

## Beyond BioBlitz: Making Your Data Count

Whilst BioBlitz is a fun and exciting public engagement event, it is important to the validity of BioBlitz that the data we collect is scientifically accurate and useful to the local and national environmental community. This simple toolkit is designed to help you get the best out of your wildlife sightings.

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### BIOLOGICAL RECORDING – THE BASICS

When you see, hear or find positive evidence of a species presence in a particular place – that is a ‘wildlife sighting’.

At a BioBlitz we want to convert those sightings into viable wildlife records that are entered into an appropriate database. To do that we need:

- **WHO** - A record of who made the sighting (so we can check back with them)
- **WHAT** - A positive species identification (preferably backed up with a photo)
- **WHERE** - The location of the sighting (usually in the form of a grid reference)
- **WHEN** - The date of the sighting



Once this data is entered into an appropriate database – for example, in the Local Environmental Records Centre (LERC) or National Recording Scheme it becomes an official ‘wildlife record’, you can find yours [here](#). Until the data reaches this point it has very limited value to the scientific and conservation community, so it is really important that we follow the full process and not just leave our sightings in a draw somewhere.

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### COLLECTING RECORDS – WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS?

On the day you can collect records either on paper using a recording form or through a number of mobile apps available.

**Paper** – Once completed these can then be entered into a simple database or online recording system either during or after the event. [Click here to download a standard recording sheet](#)

**Apps** – There are several apps available for recording biological data which collect the who, where and when of your data automatically. Widely used examples include [iRecord](#) and [iNaturalist](#) although there are others available!

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### SUBMITTING RECORDS

A great place to send your records after your event is your Local Environmental Records Centre (LERC) as this is where they can be most easily accessed locally by the end users of the data. Most LERCs share data with the national NBN Gateway to be shared more widely. Check with your LERC – you can find them [here](#).

Depending on the LERC, you can submit your records as paper forms, as a simple database (e.g. Excel spreadsheet) or through an online recording system. Online systems have the advantage of instant feedback and instant mapping of the unverified data. This means that you can show your visitors their sightings as they are uploaded. They also allow you to support your record by uploading a photo.

The LERC will then go through a process of verifying the data and confirming each sighting as an official ‘wildlife record’ before sending data on to the NBN Gateway. It is at this point that your records can contribute to local and national databases supporting scientific and conservation research, policy and land management.

***If you are using an app you should check with the app provider how the data will be verified and used.***

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## IDENTIFYING SPECIES



When recording wildlife it is really important that your species identifications are correct – but no one can identify every single species. Many species are very similar and need the help of an expert to identify with certainty. Others will be easily identified and can be recorded in the field during a wildlife walk or similar activity.

On the day a ‘Triage’ system really helps to ensure that identifications are checked over before being set in stone as records. This works particularly well for invertebrates and plants.

### 1. FRONT OF HOUSE TEAM

Your front of house team should be made up of enthusiastic volunteers with some very basic identification skills. Equipped with user friendly field guides (FSC fold out charts are perfect!) these folks will receive bug pots and specimens from your visitors following their activities and be able to help them identify their findings to a basic level (e.g. bumblebee).

*Tip – It helps if bug pots are labelled at this point with the grid reference that they came from whilst you have the person in front of you.*

### 2. BACK ROOM ID TEAM

Your back room team will be made up of more experienced naturalists and taxonomists equipped with taxonomic keys and microscopes. It is their role to get the identification down to species level if possible (e.g. Early Bumblebee – *Bombus pratorum*), and complete the record on a paper recording sheet or directly into an event database.

*Tip – A specimen ‘in tray’ for each taxonomic group will allow each naturalist to browse based on their own particular expertise.*

### 3. DOCUMENTING TEAM

The documenting team should be made up of photographers equipped with cameras and laptops to photograph specimens that nobody on site has the expertise to identify on the day. Photos can be uploaded to [iSpot](#) where a wider community of naturalists can help with identification. Make sure the photo number (which automatically becomes the filename on most digital cameras) is noted with each sighting so that photos can be matched with the appropriate record.

*Tip – Take several photos from many angles to boost the chances of an important identifying feature being visible. For smaller specimens, a macro lens or USB microscope will give better images. Why not share your photos on Twitter and Facebook to reach a wider audience?*

Many of your volunteers will be multi-talented and able to move seamlessly between these teams through the course of the event. After all, your expert taxonomists will probably be leading wildlife walks and activities. Members of each team should rove the site recording and supporting your activities but it is worth always having some stationed at a central recording point at base camp. [Download our short guide to volunteering at a BioBlitz](#) and distribute to your volunteers.

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## Want to know more?



[Download BioBlitz Species Data - Where should it go?](#)

This guide to managing your BioBlitz data disentangles the complex world of biological recording to make sure that the data you collect gets to where it will be the most useful. Originally a handout for a workshop at the BioBlitz Conference 2014, big thanks to Martin Harvey from The Open University for producing this resource: BioBlitz Species Data - Where should it go?