

HOW TO USE INATURALIST

Introduction to iNaturalist

Over 1 million species face the threat of extinction this century, primarily due to habitat loss. State biologists don't have the budget or capacity to track all species via their federally mandated State Wildlife Action Plans (state-wide bioblitzes). Therefore, it is imperative to engage lay people, citizen scientists, to help gather and crowd source information to guide conservation efforts. iNaturalist is designed to do this. It is a free platform—both a website and app—to record observations of plants and animals in nature using photographs; share what you've found; and contribute to a global dataset of biodiversity information used for both science and conservation (Global Biodiversity Information Facility, or GBIF: <https://www.gbif.org>).

Making observations is as simple as exploring, being curious, and taking photos of organisms (or evidence of those organisms, like tracks, nests, shells, skulls, etc.) The iNaturalist computer vision will suggest possible identifications, and then when you upload those observations, the iNaturalist community works together to refine and confirm the identifications. iNaturalist helps anyone explore their surroundings, improves their observation skills, and connects them to a community that will help make them a better naturalist – all without the need to carry guide books.

Getting Started

It is free and easy to join iNaturalist. Set up your account on the iNaturalist website (<https://www.inaturalist.org>), or download the app from the Apple or Google Play store and create your login there. Pick a username and password you'll remember. Once you have an account, you can use it online or on your device, and multiple people can share a login.

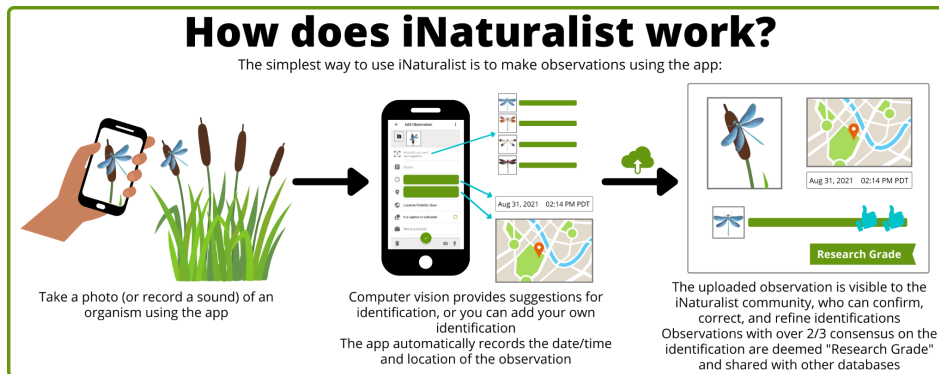
Making Observations

To familiarize yourself with iNaturalist, you're going to want to make some observations. This will give you experience using the iNaturalist app, a feel for what organisms are easiest to photograph, and an understanding of what happens to observations after you upload them.

1. Make sure your phone's location services are turned on for your camera and for iNaturalist—usually accessed through the security settings on your phone.
2. Head outside, open up the iNaturalist app and find an organism you'd like to make an observation of. Plants are a good place to start since they won't run away from you! While you can make observations of anything, try to look for organisms that are wild—so plants growing on their own without human help, or non-domesticated animals (excluding pets and farm animals).
3. Tap the button to make a new observation, and choose "Take Photo" when the options pop up.
4. Take your first photo. After you take the photo, you'll have the option of retaking it if you'd like (i.e., if it's blurry).
5. Once you have a photo you like, you'll be taken back to the observation screen. Notice that iNaturalist will have automatically populated the date and time, as well as your current location.
6. From the observation screen, you can add more photos to the observation (for example, if you'd like to get a close-up of a flower or plant, or the leaves).
7. Once you're satisfied with your photos, tap the box that says "What did you see? View suggestions." If you have a network or wi-fi connection, this will link you to the computer

vision on iNaturalist, which will try to suggest possible identifications based on your photograph and your location.

8. The “Top Suggestions” should say that the species are “Visually Similar/Seen Nearby” – these are good choices to pick from. You can pick a suggestion from iNaturalist, or you can type in your own identification using the search bar, at any level of detail you know (e.g., “California poppy” or “Plants” are both fine to use as an ID!)
9. Once you’ve added an identification, you’ll be taken back to the observation screen, where you should save the observation. Once you save it, it will be uploaded to iNaturalist, where the community will work to confirm or refine the identification.
10. Now you’re ready to make a new observation!



For more detailed instructions about using the iNaturalist iOS and Android apps, as well as for uploading observations via the iNaturalist website, see the **Getting Started** page: <https://inaturalist.freshdesk.com/en/support/solutions/folders/151000552105>

Other Useful Links

- City Nature Challenge FAQ: <https://www.citynaturechallenge.org/faq>
- City Nature Challenge Education Toolkit: <https://citynaturechallenge.org/education-toolkit/>
- iNaturalist Ambassador program page: <https://www.inaturalist.org/pages/ambassadors>
- iNaturalist Educator's Guide: <https://help.inaturalist.org/en/support/solutions/articles/151000170805>
- iNaturalist How to Host a Bioblitz Webinar: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7fJhdSRjPY>
- iNaturalist Resources: <https://www.inaturalist.org/pages/resources>
- City Nature Challenge: Northwest Louisiana Project: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/city-nature-challenge-2026-northwest-louisiana>
- South Central Plains Biodiversity Challenge Project: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/2026-spring-south-central-plains-biodiversity-challenge-scpbc>
- Biodiversity for Beginners from NatureServe: <https://www.natureserve.org/biodiversity-for-beginners-ebook>
- Citizen Science Delivers Big Wins for Biodiversity: <https://un-spbf.org/your-voices/citizen-science-delivers-big-wins-for-biodiversity-with-more-on-the-horizon/>
- Guide to Bioblitz Afterschool Programs: https://alabamawildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/uploadedFiles/File/2019_BioBlitz_Guide-afterschool-updated.pdf
- Doug Tallamy “Nature’s Best Hope”: <https://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/ideaofnature/73/>
- The surprising power of your nature photos: https://www.ted.com/talks/scott_loarie_the_surprising_power_of_your_nature_photos

For more information, please contact:

George Gehrig (geogehrig@gmail.com; 318-564-0840)