How and when to use iRecord and iNaturalist

Sussex Wildlife Trust

By Laurie Jackson

How (and when) to use iRecord and iNaturalist

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Sussex Wildlife Trust's guide to Wildlife Surveys and Monitoring provides information about the importance of recording wildlife. Here we go a bit deeper into how to actually do it, using two free tools: iRecord and iNaturalist.

iRecord

iNaturalist

The aim of both is to encourage more wildlife recording, with **iNaturalist** focusing on the identification of species using a global community of naturalists. whilst **iRecord** makes species records shareable from the original recorder to individuals and organisations to use in conservation, research and decision making.

Both **iRecord** and **iNaturalist** are powerful resources for community groups, accessible on a website and via a smartphone app.

Making a record: reminder

Wildlife records are snapshots of ephemeral events, documenting the presence of something, in a specific place, at a specific time, noted by an observer.

The **what, where, when** and **who** can be more powerful with additional information about your observation.

For example if you were doing a specific survey, it is good to include...

- The number of individuals recorded
- The life stage - (e.g. flowering, adult, gall)
- The sex
- Any behaviour observed
- The habitat or microhabitat
- The time of day
- The weather conditions

Photographs and/or sound recordings can provide additional useful data for verifiers and users of your records.

Making and sharing wildlife records ensures the data is available for others to use, including conservation organisations, local planning authorities and national recording schemes that track species' population trends.

iNaturalist: Basics

The aim of iNaturalist is to gather biodiversity information for the benefit of science and conservation by building a global community of naturalists. This community is a key strength of iNaturalist, with members helping each other with their identifications, in order to learn more about nature.

An observation is an encounter with a species or signs of a species such as **tracks, nests, exuviae or dung**. They do not need to have photos, but observations without photos or sounds cannot be verified by others.

Tip: iNaturalist observations are made one species at a time, if your observation shows more than one species, you will need to enter each separately.

When an observation is first inputted it is labelled as '**needs ID**' and other naturalists are able to suggest its identification. Once there is consensus on this identification (two out of three identifiers agree), the observation becomes **'research grade'**.

Identifications aren't instantaneous (and sometimes are not possible) but within a few days or weeks you will usually have an identification for your observation and maybe also some handy tips along the way!

Tip: switching **geotagging** on in your smartphone or camera's settings will make it much easier to find the location when you enter records to iNaturalist and save you time when submitting your record.

iNaturalist data is shared with the **Global Biodiversity Information Facility** and made available for download: you can see a list of publications that have cited this dataset on its website.

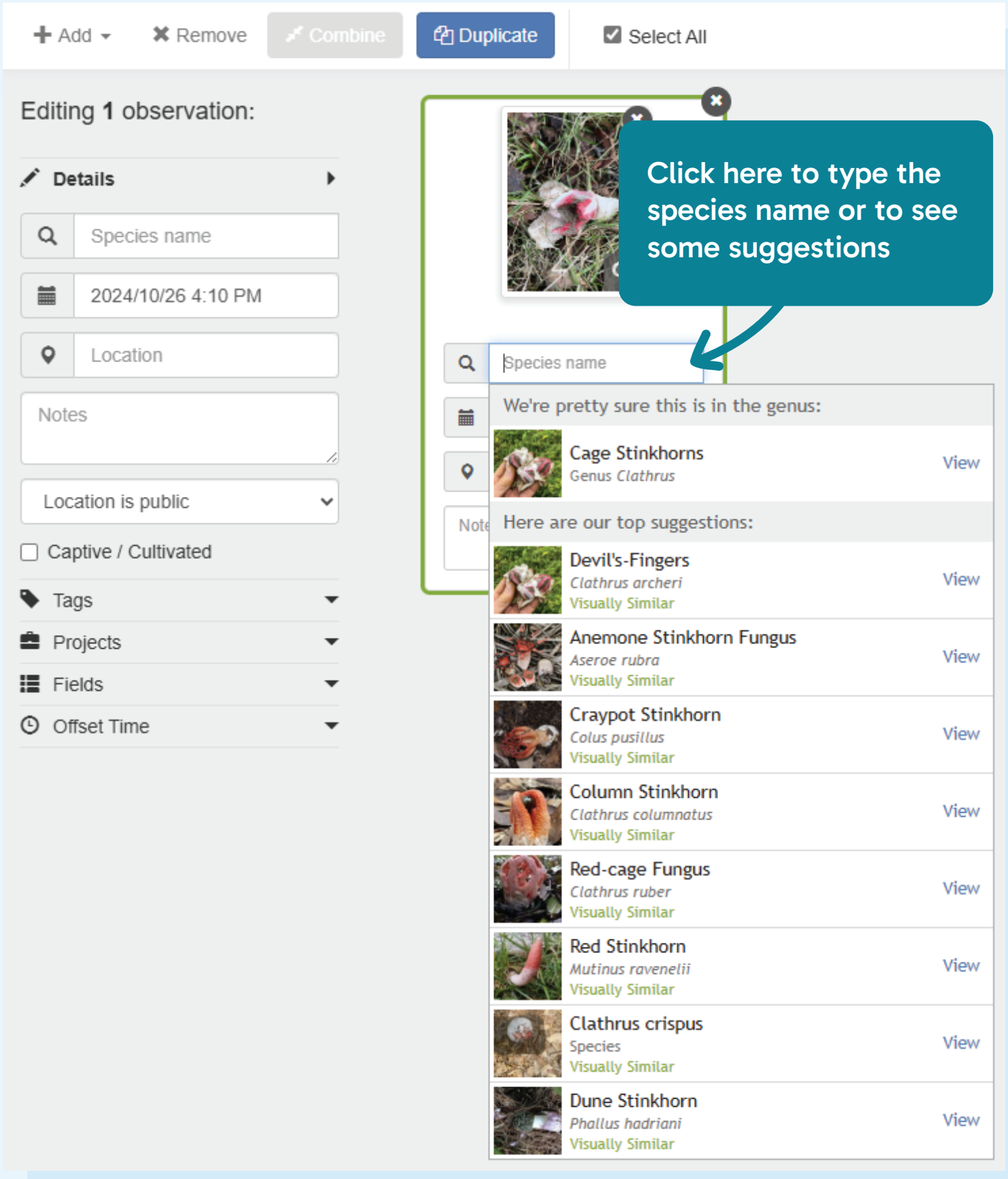
iNaturalist: Making your record

Log into your account and hit **upload**. When you upload a photograph, iNaturalist will suggest some possible identifications using '**computer vision**' (these will be more accurate if your photo is **georeferenced**, allowing the '**expected nearby**' feature to work).

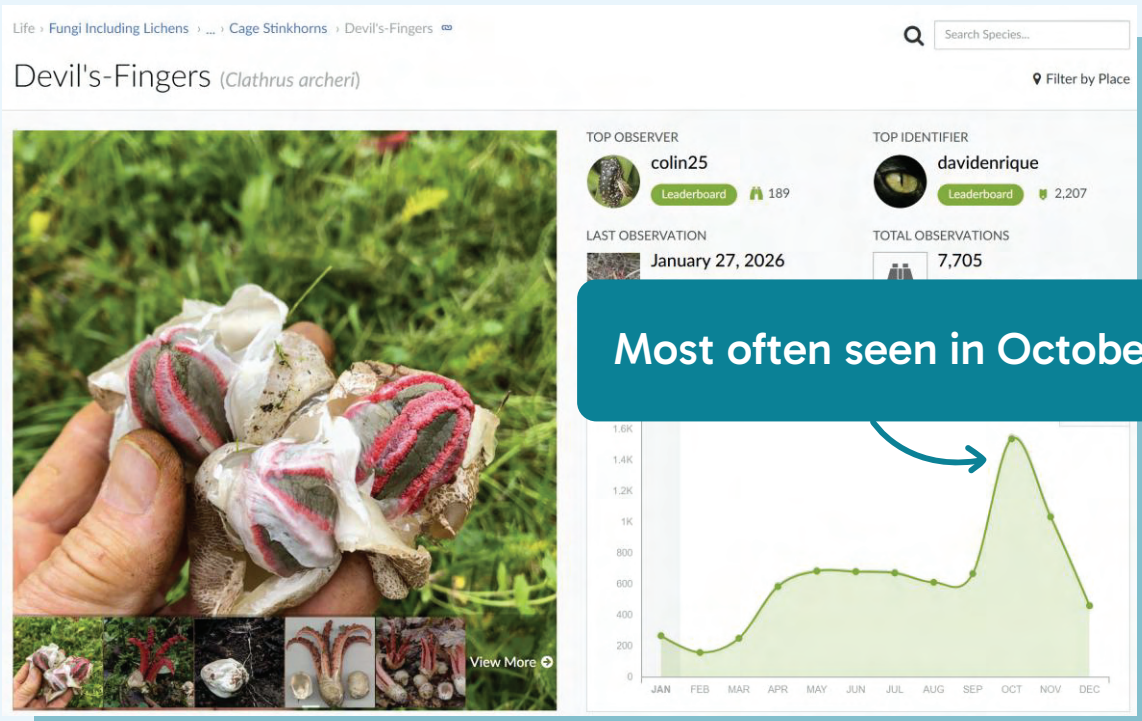
Tip: aim for photos that are as clear as possible and show the diagnostic features of the species. You may not know what these are (and that's ok!) so try and get a couple different views, you can crop photos before you upload them and add multiple photos to one observation.

What on Earth?!

New Forest, October 2024

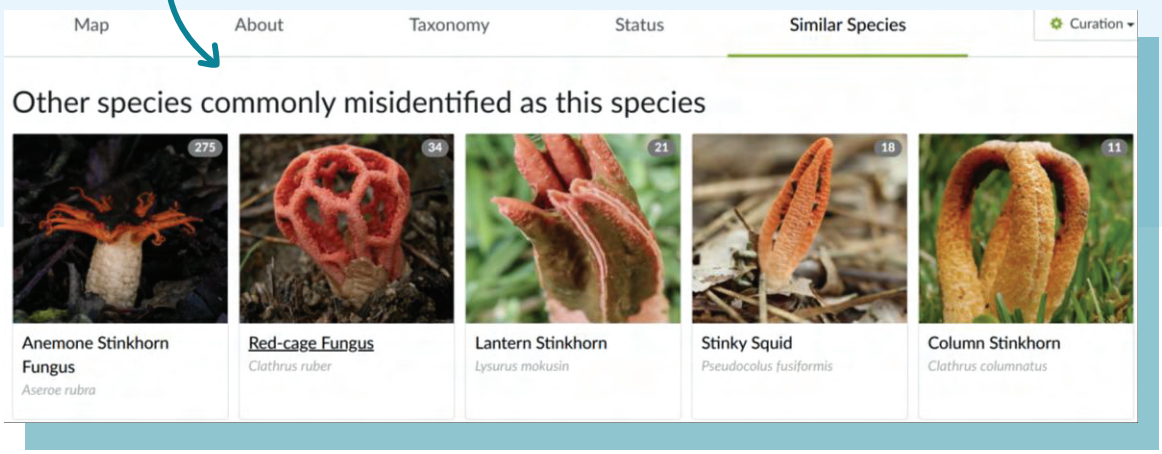


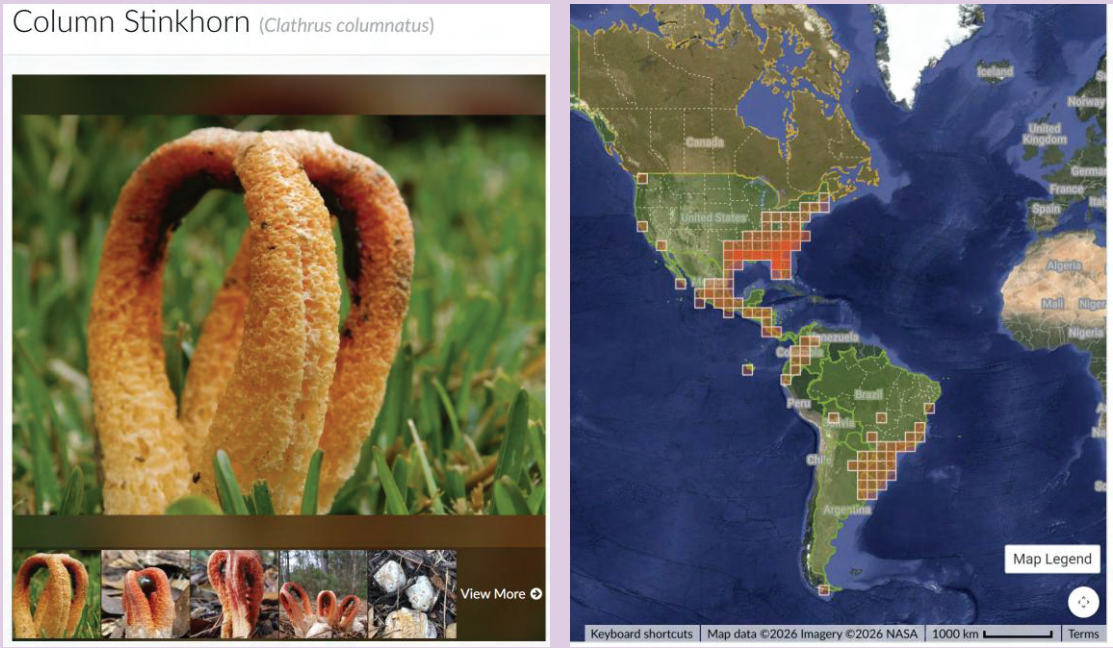
By reading the associated text for each species and the additional information, which includes **maps**, **seasonality** of **existing records** and **similar species** (a very useful section!), you can start to narrow down an identification of what it probably is...


Life › Fungi Including Lichens › ... › Cage Stinkhorns › Devil's-Fingers
Search Species...
Devil's-Fingers (Clathrus archeri)
Filter by Place
TOP OBSERVER
colin25
Leaderboard 189
TOP IDENTIFIER
davidenrique
Leaderboard 2,207
LAST OBSERVATION
January 27, 2026
TOTAL OBSERVATIONS
7,705
View More
Most often seen in October
1.6K
1.4K
1.2K
1K
800
600
400
200
0
JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC


Satellite
Dublin
Bray
Liverpool
Peak District National Park
Chester
Portlaoise
Carlow
Kilkenny
Clonmel
Wexford
Waterford
Eryri National Park (Snowdonia)
Stoke-on-Trent
Derby
Nottingham
Wolverhampton
Leicester
Birmingham
Peterborough
Norwich
Northampton
Cambridge
WALES
The Hague
Previously seen in the New Forest
Newport
Cardiff
Bristol
Weston-super-Mare
Exeter
Poole
Bournemouth
Bruges
Dunkirk
Ghent
Calais
Lille
Mons
Newquay
Plymouth
Falmouth
English Channel
Amiens
Cherbourg-en-Cotentin
Guernsey
Map Legend
Recent Observations
Keyboard shortcuts
Map data ©2026 GeoBasis-DE/BKG (©2009), Google, Inst. Geogr. Nacional Imagery ©2026 NASA
50 km
Terms

...it can also tell you what it isn't





You can add an identification at whatever level you prefer (it's ok if youare not sure of the exact species) e.g **Cage Stinkhorns**, **genus Clathrus**, as well as adding additional information including **life stage**, **sex**, **evidence of presence** (e.g. **scat**, **egg** or **the beast itself**) and whether the species was **dead or alive.**

Other members of the iNaturalist community will then offer their opinions on the identification of your observation, helping it to reach '**research grade**'.

iNaturalist: important to know

iNaturalist observations are only eligible for '**research grade**' when they have a date, location and photos.

Whilst not instantaneous, records will transfer from iNaturalist to iRecord (where others can then make use of them) so there is no need to enter the same record into both systems.

Data import from iNaturalist to iRecord will happen **automatically** for records provided they have reached '**research grade**', have a name that can be matched to the **UK Species Inventory** (this brings together the standard names for species in one place: over 70,000 species!), and the observation licence allows sharing.

When you join iNaturalist you can choose an open licence for your records (**CC0 no copyright**, **CC-BY attribution** or **CC-BY-NC attribution, non-commercial**) and photographs to ensure your observations can be shared to iRecord and the NBN Atlas. If you already have an iNaturalist account you can check your current settings by clicking '**account settings**' and then '**content and display**'. Remember to also check your '**display name**' in your profile, if you are able to use your real name this can then be used as the recorder name in iRecord.

It is worth noting that it is not possible for messages to be sent from iRecord to iNaturalist observers.

iNaturalist is a great way to get help with your identifications, remember to also consider whether you can help others with theirs...

How can iNaturalist help community groups?

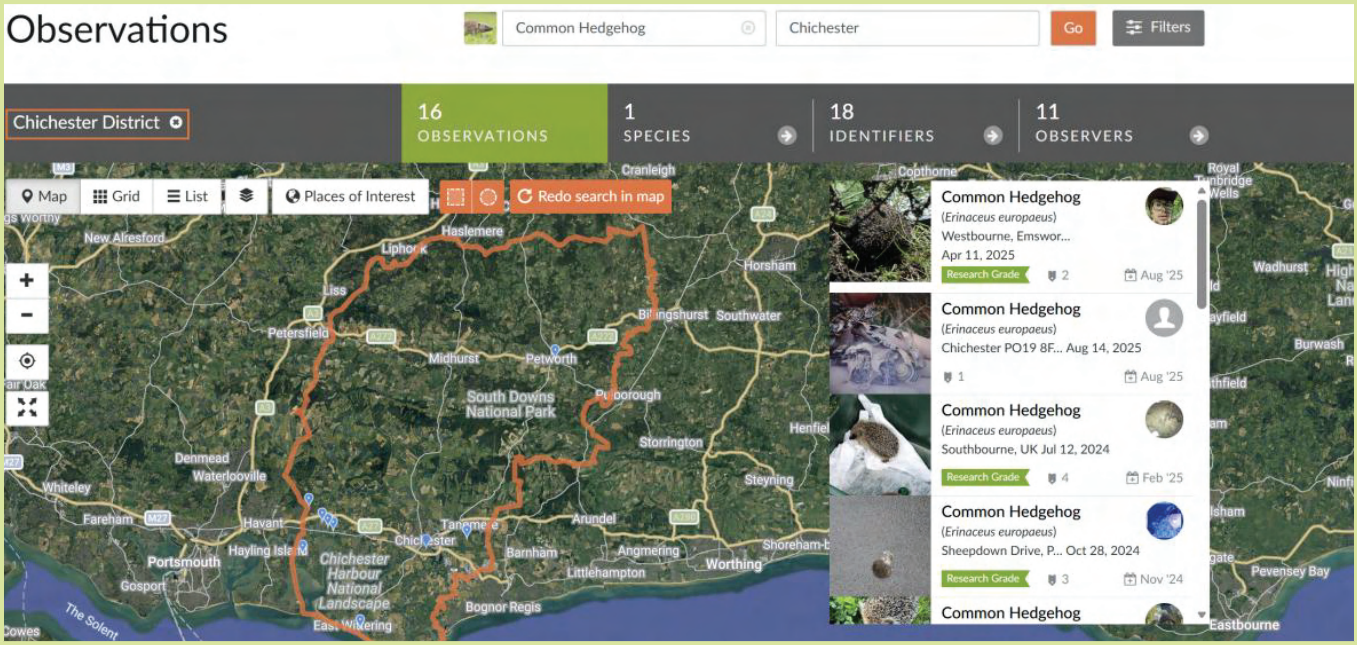
iNaturalist is great for people that are relatively new to biological recording, as well as encouraging recording within local communities or at activities such as bioblitzes.

There are lots of useful features that make it easy to get started with recording observations:

- You can upload old photographs as well as adding 'live' photographs via the app.
- It is also possible to import data from Flickr or a spreadsheet (this needs to be set up correctly and saved as a CSV).
- iNaturalist also allows you to create pinned locations for sites you regularly visit.

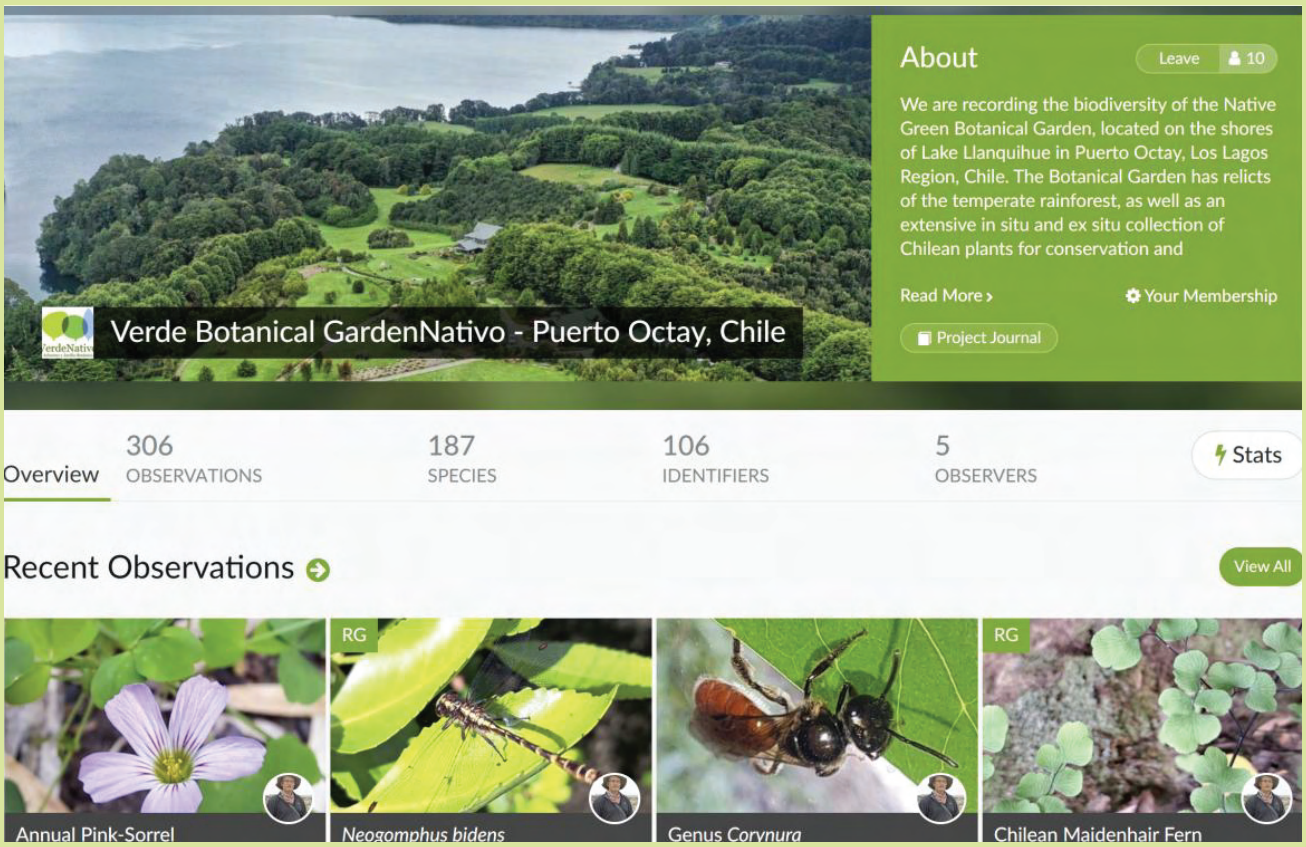
Groups can create a '**project**' to collate observations within an area or made by a collective. There are three types of project in iNaturalist: **collection**, **umbrella** and **traditional**, with collection projects likely to be the most useful for community groups.

Tip: projects take time to set up and administer, if this is something your group does not currently have, iNaturalist has tools including the '**explore**' page where you can search observations for **specific species** and **locations**, apply various **data filters**, and **download data**.



To create a '**collection project**' you need to decide upon a number of requirements around the **species or species groups** you want to include, as well as the **locations**, **participants**, and **date range**. Once these requirements are set, any observations entered into iNaturalist that meet them will appear within the project.

If you decide to set up a collection project, you can add a logo, as well as information about your group and project. There is also an option to make journal posts to communicate with project members, offering an opportunity to update people on significant finds and your progress to date. It is a good idea to have more than one person helping to manage the project page and to acknowledge existing participants and engage new contributors.



On the project page you can view all the observations within your project area that meet the project requirements on a map, on a grid or as a list.

The project map can be a useful visual representation of the work of your group, helping you to promote your work to your local community and to advocate your work to potential funders.

Tip: if the boundary of your project area is not already saved within the iNaturalist database you will need to set it up as a '**place**'.

Places can be set up using **Google Earth** or **GIS** programs and you can set up a new place on iNaturalist once you have made more than **50 verifiable observations**).

iRecord: Basics

The aim of iRecord is to bring together wildlife sightings and make them available to support research and decision-making. It was designed to import data from multiple sources, as well as receiving observations directly.

Records are stored in a database hosted by the **Biological Records Centre** and Local Environment Record Centres such as **Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre**, are given immediate access to this information.

There is a network of volunteer verifiers to check incoming observations, before verified records are passed to the **National Biodiversity Network** where they are available to other users for conservation work.

Once a record is inputted it is labelled as '**not reviewed**'. It is then either **accepted** (as '**correct**' or '**considered correct**'), **not accepted** (as '**incorrect**' or '**unable to verify**') or marked as **unconfirmed**, indicating it is plausible but there is not sufficient evidence to accept the record.

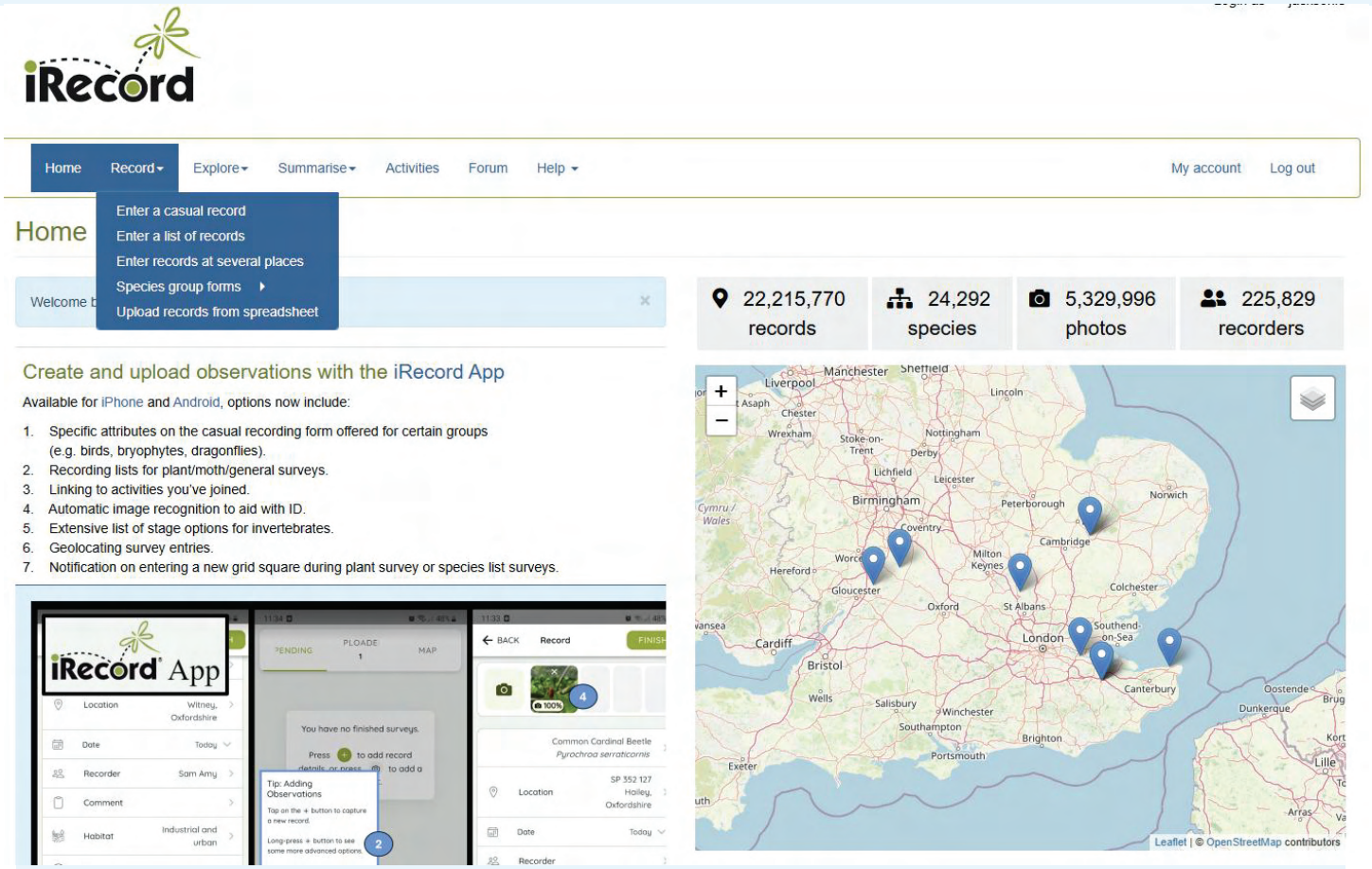
You can make sure your record is as easy to verify as possible by including an **accurate location** (think **TQ640319 Wadhurst Vicarage Green** rather than Sussex). Including **life stage** can also help with verification e.g. your Brown Hairstreak record for December could be rejected unless you specify it was an egg!

Verification is **not instantaneous** (and sometimes not possible). You will automatically receive a notification to your account once your record has been verified.

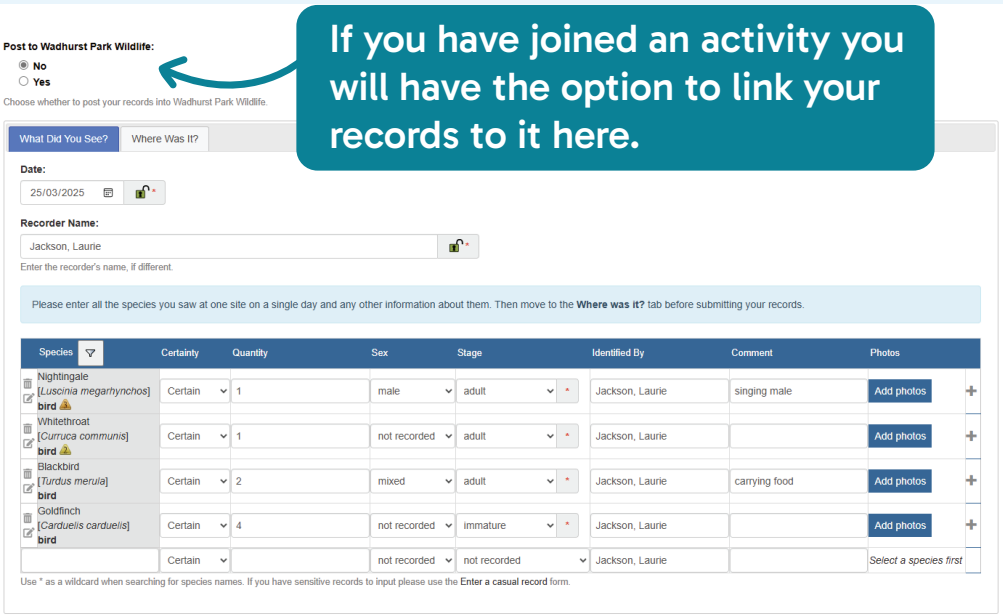
Tip: you can **switch off notifications** in the '**my notifications**' section of the explore menu, it is recommended that you don't switch off notifications relating to comments as you may receive requests for additional information from verifiers.

iRecord: Making your record

Log into your account and navigate to record: iRecord gives you the option to record a single record or a list of records for the same site, as well as records at several places on the same date. It is also possible to import data from a spreadsheet (this needs to be set up correctly and saved as a CSV file).



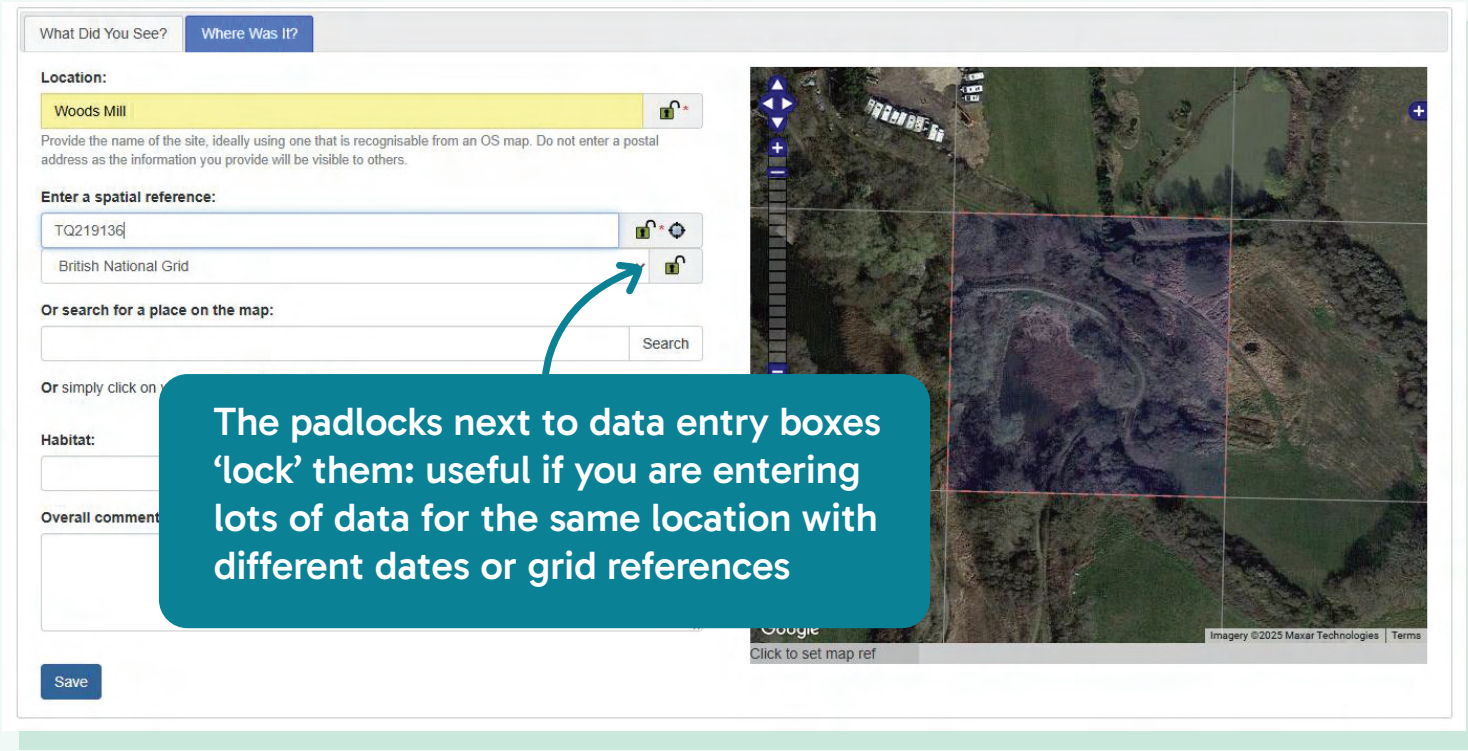
If you do most of your recording at one site, you are most likely to use the **list of records** function. On the first screen you **input the date** of your records along with all of the **individual species** you are recording: there is space here for additional information including **sex, stage** and **quantity**, as well as the option to **add photos**.



If you have joined an activity you will have the option to link your records to it here.

The next screen allows you to enter information about the site of the records.

You can use the map to **navigate** to the location or type in the grid reference: **Grab a Grid Reference** is a great tool to help you quickly find this.



Tip: you can curate a list of your regular recording sites, which you can use to type into the location box.

You may wish to record some general information about your records, for example if you were carrying out a targeted bird survey or using a grid reference that is the centre point of a field within which all the records were located.

iRecord: Important to know

iRecord has an inbuilt automated '**record cleaner**' to flag any records that appear to be outside their usual range or season. Species that are more challenging to identify e.g. **certain invertebrates** or **fungi** that might need a closer look with a lens or microscope, are also flagged by these checks. A notification from this system does not mean your record has been rejected and it will still be reviewed by a verifier.

Records are reviewed by verifiers who are experts in that specific group. This is done on a voluntary basis and delays in records being verified reflects the availability of their time.

Once a record has been imported from **iNaturalist** it will be verified and passed to the **National Biodiversity Network**.

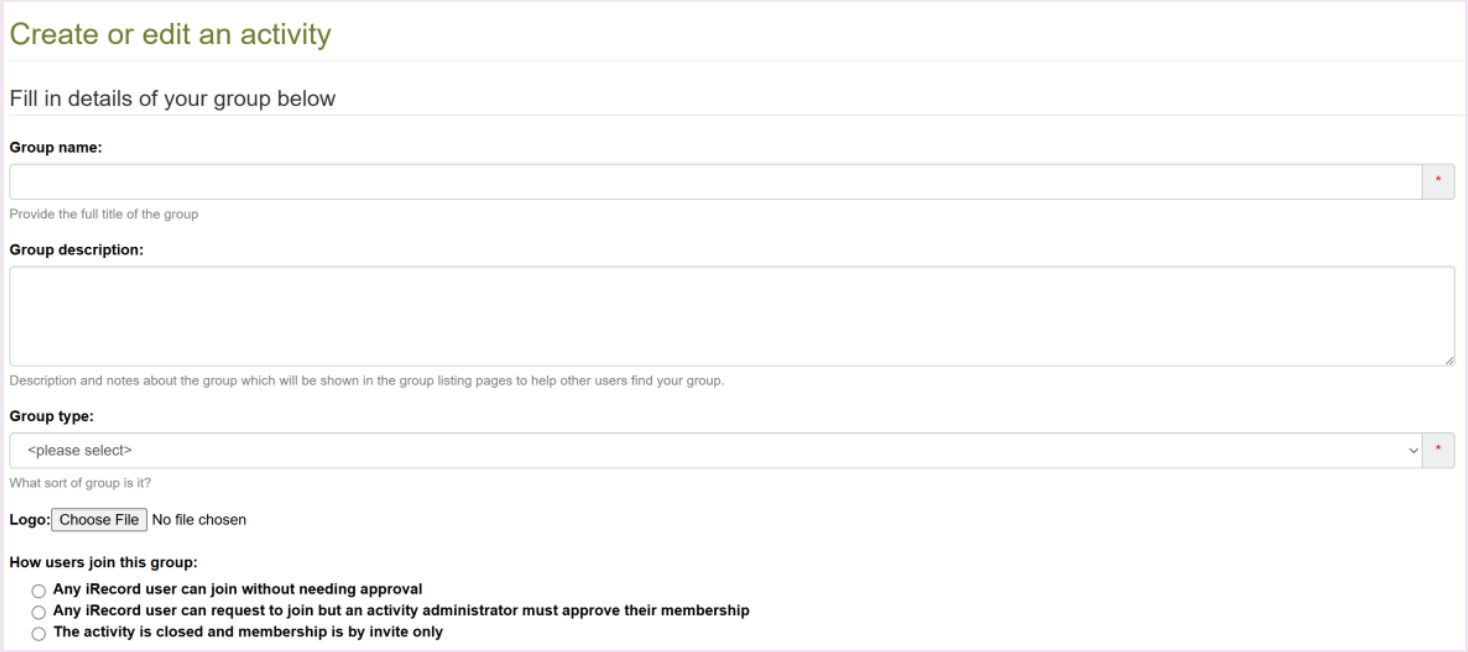
iRecord may **exclude** records from **iNaturalist** if it can't find a match in the UK Species Inventory. This might be relevant if you are recording introduced or planted species.

How can iRecord help community groups?

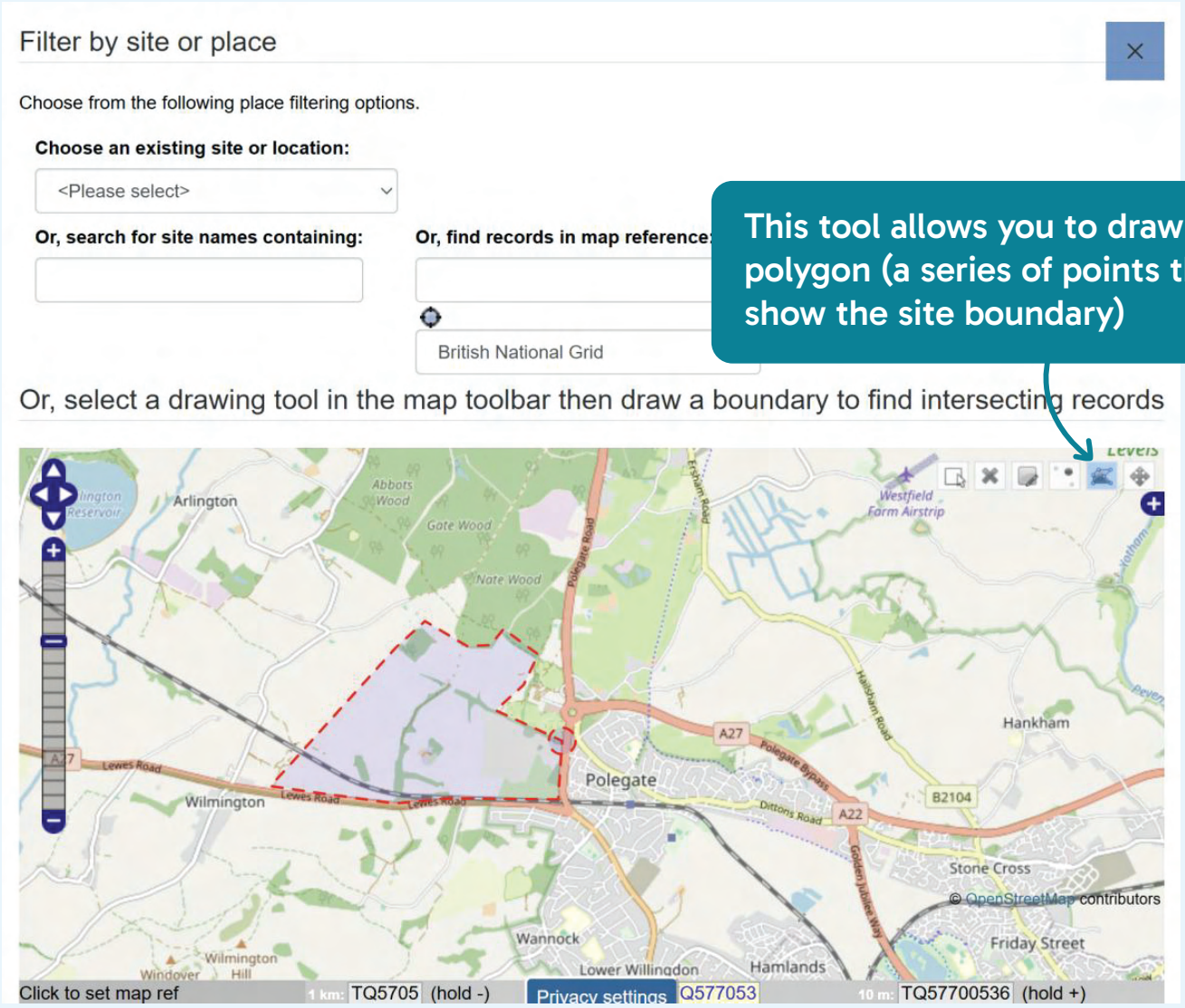
iRecord has lots of useful features to help you organise and explore your data. Groups can create an '**activity**' to collect records within an area or project. Records entered through an activity will undergo the same verification process as other records on **iRecord**.

To create an '**activity**' you need to decide on a number of aspects of what your group will do, with the option to restrict activities to certain **dates**, **species** and **locations**.

There is space to add a logo and information about your group and project to the activity page, and you can also choose how iRecord users join: do you want your activity to be **open to all** or with membership requests that **need approval**?



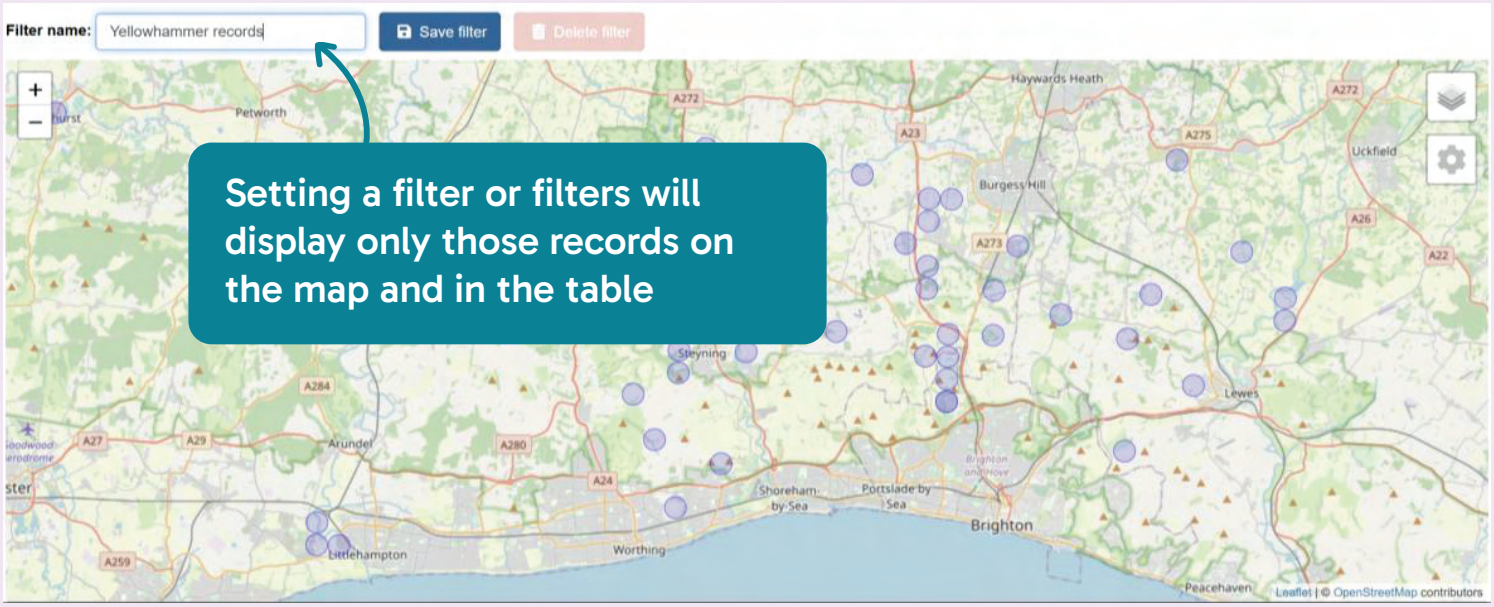
Unless you are creating the activity for a specific event e.g. a BioBlitz you probably will not want to **limit the time period** in which people can join the activity, likewise you will probably want to include all **species** in the activity, to enable as many people to be involved as possible.



Tip: you can draw the boundary of your project area on a map as you set up the activity, or use an existing site you have saved in 'my sites'.

The person who sets up the activity will automatically be an administrator: it is a good idea to have more than one person helping to manage the activity and more administrators can be added easily.

iRecord allows you to explore your (and others') records using filters including **species**, **location**, **date** and **recorder**. These filters can be combined, allowing you to do some useful analysis.



Records can also be sorted to help identify patterns in data, or where there might be gaps in recording effort: maybe this is an opportunity to invite an expert to your site to give you some pointers on a specific group and kickstart your recording of those species.

Records | Species | Families | **Groups** | Downloads

Group	No. of records	No. of species	First record	Last record
bird	9382	165	17/05/2011	19/10/2025
flowering plant	6855	471	21/01/2014	19/10/2025
insect - butterfly	2447	39	28/01/2014	06/10/2025
insect - moth	1403	366	07/05/2012	06/10/2025
insect - true fly (Diptera)	813	121	13/08/2015	05/08/2025
terrestrial mammal	682	35	09/10/2013	23/07/2025
insect - hymenopteran	654	79	11/06/2014	18/07/2025
insect - dragonfly (Odonata)	376	26	14/04/2014	07/08/2025
insect - beetle (Coleoptera)	280	52	26/06/2014	09/07/2025
insect - true bug (Hemiptera)	244	58	07/08/2015	23/07/2025
insect - orthopteran	184	17	26/06/2014	27/06/2025
amphibian	83	6	17/03/2014	20/06/2025
reptile	72	5	15/04/2014	28/07/2025
fern	51	8	20/05/2020	19/08/2024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Which one to choose?

Both **iNaturalist** and **iRecord** are powerful and useful tools. Their aims are clearly aligned however the focus of **iNaturalist** is the curation of a community of naturalists, rather than being a data repository.

If you are confident with your identification use **iRecord**, if you need a bit of help, try **iNaturalist**: as long as all your settings are in order, your record should make its way over to **iRecord**.

Whichever you use, once you have entered a record, remember to engage. On **iNaturalist** this can be a great opportunity to learn, whilst on **iRecord** verifiers may ask you follow up questions to ensure the record can be verified and made available to others for biodiversity research and conservation (this is where evidence such as **photographs**, **sound recordings** or even **specimens** can be useful).

Other identification tools

There are a range of other apps available that use **artificial intelligence** to help with **species identification**.

These tools can help you to learn more about wildlife, however they are not infallible and like all of us, **they can make mistakes**! It is always best to check the suggestions against your own knowledge and by seeking further information from others or published material.

You can improve your chances with artificial intelligence apps by using **good quality images** (**or sound recordings**).

Wildlife recording apps you might want to include:

- For general recording: Seek (by iNaturalist), ObsIdentify
- For Birds: Merlin, BirdNET, ChirpoMatic
- For Fungi: Mushroom Identificator, ShroomID
- For Insects: Picture Insect
- For Plants: Flora Incognita, PI@ntNET, PictureThis

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