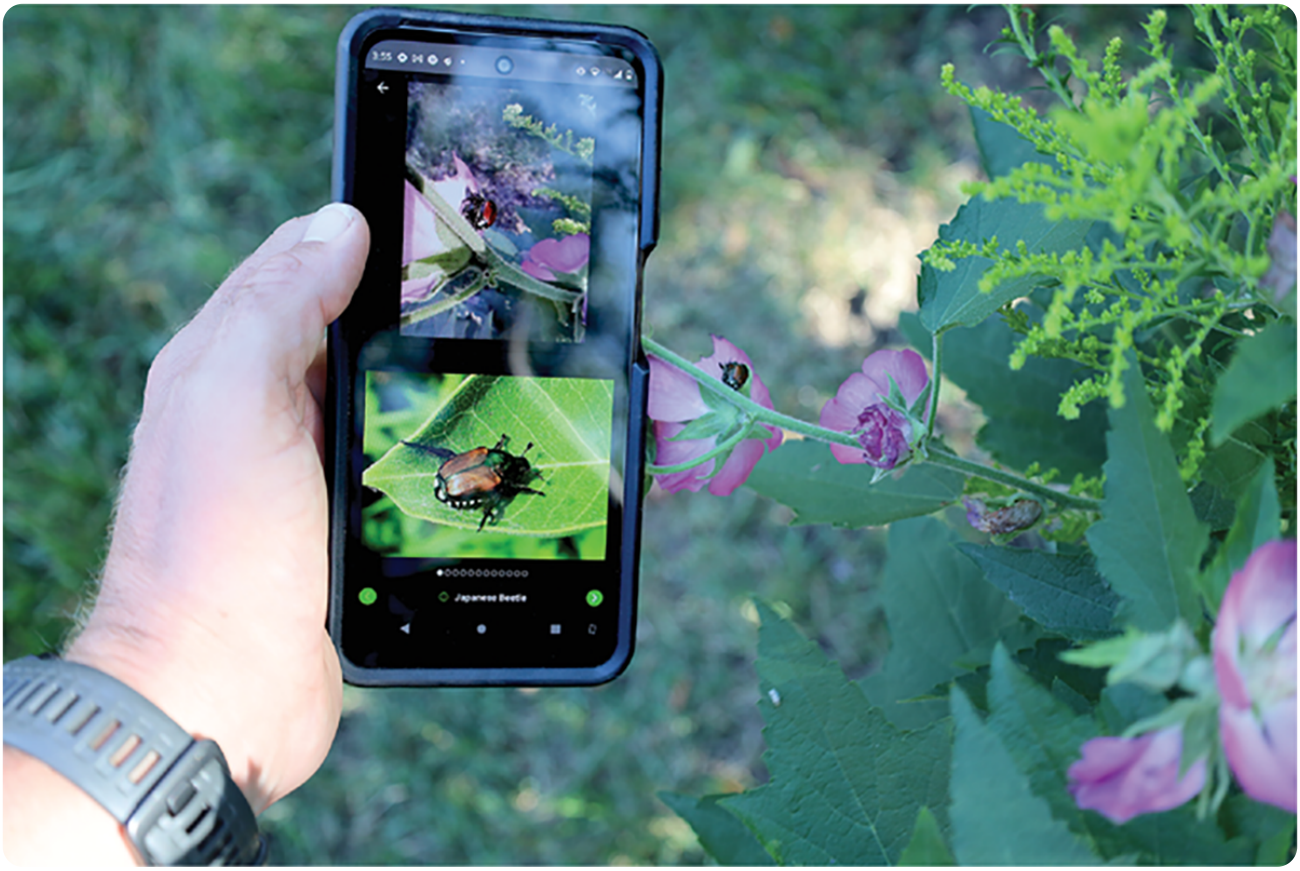
Science Societies

Phone app boosts curiosity and interest in insects

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A Japanese beetle is identified using the iNaturalist app. Photo by Derek Rosenberger.

Insects play an important role in grand challenges like sustainable food and fiber production, biodiversity loss, and potential subsequent ecosystem services collapse. Effective entomological training and educational tools are needed to prepare the next generation of problem-solvers to address these challenges. However, few empirical studies have investigated teaching strategies in entomology, especially in increasingly common online learning environments. Methods used in traditional classes to encourage interest in insect observation and identification, such as physical insect collections, won't work in remote education.

In a study described in *Natural Sciences Education*, entomology course instructors at five universities developed an insect scavenger hunt using the **iNaturalist** citizen science phone app. The app uses artificial intelligence technology to identify organisms from photos. Using pretest–post test experimental designs, the team showed that using iNaturalist significantly increased student interest in observing insects and in entomology. Most significantly, it also increased their curiosity about insect identification. A majority of students continued to use the app after completing the course, demonstrating its lasting impact.

With the rapid emergence of online courses, this study provides much needed empirical support for effective remote learning tools that instructors can use in organismal biology courses to promote lasting interest and engagement.

Dig deeper

Mech, A., Rosenberger, D., Fanning, P., Riggins, J.J., Aukema, B., & Hartshorn, J. (2022). There's an app for that: Teaching entomology in the online age. *Natural Sciences Education*, *51*, e20081. **https://doi.org/10.1002/nse2.20081**

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