



iNaturalist Training Outline - June 2021

What Is iNaturalist

iNaturalist is a free, online, crowd-sourced database of nature observations AND a community of scientists, naturalists, and nature enthusiasts.

It is a powerful tool for identifying and mapping plants, animals, fungi, etc.

iNaturalist is populated by professional and amateur users who serve as OBSERVERS and/or IDENTIFIERS.

To get started, make an account at www.inaturalist.com and download the iNaturalist app to your iOS or Android device. If you need more help, visit the Getting Started Guide at <https://www.inaturalist.org/pages/getting+started>

Adding data: making observations

► TIP: Observations can most easily be made with a smart device, and easy-to-use apps exist for iOS and Android devices. Observations can also be made via the iNaturalist website.

An observation is USER-provided DOCUMENTATION that they encountered an ORGANISM at a particular LOCATION, on a particular DATE.

Observations can be CASUAL or VERIFIED.

VERIFIED observations include all required data and are made of non-cultivated/non-captive organisms.

Verified observations may be awarded RESEARCH GRADE. Research grade observations are verified and have been confirmed by one additional member of the iNaturalist community, or are agreed upon by 2/3 of identifiers if there is disagreement.

Observations that are missing any of the required data, or observations of species that are captive or cultivated, are considered CASUAL and cannot achieve research grade.

The act of making an observation consists of three steps: **RECORD**, **SHARE** and **DISCUSS**.

RECORDING: The following data is required for observations.

USER – an account with a valid email is required, and can be set up from the website or from an app.

DOCUMENTATION – proof of your encounter, provided to allow other users to confirm or, if needed, correct your identification.

Photographs are the main documentation available to the iNaturalist user. One to four photographs can be uploaded per observation. Please do not create separate observations for each photograph of the same organism.

► **TIP:** Photographs from different angles can be helpful, and images of both flowers and leaves are helpful to identify many plants.

Photographs can be taken within the app, uploaded from your camera roll within the app, or uploaded from your computer from the website.

Photographs of feathers, fallen leaves, tracks and nests are allowed.

Sound recordings may be recorded in the app or uploaded as with photographs. This can be helpful for documenting birds and singing insects that are difficult to photograph.

Description. A skilled observer may see and identify an organism without capturing an image. By providing detailed field marks, a user may submit a verified observation.

ORGANISM - Observations can be made of living or previously-living members of the community of life: plants, animals (vertebrates and invertebrates), fungi, algae, etc.

Organisms can be native or introduced.

Observations of abiotic components of the environment, such as soils, rocks, minerals may NOT be submitted.

Organisms must not be captive or cultivated (for verified observations).

If you see a zebra at the Columbus zoo, you may not submit your encounter as a verified observation. If you see a fly on the zebra's hindquarters, you may submit the fly!

You may not submit observations of plants you've added to your yard, but you may submit the insects that visit them.

➤ TIP: YOU DON'T NEED TO KNOW WHAT YOUR ORGANISM IS TO SUBMIT IT!

iNaturalist will make suggestions based on your photograph from a pool of observations made recently near your locale. If needed, community members will confirm or correct your identifications.

LOCATION

➤ TIP: turn location services for your phone camera ON. This will include location in a photograph's metadata. (Location may also be entered manually.)

By default, all locations in iNaturalist are OPEN. Open observations are marked on maps within iNaturalist with pins color-coded for vertebrates, invertebrates, plants, fungi, algae, etc.

Options exist for limited geoprivacy in the following instances:

You may OBSCURE the geolocation of an individual observation before you share it with the community. Some users prefer to do this if they observe in their yard and want to keep their residence private, or if they observe nestlings. Obscured observations appear as a circle at a random location within a 0.2° x 0.2° box around the obscured location. In Dayton, this equals approximately ten square miles. **You, trusted users, trusted project administrators and some iNaturalist partner organization administrators (depending on your settings) can still see obscured locations.**

You may set an observation's location to PRIVATE. Private locations are hidden on public maps, but **you, trusted users, trusted project administrators and some iNaturalist partner organization administrators (depending on your settings) can still see private locations.**

Finally, iNaturalist automatically obscures the location of threatened and endangered taxa to protect them from harvest or harassment.

Read more about geoprivacy on iNaturalist:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/pages/help#geoprivacy>

DATE – This is the date of the observation, not the date you shared the observation on iNaturalist. Entering old observations is encouraged if you have excellent records!

SHARE – Now that you've recorded all the required data, it's time to upload or sync your observation to the iNaturalist website. This makes your observation available for confirmation or correction by members of the community.

➤ Tip: To prevent broadcasting your location in real time by continually uploading observations, navigate to settings and turn off "auto upload" (iPhone) or "auto sync" (Android). This also saves cellular data!

DISCUSS – This is the process through which a verified observation can progress from the default “needs ID” to “research grade.” IDENTIFIERS view uploaded observations and confirm or refine identifications, or perhaps correct them.

►TIP: Our goal should be research grade observations, but that is not always possible. Some organisms can't be identified to species with a photograph, and others are simply missed for verification despite the best efforts of an active and engaged community.

When an IDENTIFIER makes a suggested identification on your observation, you'll receive an alert. (Alerts can be managed in “settings.”)

If the identifier agrees with an identification you provided, your observation is awarded research grade. Congrats!

If the identifier narrows your identification, i.e. you submitted an observation as a “butterfly,” and an identifier specifies that it is a “monarch butterfly, *Danaus plexippus*,” you'll be given the option to agree with the identifier. If you do, your observation will be awarded research grade. Congrats! Alternatively, you can wait for another identifier to agree; in this case, the observation will still be labeled “needs ID.”

Finally, an identifier may disagree with your identification. Perhaps you uploaded an image of a butterfly and labeled it a monarch, but another user noticed the bar on the hindwing that marks your specimen as a similar-looking viceroy and suggests that as an alternative ID. You can agree with it, or wait for others to. Sometimes, multiple identifiers will weigh in with alternate IDs. In this case, research grade will be awarded when 2/3 of identifiers agree.

►TIP: If you only care about the identification capacity of iNaturalist, or if you work with children, check out Seek by iNaturalist, also available for iOS and Android devices. Seek is a simplified application that encourages exploration of the natural world without sharing findings publicly.

Viewing and using data

Making observations may be the extent of your participation in the iNaturalist community. But perhaps the best part of iNaturalist is viewing everyone else's observations! iNaturalist can answer questions such as what is the range of the karner blue butterfly?, when do six-spotted tiger beetles emerge in Greene County? or what wildflowers might I see on my trip to Washington state next month? You can also curate a personal feed of the people, places, taxa and projects you care about to keep up on what is happening around you.

►TIP: Searching data, participating in projects, and following individuals or taxa is much easier on the website from a computer. The following instructions assume you are logged in on the full website.

FEEDS You can follow PEOPLE, PLACES, and TAXA to receive alerts about iNaturalist activity that interests you. You can control which alerts you receive by email by navigating to “settings.”

PEOPLE When you follow another user, their activity (observations and journal posts) will appear in your feed. To find a person, click on the community tab on the top of the website, select “people” and enter their name or address in the search bar. If they are not a user, you can send them an invitation if you know their email address. When you find the correct person, click on their name to be taken to their profile page and click the follow button. You can also send messages to users from their profile.

PLACES Want to know when someone records an observation at your favorite park? Follow it to add it to your feed! Scroll down the home page until you see “Subscriptions” on the right hand side. Select “Subscribe to a place” and enter your place into the search bar. Optionally, you can limit the kinds of species you see.

TAXA Also under “Subscriptions” is a “Subscribe to a taxon” button. This allows you to subscribe to an order, family, genus, or species.

➤ TIP: You cannot limit your taxa geographically from here. If you want to subscribe to bumblebee observations in the State of Ohio, use the “Subscribe to a place” option.

PROJECTS are pooled sets of observations created by filters determined by project creators. If your observation fits the requisites of a project, it will be automatically added. You cannot add your observations to projects manually. You will receive an alert when a project adds one of your observations.

Projects can be defined by location, taxa or observers, or by any combination. Umbrella projects join multiple projects together.

To search for a project, click the community tab at the top of the homepage and select “projects.”

View an example of a project – our MSJ All Taxa Biotic Inventory – here:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/mount-st-john-all-taxa-biotic-inventory>

➤ TIP: You can “join” projects to be alerted when project admins post a journal entry. You will not be alerted every time an observation is added, but projects you have joined will be gathered within your profile for easy access.

QUERIES iNaturalist features a powerful search function. To explore the possibilities, click the “explore tab” at the top of the homepage. By default, this brings up a list of every observation in iNaturalist. You can quickly limit the list by species or location using the explore search bar. Further refinements are available by selecting the “filter” button.