An Introduction to Recording Species at BioBlitz Events

During BioBlitz events, the two key aims are usually:

1) To engage the local community
2) To collect wildlife records that could be useful for science or local records

To make your wildlife record count, you need the following information:

- **WHAT** - **What species did you see?**
- **WHO** - A record of **who made the sighting** (so information can be checked 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 and time** of the sighting

When submitting records of 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" with the use of identification guides.

BioBlitz events usually have a mix of experts, knowledgeable volunteers and enthusiastic participants participating to record species. Some taxonomic groups, for example flies and worms, contain many species that can be difficult for beginners to tell apart - so **it is recommended to have some wildlife experts on site that may be able to help identify and verify these trickier groups**. Good knowledge of local wildlife and identification experience can be invaluable on the day of the BioBlitz!

Remember: Good records are based on evidence; this could include sound recordings, feathers, photos of animals, their tracks or dung. It's a good idea to get a photo of the plant/animal/evidence, if you can.

Where does the data need to go?

In the UK, there are a number of tools available to record wildlife.
Most often, wildlife recorders will send their records **directly to a** Local Environmental Records Centre, or **use a wildlife recording app such as iRecord or iNaturalist.**

For BioBlitz events, apps such as iNaturalist are often used. iNaturalist has a system that uses Ai technology and the knowledge of fellow iNaturalist users, to verify that your records are correct, before sharing them outside of iNaturalist*. This feature is especially helpful for identifying species in groups you're less familiar with.

*For records to be share outside of iNaturalist, your records need to have an "open copyright licence". See this 1 min video on how to make sure your records have an open licence.

How to collect the records for sending to a Records Centre?

If you are sending your records directly to a Local Records Centre, you may want to use paper records - you can find a template here. However we strongly recommend **getting in touch with your local records centre** before you start your BioBlitz, as they might have their own recording sheet or digital system that you can use to make records.

IDENTIFYING SPECIES when using iNaturalist

What is iNaturalist?

iNaturalist is one of many wildlife-recording tools available. It's particularly good with BioBlitz events as it collects participants' findings, places the records on a map, and produces handy graphs to share with participants after the event. You can check out an example of an event here to see how a BioBlitz project page might look.

During the event

During the event, participants will explore the site taking clear photos of the wild species that they encounter. These can be uploaded to iNaturalist straight away via the mobile app, or saved until there is access to WiFi. Users can then use the app's AI technology to help identify what they've seen.

New to using iNaturalist? Click here to find our top tips and how-to guides for iNaturalist

If photos are taken on a DSLR 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**, as you'll need to enter this into the website manually!

After the BioBlitz - the following days

After wildlife records are uploaded onto iNaturalist, and over the following weeks, the online iNaturalist community will be able to look at the records. They can either confirm the suggested identification is correct or suggest an alternative species name. Anyone from across the world can use their knowledge to identify the photos taken on iNaturalist. You might want to consider contacting local naturalists to see if they can help identify the photos after the event. iNaturalist have a guide on how to identify photos here

Please note that some species *cannot* be identified by photo alone, and may need the use of a microscope - so although a useful tool to help guide with the identification of wildlife, it is not be possible to correctly identify all species through iNaturalist

IDENTIFYING SPECIES and making the data count - verifying your records with on-site experts

Some species cannot be identified by photo alone, and **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.

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 the public taking part in your BioBlitz, and will help 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 (e.g. Excel spreadsheet). 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 Guides 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.
Thank you to Martin Harvey from The Open University for producing the original resource: BioBlitz Species Data - Where should it go?