

# An Introduction to Recording Species at BioBlitz Events

During BioBlitz events, the aim is to turn casual wildlife observations into verifiable wildlife records that are useful to science. For this reason, our records need to be evidence-based; this could include sound recordings, feathers, photos of animals, their tracks or dung.

## To make the record count, we need the following info:

- **WHAT** - What species did you see? (backed up with a photo or sound recording)
- **WHO** - A record of who made the sighting (so information can be check back with the recorder if needed)
- **WHERE** - The location of the sighting (usually in the form of a grid reference or a geotagged photo)
- **WHEN** - The date & time of the sighting

When recording wildlife it is really important that species identifications are correct. Many species are very similar and will need the help of an expert to identify with certainty. Others will be easily identified and can be recorded on by volunteers "in the field". BioBlitz events usual have a mix of expert and volunteer recorders on hand to record species.

## Where does the data need to go?

Ultimately, data needs to be shared with the Local Environmental Records Centre (LERC), where it then becomes an official wildlife recording and can be shared with other datasets such as the [NBN Atlas](#), the UK's largest collection of biodiversity data. At this point it is of high value to the scientific and conservation community, so it is very important that we submit our wildlife observations correctly. In the UK there are a number of tools available to record wildlife. Two of the most popular websites/apps for submitting records are [iNaturalist UK](#) and [iRecord](#).

## iNaturalist

### For BioBlitz organizers:

For a site-wide BioBlitz with participants from the general public taking part, we would recommend using the iNaturalist app to record the majority of your wildlife observation data. The user-friendly app will automatically count what you have discovered, place the records on a map, and produce handy graphs to share with participants after the event. iNaturalist has been used to record wildlife during events such as City Nature Challenge - you can check out a previous event [here](#) to see how it looks.

If using iNaturalist, you will need to set up a "project" that shows your BioBlitz area, start and end time. iNaturalist has a fantastic how-to guide on their website so you can set up your project on the app - [Bioblitz Guide · iNaturalist](#).

### For participants:

iNaturalist phone app is easy to use, with an A-I feature to help you identify what species/evidence you've photographed. A community of scientists and wildlife enthusiasts can either agree or suggest a new different species for your observation. Once there is sufficient verification, the record becomes "research grade" and can become an official wildlife record, making it useful to the scientific community. There is a video of how to use the app [here](#) on YouTube. Tip: Taking several photos from many angles can help increase the chances of a correct verification!

## Paper records

Some species, such as some flies or worms, are not easily identified by photo and will need additional verification either by a local expert or naturalist and/or with the help of identification keys. It is good to have paper records on hand to record these observations, and also for anyone to use who does not want to use the apps. Once completed, these can then be entered into a simple database (e.g. Excel spreadsheet - though it is recommended to first [contact your LDRC](#) to see how they would prefer to receive these records), or other online recording systems (such as iRecord), either during or after the event. Visit our resources page to find recording template sheets.

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.

## IDENTIFYING SPECIES and making the data count when using iNaturalist

### During the event

During the event you will want as many people as possible walking around the site taking clear photos of the wild species that they encounter (up to 4 photos of each species - more photos help online verifiers with their identifications). These can be uploaded to iNaturalist straight away via the mobile app, or saved until there is access to WiFi. If photos are taken on a camera rather than a phone, they can be uploaded to the iNaturalist website on a computer - just make sure to make a note of where each species was seen!



### After the BioBlitz - the following days

After the event, it will be time to verify the records that have been made during the BioBlitz, to make the records count. Other iNaturalist users will be able to look at photos taken during the event and either confirm the suggested identification as correct or suggest an alternative species name. Fortunately, anyone from across the world can use their knowledge to identify the photos taken on iNaturalist, which may speed up the identification process. We also recommend contacting local naturalists such as botanists, and volunteers, to see if they will help identify the photos on iNaturalist after the event. iNaturalist have a guide on how to identify photos here:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/pages/getting+started#identify>

You may want to consider hosting a "DataBlitz" event, where people can come together and have fun identifying the photographs of recorded species together at a local venue, such as a pub or town hall. Identifications can also be made from home on the app. This can be helpful if you need the help of experts who might not be able to make an in-person datablitz event.

## IDENTIFYING SPECIES and making the data count - on-site experts and paper records/iRecord

Some species cannot be identified by photo alone, these will need the help of an expert to identify with certainty. 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, or any species that iNaturalist is not confident with making an identification for.

### 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!). The team will receive bug pots and specimens from your visitors and help them to identify their findings to a basic level (e.g. bumblebee). Top Tip: It helps if bug pots are labelled at this point with the grid reference of where they were found.

### 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*). 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. They can assist the ID team by recording the records on a paper recording sheet, or directly into an event database (Excel spreadsheet, or iRecord). They should also make detailed photographs of specimens that nobody on site has the expertise to identify on the day. Photos can be uploaded to iNaturalist website (or iRecord) where a wider community of naturalists can help with identification. If using paper records or Excel, make sure the photo file name is noted on the appropriate record, along with grid-reference of where the species was found.

**Top 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.

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.

### Next steps: head back to our website for other documents you may need.

Find other resources such as our ["Guide for BioBlitz Volunteers"](#) or our ["Guide to Using iNaturalist"](#) which you can distribute to your volunteers ahead of your event. Head back to [Run Your Own BioBlitz](#) for other useful resources.

This guide has been adapted from a handout for a workshop at the BioBlitz Conference 2014. big thanks to Martin Harvey from The Open University for producing the original resource: BioBlitz Species Data - Where should it go?



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