



Conservation Stewardship Program
Community Science

POLLINATOR HABITAT DOCUMENTATION PROTOCOL 2026



THE CITY OF
COLUMBUS
ANDREW J. GINTHER, MAYOR

RECREATION AND PARKS
DEPARTMENT

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Pollinator Habitat Documentation	
Purpose:	To record plant and pollinator species at pollinator habitats across various parks. Data collected from surveys helps assess the quality of pollinator habitats which informs current and future maintenance and expansions.
Requirements:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All volunteers must sign a yearly liability waiver (through VolunteerHub). • Attend an in-person OR virtual training session held by Columbus Recreation and Parks staff.
Training Materials:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pollinator Habitat Documentation Protocol (this document) • Pollinator Habitat Documentation Training Slides
Duties:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record pollinator and plant species in iNaturalist and Survey123 by walking at least one fixed route in a Columbus Recreation and Parks pollinator habitat.
Qualifications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If under 18 years old, must be with an adult when onsite. • Ability to be comfortable working outdoors. • Ability to follow direction of Columbus Recreation and Parks staff. • Demonstrate tact and diplomacy when working with the public.
Equipment:	Mobile device able to take photos and run the iNaturalist App. Optional Materials – watch, pencil and paper (for notes), pollinator and plant guides/ list/ ID Key.
Season:	May through September.

How to Document Pollinator Habitats

Adapted from National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Survey Protocol

Tool to Document Observations: The iNaturalist app is a free tool for users to record and share observations of plants, animals and more. The app assists in identifying species.

Where to Document: At any of the City's Pollinator habitats. Click [here](#) or the link below for an interactive map of pollinator habitats throughout the City.

<https://columbusrecreparks.com/nature/pollinatorhabitats/>

When to Document:

- Multiple times during the growing season (May – September)
- Bee foraging season is spring through fall

Ideal Documenting Conditions:

- 8am-3pm
- 70°F or warmer
- Clear sky, partly cloudy or slightly overcast
- Calm conditions to light breeze

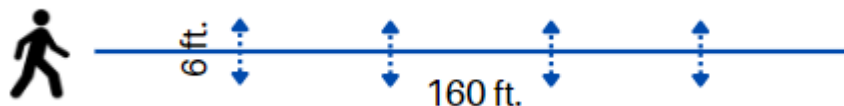
Before you document a pollinator habitat

- Read Columbus Recreation and Park's Volunteer Manual
- Complete a pollinator habitat documentation training session (virtually or in-person)
- Create an iNaturalist account

While you are on site

Documentation Method

- **Fixed Route:** Walk an estimate of a 160x6 ft. line or the length of the pollinator habitat (whichever is shorter) in 15 minutes; use the iNaturalist app to document **one of each** pollinator and plant species in this area. Keep in mind the abundance of each species as that question will be asked later.



How to pick a fixed route?

- To ensure your safety, explore the area and take a walk around the habitat before you document species. Identify any hazards or risks and observe dominant plant species in the area.
- If you are comfortable, when walking your fixed route, we encourage you to walk within the habitat rather than the boundary. This will help you observe more species.
- For small pollinator habitats (<0.5 acres) –
 - Complete one fixed route.
- For large pollinator habitats (>0.5 acres) –
 - If the habitat is heterogeneous (has distinguishable/ varying plant communities) – complete a fixed route walk for each representative plant community.
 - If the habitat is homologous (has similar plant community throughout the habitat) – complete one fixed route.
- **Once you have picked a location**, make note of your starting point and estimate a 160-foot line (the width of a football field, the side of the end zone) or the length of the pollinator habitat-- whichever is shorter.

Document a 6-foot width (your arm span) along the line and walk at an even pace for 15 minutes from beginning to end while documenting plants and pollinators observed in iNaturalist. Remember that you only need to take one photo for each species. The abundance of that species will be addressed in the Pollinator Habitat Documentation Form.

ID using iNaturalist

- While walking in a straight line, document plant and pollinator species as you go.
- Walk slowly and avoid casting shadows that spook pollinators.
- ID pollinators and plants along that path. Include only one species per uploaded observation/ record. If you observe the same species multiple times, keep that in mind for the Pollinator Documentation Habitat Evaluation Form.
- If you have other findings that need notes- make sure to take paper and pencil with you.

What Counts as One Record:

- Some plants have a branching flowering structure called inflorescences, while others are single stemmed. You will count the branching flowers as one record. These photos of milkweed and black-eyed Susan would each count as one record.



iNaturalist Project

An iNaturalist Project called [Columbus Recreation and Parks Pollinator Habitats](#) was created to **automatically collect observations** made within Columbus Recreation and Parks Pollinator Habitat boundaries. It is **OPTIONAL** to join the project!

If you are interested in joining the iNaturalist Project, please see Appendix B on how to join.

After you complete your fixed route

- Complete the Pollinator Habitat Documentation Form linked [Here](#) or use the QR code below

<https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/5fe3833509164345b5a4ec65fd877aa0>

**Pollinator Habitat Documentation Form Questions**

1. Date of observation
2. Volunteer name
3. iNaturalist username
4. Pollinator habitat name
5. Fixed route description (locate area on map)
6. Number of different plant species observed (both native and invasive)
7. What are the 5 most abundant plant species observed and their relative percent coverage
8. Number of different pollinator species observed
9. Are invasive plant species present
10. Additional maintenance needs observed
11. Optional to upload observation pictures

Appendix A: How to Use iNaturalist

Please do not touch or remove plant species that you are unsure of.

Below is a How-To from iNaturalist on utilizing their iNaturalist CLASSIC application.

What Are Observations?

An observation records an encounter with an individual organism at a particular time and location. This includes encounters with signs of organisms like tracks, nests, or things that just died. When you make an observation, you'll record:

Who you are

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

Where you saw it

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

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**

When you saw it

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

Evidence of what you saw

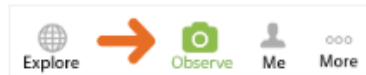
By including evidence like a **photo or sound**, the community can help add, improve, or confirm the identification of the organism you encountered. Help the community by taking clear well framed photos, by including multiple photos from different angles



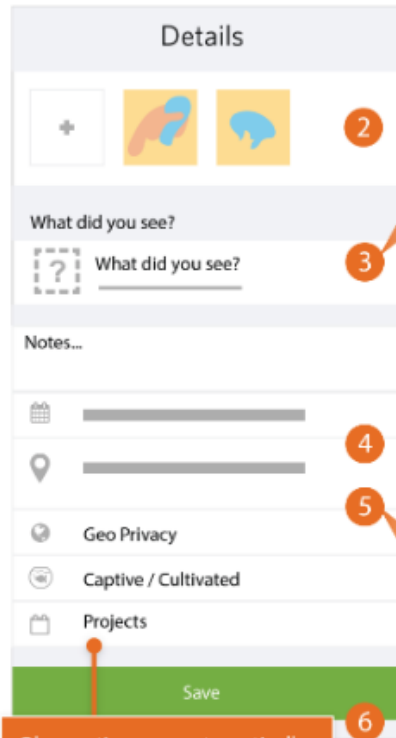
Your observations don't need to include all of these parts, but they do in order to become research quality observations for science. Remember, you should make separate observations for each separate organism you encounter.

How to Make an Observation with your iPhone

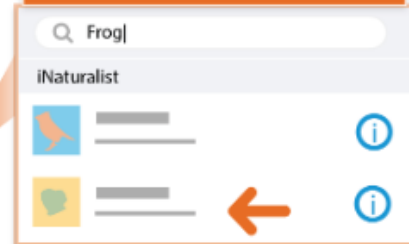
- 1 Tap **observe**.



- 2 Add one or more photos as **evidence**.



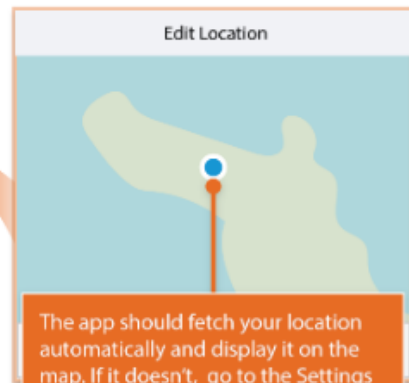
Choose one of the computer vision suggestions, search for something else, or type in a 'Placeholder' if offline



- 3 Choose **what** you saw.

- 4 **When** you saw it should be added automatically.

- 5 **Where** you saw it should be added automatically. If it doesn't, check Privacy in the Settings app.



The app should fetch your location automatically and display it on the map. If it doesn't, go to the Settings app and tap Privacy to enable Location Services for iNaturalist

- 6 **Save** your observation.

Observations are automatically counted by collection projects and can't be added manually

- 7 **Upload** to share with the community. This should happen automatically. If it doesn't, tap the Upload button. You can turn off automatic upload from the app settings from the Me tab.



- 8 Check back for **activity** on your observation from the community or be notified by email to the address in your account settings.



How to Make an Observation with your Android

- 1 Tap the **observe** button from the My Observations tab.



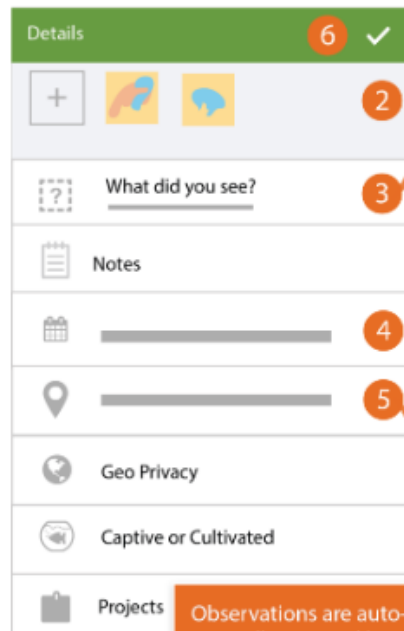
- 2 Add one or more photos as **evidence**.

- 3 Choose **what** you saw.

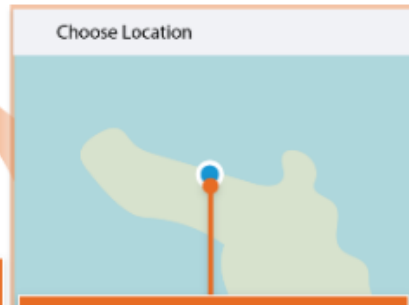
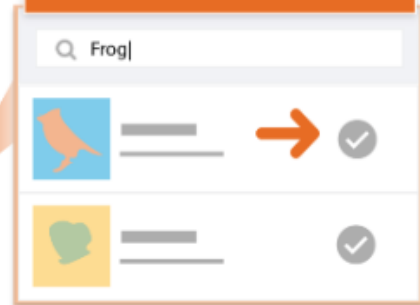
- 4 **When** you saw it should be added automatically.

- 5 **Where** you saw it should be added automatically. If this doesn't happen, check app permissions in the Settings app.

- 6 **Save** your observation.



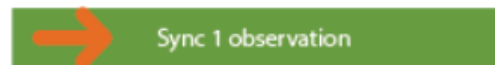
Choose one of the computer vision suggestions, search for something else, or type in 'Placeholder' if offline



The app should fetch and display your location automatically. If it doesn't, tap through to get your location manually.

Observations are automatically counted by collection projects and can't be added manually

- 7 **Sync** to share with the community. This should happen automatically. If it doesn't, tap the button. You can turn off auto upload from the Settings tab.

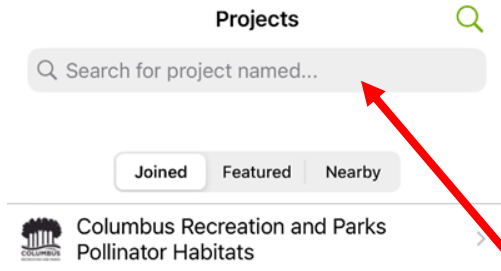


- 8 Check back for **activity** on your observation from the community or be notified by email to the address in your account settings.



Appendix B: How to Join Columbus Recreation and Parks Department's iNaturalist Project

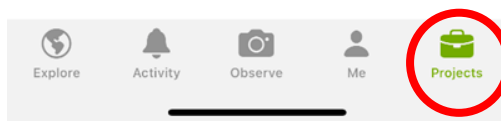
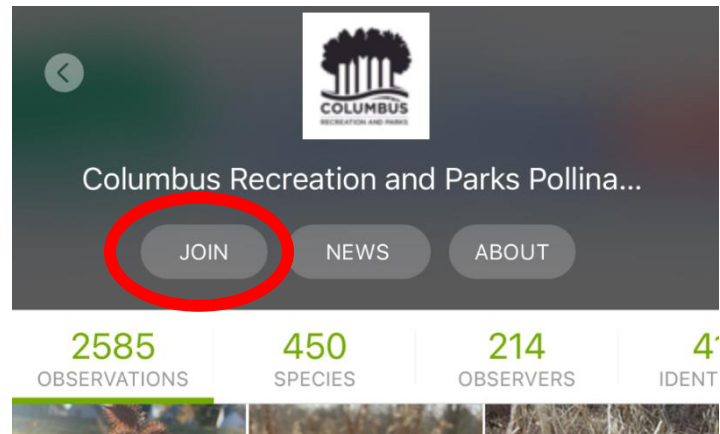
To join the project on a mobile device using the iNaturalist app:



1. On the navigation bar at the bottom of your screen, tap "Projects".

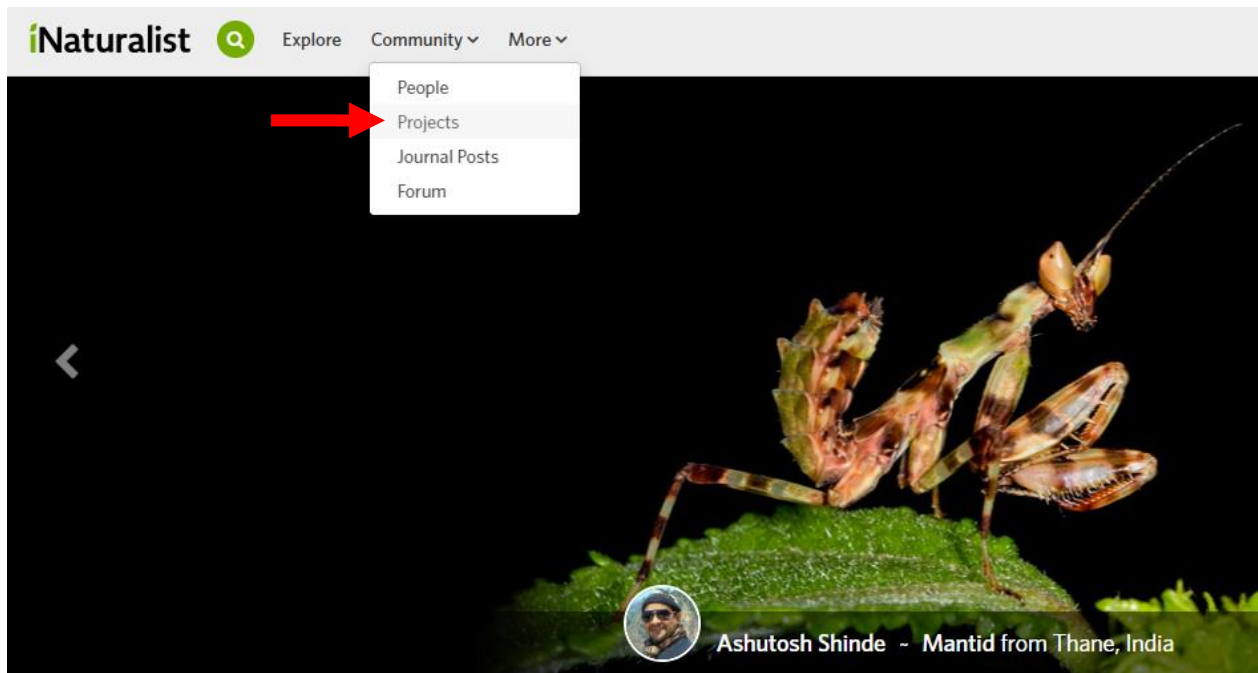
2. In the search bar, type "Columbus Recreation and Parks Pollinator Habitats"

3. Go to the project page, tap on "Join"

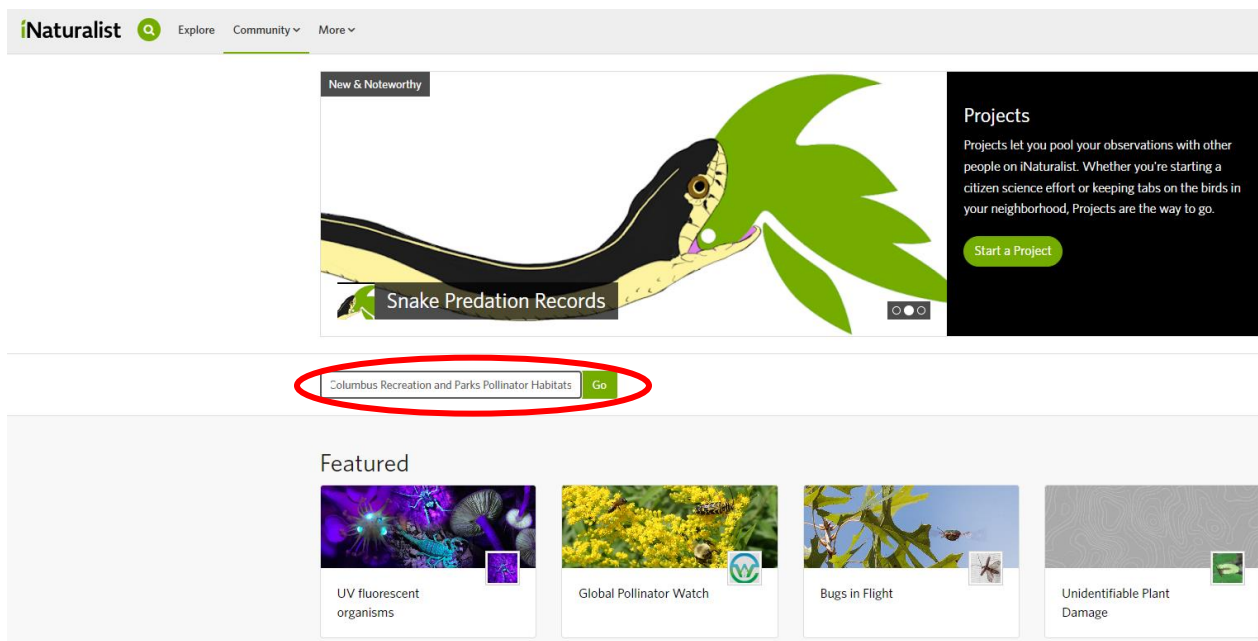


To join the project on a desktop:

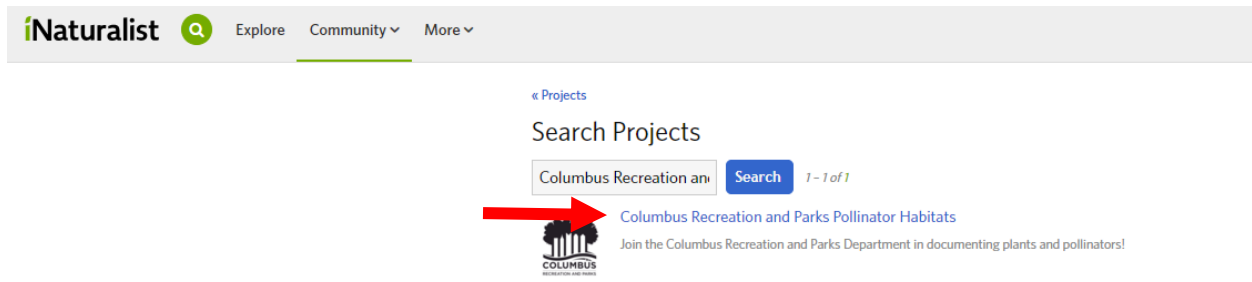
1. On the top navigation bar, hover over “Community” and click on “Projects”.



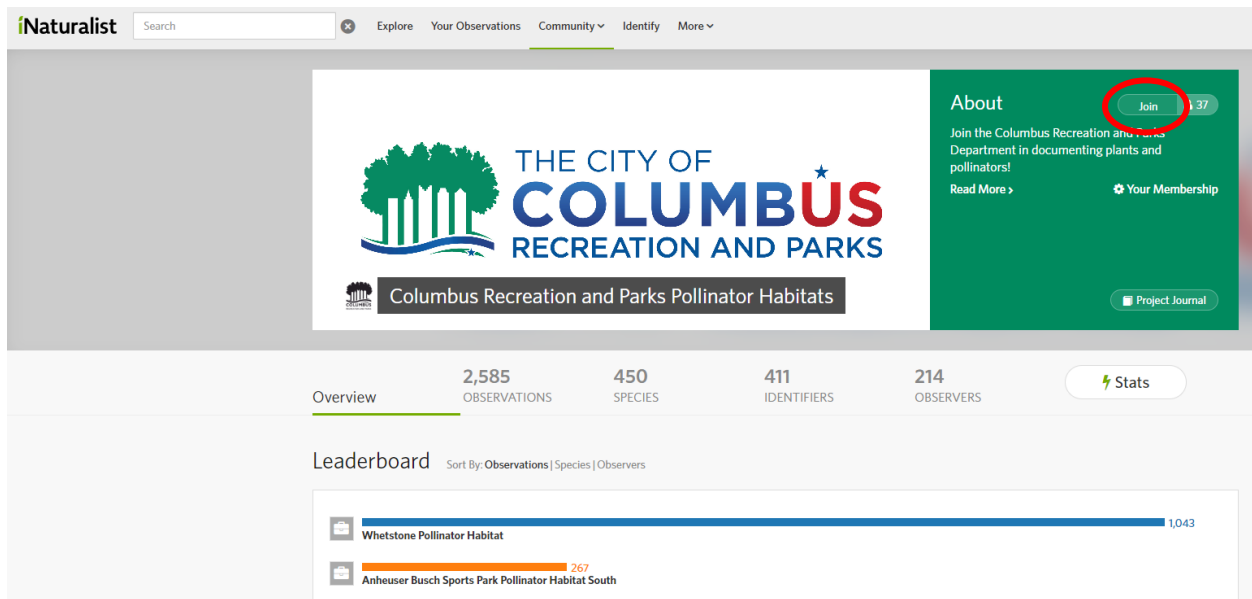
2. In the search bar, type “Columbus Recreation and Parks Pollinator Habitats” and Click “Go”



3. Click on “Columbus Recreation and Parks Pollinator Habitats”



4. Go to the project page, click on “Join” in the right-hand corner.



5. Scroll to the bottom of the “Join Columbus Recreation and Parks Pollinator Habitats?”page and click “Yes, I want to join”

- must be in project Woodward Nature Preserve Pollinator Habitat
- must be in project Worthington Hills Park Pollinator Habitat
- must be in project Three Creeks Park Pollinator Habitat
- must be in project Williams Creek Park Pollinator Habitat
- must be in project Whetstone Pollinator Habitat
- must be in project Stockbridge Park Pollinator Habitat CRPD
- must be in project Stoneridge Park Pollinator Habitat
- must have quality grades: research, needs ID

Other

Receive updates from this project

Receive updates about this project on your dashboard and in the daily updates email.

Trust this project with hidden coordinates?

Granting access to your hidden coordinates will allow the managers of this project to see the true, unobscured location of your observations in this project. This is extremely important in situations where scientists or resource managers need access to exact coordinates for analysis and decision-making.

No

Yes, for any of my observations

This includes observations where you have set the geoprivacy to “obscured” or “private,” e.g. observations from your backyard or spots you don’t want other people to know about.

Yes, but only for my observations of threatened taxa, not when I’ve set the geoprivacy

Many projects just need access to coordinates that are obscured because the observation depicts a threatened taxon.

Please Be Careful!

Coordinate access is important for scientists, but can also be abused by poachers. Make sure you trust all the project curators before trusting this project.

Once you have joined the project, it will show up under “Projects” on the top navigation bar whenever you are logged in.

Note: You only have to join the project once!