

Guide to using iNaturalist



Updated March 2022

iNaturalist - download the free app

To get started, download the free iNaturalist app (from Google Play or App Store) on to your smartphone and create your profile using a mobile number or email address.

Then head out to your local creek, reserve, or even your own backyard and keep an eye out for wild plants and animals. Using the app, you can record an image or two of each different plant or animal you can find (your phone's GPS will record the date and location), identify them to the level you are confident with, then share your observations on the iNaturalist online platform.

To help you download the app and get started using it, Maroondah produced a basic guide for each of Apple and Android devices.

Alternatively, once back home on your computer, you can log into the iNaturalist website and record the locations (by dropping a pin on a map) and upload your photos of the observations. This enables you to use photos taken with digital cameras, and also to be more selective with the photos you upload.

[Downloading and getting started with iNaturalist - Apple devices](#)

[Downloading and getting started with iNaturalist - Android devices](#)

Identifying your observations

As part of uploading an observation, you are encouraged to identify each one to the extent of your knowledge. Once uploaded, the online iNaturalist community will be able to see them, and often will apply their knowledge to refine, or confirm, your identifications.

For example, if you only know what you have observed as a 'butterfly', you can identify it as "Butterflies and Moths - Lepidoptera", and once it has been uploaded someone who knows their butterflies may update your observation with its full species name. You will receive a notification of any updates made to your observations.

The iNaturalist platform also uses computer learning to make suggestions for what your observation might

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be - if you think the suggestion is accurate, you can select it before you share your observation online. Try to avoid leaving your observation with no identification at all, as it is less likely to attract the attention of someone who might know what you have seen.

Learning how to use iNaturalist

There are several online resources available to help you learn how to use iNaturalist. In 2021, the Great Southern BioBlitz organisers ran two online webinars featuring Thomas Mesaglio (@thebeachcomber), a curator and forum moderator on iNaturalist, and the leading identifier in Australia.

[A beginners guide for using iNaturalist](#) (recording of webinar ran 28th September 2021)

[Advanced tips for using iNaturalist](#) (recording of webinar ran 7th September 2021)

In 2021, to support participation in the City Nature Challenge, the Melbourne - Eastern Metropolitan Area collaboration ran two online webinars featuring entomologist, Dr Luis Mata (@lmata).

[How to use iNaturalist \(1\)](#) (recording of webinar - 23 March 2021)

[How to use iNaturalist \(2\)](#) (recording of webinar - 20 April 2021)

The iNaturalist website also provides several detailed [video tutorials](#).

Tips for making your observation more easily identifiable

The most valuable observations are those where the species can be readily identified and independently confirmed online. A few things to note to help make your observation a valuable one:

- > Only upload observations of species that you believe are naturally wild and not planted, domesticated, captured or placed. Please avoid uploading photos of your pets or your garden plants!
- > Wherever possible, feature only one species in your photo or sound recording (if necessary, you can add notes to clarify which species your observation is of)
- > Aim to take your photos as close up, and as clear and sharp as you can
- > Apart from photos showing the whole plant or animal, additional photos that show distinguishing features can be helpful:
 - for plants, include close ups of as many different parts as you can including seeds, leaves, flowers, buds, bark and overall form
 - for ferns, include photos from the top, underside of the fronds, and overall form
 - for grasses try to also include close ups of the flower, seed head, and individual seeds
 - for fungi include photos from above, side on and the underside of the fruiting body (cap). Tip: you can use a small mirror placed under the cap to get the top and underside in the one photo!
 - for invertebrates (eg. insects and spiders) try to include close-up photos from above, and side on, and from underneath if possible
 - for birds aim to show the shape of the beak, eye colour, distinguishing feather patterns,

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etc.

- for frogs/birds try recording their call instead as it can often be hard to get a good photo
- add notes of any distinctive behaviours you noticed, e.g., a distinctive call, flight, habitat etc.

Tips for discovering and observing nature around you

The following tips have been provided by people with great local knowledge of nature in Maroondah, including Graeme Lorimer, Luis Mata, John Cull & Ken McInnes:

- > Most plant species are below knee-high, so look low and carefully to discover the diversity of our local flora. You can keep listening for birds and frogs at the same time.
- > Find a plant in flower and look closely at the flowers for 5-10min – there is a great chance you will start to notice insect pollinators and other flower-visiting insects that were not apparent at first, or that land on the flowers as you're watching.
- > Carefully lift/roll small logs and rocks (or bricks and pieces of wood) on the ground to see what you may find underneath – remember to put them back to their original position to minimise habitat disturbance.
- > Carefully look under pieces of loose bark around the base of gum trees to expose any insect, spider, and other invertebrate species that may be sheltering there – remember to replace any moved pieces of bark (facing down) at the base of the tree.
- > Look for invertebrates amongst foliage, on the ground, on tree trunks, under leaf litter/logs/rocks, or in your compost bin, particularly on warm days when they will be more active. Hand lenses, glass jars, and head torches will help with finding and photographing these insects.
- > Look for and listen to birds in the early morning or evening when they are more active and vocal. When attempting to observe birds – move slowly and quietly, wait and watch. Carry binoculars or use a telephoto lens to enhance sightings.
- > Look for lizards and snakes when it is warm, as they are more likely to come out to warm themselves.
- > Look for nocturnal creatures after dusk using a torch or spotlight.
- > Set up a simple 'moth sheet' to attract and observe nocturnal invertebrates, especially moths. Warm, dry and still nights are best for this.
- > Waterbodies such as creeks, dams, wetlands and ponds will attract many animals, especially water birds and frogs, and can provide the best opportunities for taking photos or recording calls. On warm days, many animals may come visiting for a drink. Utilise a head torch to try and spot these frogs.
- > Look up into the canopy, and if you find hollows in trees, stop and look for signs of occupation. Another good photo opportunity for many species!
- > Look for fungi on the ground, on dead wood, and bring a small mirror or hand lens to view the underside of the fungi.
- > There is lots of fauna living in our soils and leaf litter. Scoop damp soil and leaf litter into a tray and use a magnifying lens to see what you can spot.

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Staying safe

- > **Looking after our community**
 - Please do not attend if you are unwell or have been instructed to isolate or quarantine
 - Please abide by the CovidSafe requirements of the day, which may include:
 - Contact tracing - scan QR code on arrival, or fill in sign-in sheet
 - Carrying or wearing a mask
 - Keeping at least 1.5 metres distance between you and anyone you don't live with whenever possible, otherwise it is recommended you wear your mask
 - Practicing good hygiene such as washing your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds before arrival, and coughing and sneezing into a tissue or your elbow.
- > **Looking after you**
 - Please dress for the prevailing weather conditions, and wear sturdy, closed footwear
 - Please note that you are likely to be walking outdoors on unmade, uneven tracks through bushland, and you may encounter stinging and biting insects, and tripping hazards such as fallen branches and potholes
- > **Looking after our reserves**
 - Numbers for various nature discovery activities and nature walks will be limited (maximum yet to be determined) - online registration is essential
 - Please follow your guide's instructions and stay on the tracks
 - Before you arrive, please remove any dirt/clay/soil from your footwear to prevent spread of forest diseases

Further information

To learn more about the City Nature Challenge, please visit the City Nature Challenge website.

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