

Become a Citizen Scientist

Citizen science is a unique and fun opportunity for members of the community to study the world around them and contribute to science. This means anyone can do science!

There are so many different types of citizen science. Find one that interests you at [Scistarter.com](https://www.scistarter.com). You can also address an environmental problem you've noticed in your community by taking action to document a change.

Citizen science is also a fun way to remind us how connected we all are. During this time when we are keeping our distance from others to protect our community, we can come together online to improve our knowledge of our communities.

Observations

One important piece of the scientific method is making observations. You can observe individual plants and animals by using your five senses. Did you know that making observations of evidence of life like nests, tracks and scat is also very helpful in showing that the animal is around even if you don't see them?

Once we make observations, another important part of the scientific method is to write them down or record them. By adding to a citizen science project, we can work together and share our observations.

An easy way to record observations is through the website and app [iNaturalist](https://www.inaturalist.org). This way observations made around the world go into the same database and you, the community, and scientists can work together to see patterns and diversity of life even in our own backyards! Let's get started!

Who you are

You'll need to make an **iNaturalist account** and please only post your own personal observations



What you saw

Choose a group of organisms like **butterflies** or better yet a specific organism like the **Monarch butterfly**. If you provide evidence you can leave this blank and the **community can help**



Where you saw it

Record both the coordinates of the encounter as well as their accuracy. You can obscure the location from the public



When you saw it

Record the date of your encounter, not the date you post it to iNaturalist



Evidence of what you saw

By including evidence like a **photo or sound**, the community can help add, improve, or confirm the identification of the organism you encountered. Help the community by taking clear well framed photos, by including multiple photos from different angles



Here are some ways to get started with iNaturalist:

1. Do a backdoor census!

If you can, download the app on a mobile device. If not, grab a camera and go outside. Can't go outside? Make your observations through a window or inside your house (insects).

Whether you step out onto a city sidewalk or a backyard, look around and observe wild things. This means anything that was not planted there or brought there by people, for example: squirrels, birds, weeds, insects, snails, and spiders.

Then upload your pictures to iNaturalist.

Mark each observation with the kind of living thing that it is. It's okay if you just know it's a bird, but not what species. By labeling it as a bird, the bird experts on iNaturalist will help identify it for you!

Tips:

- i. Each animal or plant is a different observation.
- ii. Take clear, up close pictures so someone else can identify what you saw.

2. Do a specific hunt on a walk.

While getting outside, decide on a specific type of life you are going to look for and photograph. It could be trees, insects, mammals, birds... whatever you choose!

If you will be returning to the same area multiple times, choose a different kind of life each time.

Remember to practice appropriate physical distancing – both from other humans on your walk, and from the animals you are observing. Wild animals like their space.

3. Identify what other people already observed.

There are already so many observations on iNaturalist and you can help identify them.

Don't feel like an expert? That's okay, work at a level you feel comfortable with.

Search for 'unknown' life and then label it as bird, plant, mammal, insect, or as far as you can get. Just doing that much helps someone else come along and move that plant to a pine to an eastern white pine.

If you're not an expert in any group, you can still help by identifying the "unknowns" – the observations with no IDs at all! Click the "Filters" button and then select the dashed-line leaf with a question mark in it.