

A Teachers' Guide to using iNaturalist UK

The iNaturalist app and website help you identify the plants, animals and fungi around you while generating data for science and conservation. It is a great tool to engage and inspire learners to discover and understand nature.

iNaturalist is the name of the global wildlife recording website and the app. When using the website, UK users should go to iNaturalistUK. You will be able to view and explore all global observations via iNaturalistUK with the benefit of accessing UK specific messaging and articles.

Introduction to this teachers' guide

iNaturalist is an amazing tool that can support teaching and learning and build knowledge on biodiversity. Here's some guidance to help you make best use of it and ensure your observations can be used to study and protect nature.

Getting started

Before you can use iNaturalist to make observations in the National Education Nature Park project, you need to set up an account. Go to iNaturalistUK and select 'Sign up'.

Full instructions are set out here

Remember:

- Your Username and Display Name must start 'NENP_'
- You need to use a generic email, not one personal to you
- Observation, photo and sound licence settings must be set to CC0 (Account Settings > Content & Display)
- You need to affiliate to the iNaturalistUK Network

Once you have an account set up on the website you can sign in using the same details on the app.

Use iNaturalist yourself

Try to add 20-30+ observations before considering how you will use iNaturalist with your learners. iNaturalist will make a lot more sense to you after some firsthand experience. This can be as simple as using the app on a short walk around your local area, or better yet, try to use it at a place and time that is similar to where and when you are expecting your learners to use it.

Have a go at the following: recording observations, adding comments, adding identifications, as well as learning how to use the Explore function.

Tip: Go to the Getting Started pages on iNaturalistUK for useful guides and videos.

Explore existing observations

Before your learners add any data, use the Explore function to see what has been observed in your area or globally.

To find a location you can:

- zoom in on the map view
- use the 'Location' search box (this uses google maps to give approximate boundaries)
- use the 'Place' search box within Filters

Tip: In Account Settings > Account you can set your default location for the Explore page to an area of your choice, for example Nottinghamshire.



Four tips for making great observations

- **Take clear photos:** Photos of distant trees or dark specks for birds are hard to identify, leading to a disappointing user experience and limited scientific use of your observation, so make sure you show your learners how to **fill the frame with your subject**, perhaps using the phone or camera's zoom. Using your hand to hold a plant still can be helpful, but make sure the plant is not toxic, stinging or irritating.
- **Take multiple photos:** Many organisms, particularly plants and insects, are difficult to identify from a single photo. Show learners how to take multiple photos from different angles (top, bottom, side, front, back), and/or photos showing different features of the organism. For plants it's especially important to take pictures of flowers or fruit. Photos of flowers or fruit AND leaves are the most helpful. Be sure to add multiple photos of the same organism to the same observation.
- **Focus on wild organisms:** Some learners may want to focus on the cultivated plants and animals they can find near their classroom. That's totally fine, but in general, the iNaturalist community is more interested in wild organisms. Many learners don't understand the difference between cultivated and wild organisms, so this could be a great opportunity to discuss this with them. If learners do make observations of garden plants or other non-wild organisms, make sure those observations are marked as "Captive/Cultivated" before uploading them.
- **Ensure date and location are correct.** The app automatically records the date a photo was taken and the location (you need to have location services turned on in your device). Only upload photos you've taken yourself, not screenshots of other devices.

Maximise learning opportunities and scientific value of your observations by following these guidelines:

- **DO photograph wild plants:** Weeds are wild and always nearby. Take a step outside and find something growing in the cracks of the pavement, or a leaf that's fallen to the ground.
- **DON'T photograph pets or house plants:** We want to record wildlife found outdoors.
- **DO mark captive / cultivated organisms:** If you photograph organisms such as domestic animals or garden plants, make sure you mark them as "captive/cultivated".
- **DO delete your test observations promptly:** If you have no intention of keeping some of the observations, please delete them ASAP.
- **DON'T photograph people's faces:** Especially when children are involved. Many learners will be used to posting pictures of themselves to social media outlets, but iNaturalist is completely public, so please ensure that you and your learners respect each others' privacy.
- **DO promote quality of observation over quantity.** We recommend avoiding setting grades, prizes, or contests that encourage a "race" among learners. Slower, more careful observation and photography leads to better quality observations that can be used for research, so emphasise and reward quality over quantity.
- **DON'T upload other people's photos:** Uploaded photos should be those taken by the learners and educators, and of the **actual organism** observed at that time and place. Uploading photos taken by others usually violates copyright law. Photos uploaded as an example of what had been observed rather than the specific organism itself violates iNaturalist's Terms of Service. Don't upload AI generated images.



Using Seek by iNaturalist

It may not always be appropriate for your learners to use iNaturalist and you may wish to use Seek by iNaturalist instead.

Seek by iNaturalist is a fun, privacy-focused app that provides live ID suggestions. It may be a better fit for your education setting, especially if you work with Early Years, because it doesn't post observations to iNaturalist, but still provides tools such as automated species identification and nature journaling.

Safeguarding

iNaturalist doesn't allow people under the age of 13 to create accounts without parental approval. We recommend the educator creates an account for the school, college or nursery, and young people use that account under supervision. We expect that children using the app and websites will be supervised and managed as per your setting's policies relating to online safety and use of electronic devices.

For educators using iNaturalist as part of the National Education Nature Park programme, please follow the specific instructions on how to set up an account, which ensures your observations are displayed on the Nature Park maps.

Credits

This document is based on original text by iNaturalist. This version uses some of the same text but has been heavily edited to be aimed specifically at educators using iNaturalistUK as part of the National Education Nature Park and Climate Action Awards (Nature Park). You can also find useful advice in the Educators forum on the iNatForum. This is a global platform containing lots of information, advice and general discussion relating to all aspects of iNaturalist.



National Education
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