



School Resources: Wildlife Recording for Schools

Engage your class with the wildlife in and around the school through wildlife recording. It can be as simple as compiling a list on a piece of paper or whiteboard. An alternative is to use a more formalised approach which you can then send to your local record centre to help inform decision-making across the county.

How to record wildlife

It is as simple as noting what you saw, when, where and by who. These are the 4 Ws and make up a basic record:

- What did you see? Ideally the scientific name but common names can be used.
- When did you see it? Simply the date of your observation.
- Where did you see it? The name of the location (school name etc.) and grid reference (which you can get from a map).
- Who saw it? The name of the observer (called the 'recorder') and a 'determiner' if someone else confirmed the species. For safeguarding, you might only want to record an adult's name.

You can do this using a spreadsheet but perhaps the simplest approach is to use the iNaturalist app. A teacher or other adult could create an account for the class. For older students, it might be possible for them to create their own account: accounts can be created from age 13+.

Example:

Your class has seen a Robin. This can be a record by recording the following:

- What? Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)
- When? 1st March 2024
- Where? Bitts Park, Carlisle (grid ref: NY395566)
- Who? Class Endeavour (Determiner: Teacher Someone)

What to record and what NOT to record

Record all wildlife – plants, animals and fungi. Animals include insects, spiders, molluscs, amphibians, mammals, birds etc.

Don't record pets or livestock. Garden plants are generally non-native but if in doubt, do record them as it might not be obvious whether it is native or not, and this can also capture potentially invasive plant species.

How to use iNaturalist for wildlife recording in schools

iNaturalist is a free app that can be downloaded to smart phones or tablets, or can be used via a web browser on a PC or laptop. It was created in the US and provides a relatively simple interface for recording wildlife observations which can be checked by a large number of wildlife enthusiasts from around the world. Find out more about iNaturalist here: <https://www.inaturalist.org/>



iNaturalist provides an excellent guide for teachers – please do read this to ensure that this app is suitable for your needs and consider using the ID app ‘Seek by iNaturalist’ with paper/spreadsheet recording instead if you have any concerns about recording with the app. Read the teacher’s guide here: <https://www.inaturalist.org/pages/teacher's+guide>.

To record an observation:

You will need to create an account. For primary schools and younger students, you might want to create a class account. Alternatively, the teacher or other appropriate adult could create and use their own account.

Once you have an account, you can start recording wildlife by taking photos, uploading photographs from your image library or simply recording what species you have seen where and when. You will be able to map your records so you can track what you have seen.

To make sure that your records can be used by Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre and so contribute to better planning for nature recovery, conservation projects and so much more, you will need to adjust the default licence on your account to ‘CC-BY’: this will allow Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre to collate your records and add to the county-wide database. There is information on how to do this in a separate help document.

To set up a project:

Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre can help set up a project for your school grounds or other local area (e.g. park, community gardens etc.). If you would prefer to do this yourself, you will first need to have made 50 observations using your account before the option to create a project appears. Once the option is available, you can follow the simple steps or open a step-by-step guide within iNaturalist to walk you through the process.

Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre support

As well as helping set up iNaturalist projects, Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre can help with additional support including webinars to get you started and, if time allows, a school workshop to find out more about wildlife recording. Get in touch with your query and we’ll get back to you to discuss!

Other approaches to recording

If you would prefer not to use the app but still would like to contribute to biodiversity recording across Cumbria, you can download a spreadsheet and use this to collate all your school’s or class records. You can then submit this spreadsheet to Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre. We would suggest starting a new spreadsheet at the start of each school year and emailing to us at the end of school year. If you do this early enough, we might be able to map your observations to present to your class before they break up for summer!

Finally...

Make sure that you have fun! If wildlife recording doesn’t engage the students, don’t push it. They might need a gradual introduction and improve their identification skills initially: ‘Seek by iNaturalist’ offers an opportunity to do this. There is a competitive aspect to iNaturalist which could gamify the process, with classes competing for the best observations: this might prove engaging for some.