



Citizen science with iNaturalist

Every photo of a plant or a bird can become real data for scientists. This guide shows how to make an observation that counts — with examples from the Siret floodplain in Vrancea, Romania, and a 90-minute lesson you can run anywhere.

For: pupils aged 13+, teachers

Under 13: the Seek app

Duration: one 90-minute outing

You need: a phone with a camera

iNaturalist or Seek?

iNaturalist — from age 13

Your own account; observations go into the public database used by researchers and protected-area managers. Under 13, an account needs a parent's approval.

Seek — for younger children

No account, no personal data. The camera identifies the species on the spot and the child collects badges. Ideal for primary classes and family outings.

A good observation has four things

- 1 **What:** a clear photo, several angles if possible — leaf, flower and stem for plants; a sound recording for birds or frogs.
- 2 **Where:** the phone's GPS location. For rare species, iNaturalist automatically hides the exact spot.
- 3 **When:** date and time — filled in automatically from the photo.
- 4 **Wild:** only organisms living on their own in nature — not potted plants or pets.

What "Research Grade" means

An observation becomes "Research Grade" when it has a photo or sound, a place and a date, and at least two people agree on the species (more than two thirds of identifications). Only then does it flow into international scientific databases. Help others too: identify your classmates' observations.

Example: what to look for in the Siret floodplain

The Siret floodplain (Natura 2000 site ROSPA0071) and the Curvature Subcarpathian hills are home to species you can find easily. Make a similar table for your own area.

Group	Common species	When and where
Birds	white stork, grey heron, little egret, common kingfisher, common kestrel, great spotted woodpecker	Spring–autumn, along the Siret, at ponds, on poles in the fields
Amphibians and reptiles	fire-bellied toad, common toad, European pond turtle	April–June, in floodplain ponds; fire-bellied toads call in the evening
Mammals	Eurasian otter (tracks on the bank), roe deer, hedgehog	All year; look for tracks in sand and mud
Trees and shrubs	white willow, black poplar, sea buckthorn, downy oak	All year; sea buckthorn is easy to spot in autumn by its orange berries
Insects	swallowtail butterfly, praying mantis, dragonflies	June–September, in meadows and near water
Invasive species	common ragweed, box elder, black locust	Records of these are just as valuable: they show how they spread

■ Rules in the field

- ☐ Don't pick plants or catch animals — photograph them where they are.
- ☐ Don't approach nests; use the zoom.
- ☐ Don't photograph people and don't post photos that show your home.
- ☐ For observations near home, set the location to "obscured" (geoprivacy).
- ☐ Go in a group, with an adult, and tell someone where you're going. Floodplains have marshy patches.

■ For teachers: a 90-minute lesson

1. **10 min** — what citizen science is; demo with an existing observation.
2. **50 min** — outing to the school grounds or a park: each team of 3 makes at least 5 observations.
3. **20 min** — back in class, teams identify the other teams' observations.
4. **10 min** — discussion: which species surprised everyone? Which invasives did we find?

A class project

Create an iNaturalist project named after your school so all observations collect in one place.

International partners: we are happy to link class projects across countries for a shared bioblitz.

The species are common examples for our area, not a complete list. iNaturalist rules checked on 12 October 2026 (help.inaturalist.org).



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