Arkansas Environmental Education Association

Observ-a-thon Observer Toolkit

Introduction

Thank you for becoming an observer for our inaugural Observ-a-thon! Your participation is key to the success of the event and we are thankful for your help to raise awareness about the importance of environmental education in Arkansas. For the week of October 2-8, your goal will be to submit as many observations as possible to the Observ-a-thon Project on iNaturalist.

Being an Observer is all about getting outside, documenting biodiversity and having fun while raising support for AEEA. There is also plenty of opportunity to make the most of your efforts, and this toolkit will help you be the best observer you can be. We encourage you to read through this resource, access the supporting graphics and use them to help us spread the word about the Observ-a-thon and your participation in it.

The Arkansas Environmental Education Association is a state-wide nonprofit that champions access to environmental education, builds community among professionals, provides support to educators, and drives excellence in the field of environmental and outdoor education in Arkansas. We believe this will lead to a thriving future for the Natural State.

First things first:

Before you start recruiting sponsors, making observations, or post about your progress, it is important to make sure that you are all set to begin:

Observer Checklist - Pre-Observ-a-thon:

Have you done the following?
- ☐ Completed the Observer Registration Form
- ☐ Signed up for iNaturalist*
- ☐ Joined the iNaturalist Project
- ☐ Shared the Sponsor registration form to your friends, family, etc.

Once that's done, you're ready to begin preparations for the big event!

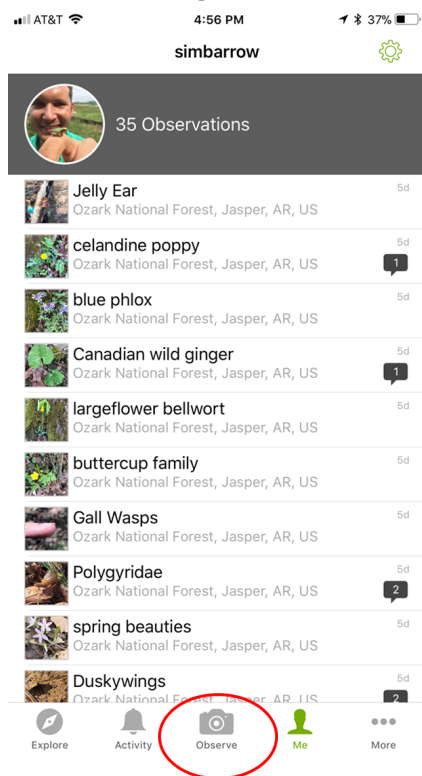*For those who use the Seek app, see below for more details.

How to use iNaturalist:

If you've never used iNaturalist, it is "*an online social network of people sharing biodiversity information to help each other learn about nature.*" In short, users take georeferenced photos of life (or evidence of life) and submit it to the iNaturalist database for other users to identify. iNaturalist is used by conservation scientists around the world to better understand biodiversity, ecosystems, and more. iNaturalist is a fantastic way to help curious explorers get outside and contribute to real science as citizens.
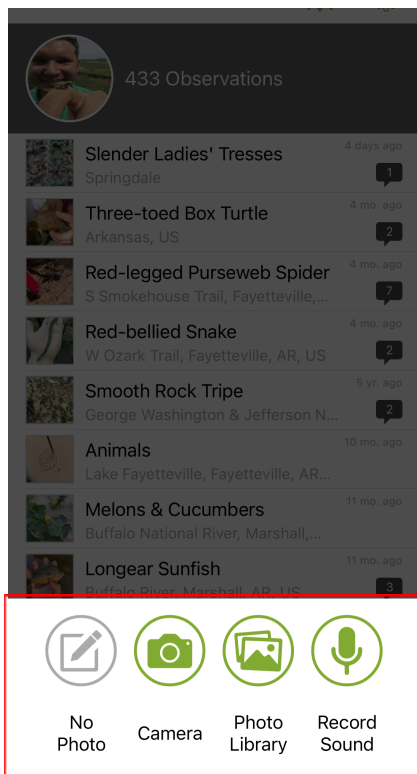
iNaturalist can be accessed from any computer, but for the Observ-a-thon it is recommended that you use the smartphone app because it streamlines that observation process significantly (of course, as an Observer you can use the platform however works best for you). Here's a quick step-by-step tutorial* on how to make an observation and submit it to iNaturalist:

*This tutorial uses the iOS app for iPhones. The Android app may look different in some ways, but functions similarly.
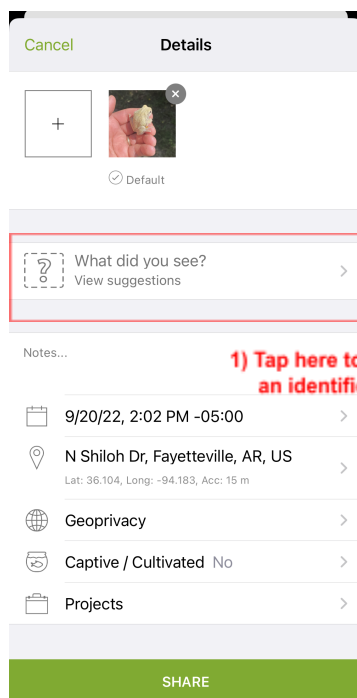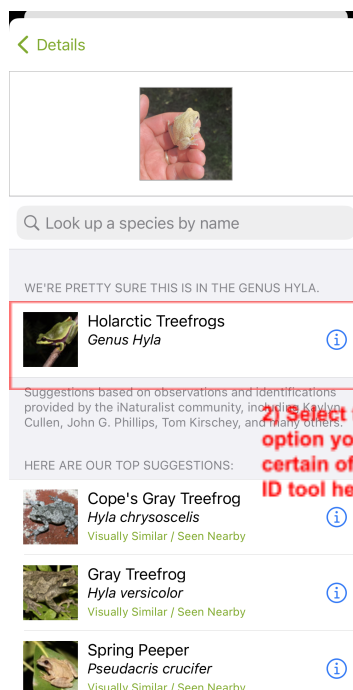
<u>Step 1: Making an observation</u>

Once you've signed up and logged in, this is what you will see. To make an observation, tap the "Observe" icon on the bottom of your screen.
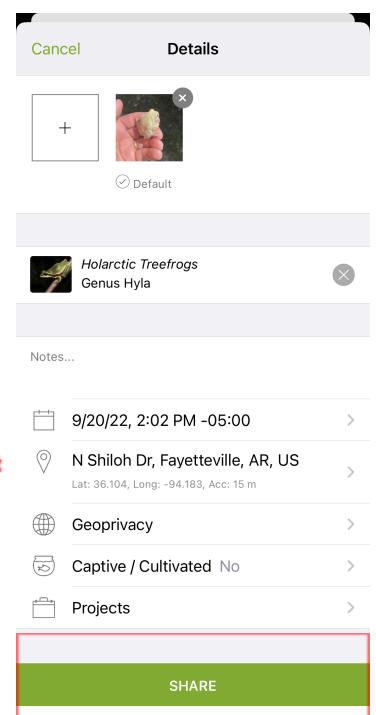
From there, you can select one of four options: no photo (not recommended), use the camera within the app, select a photo from your phone's image library, or record a sound. *Hint*: be sure to enable location services in your camera app if you plan to upload from the image library. Also, because the camera app is easy to access, it is the quickest way to get a photo if you are trying to observe an animal that might escape quickly.

1) Tap here to suggest an identification.

2) Select the identification option you are most certain of (or use the smart ID tool here)

3) Tap "share" to upload your observation

Once you have submitted your observation, tap the "Projects" line to make sure that the observation has been included in the Observ-a-thon project. And that's it! You can continue searching for life to document.
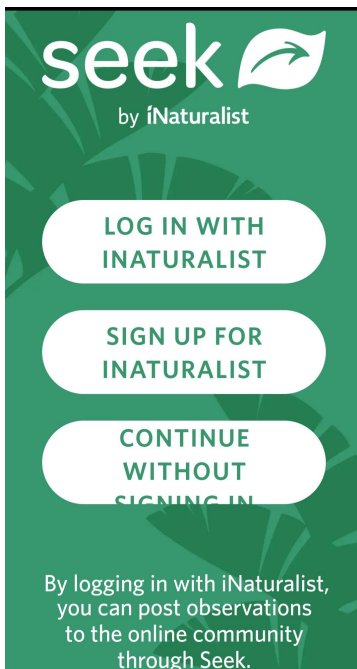
A few notes on observations:

Please keep in mind the following when using iNaturalist:
- **Take good pictures** - if photographing a plant, be sure to add multiple photos to include the flower, leaf, growth habit, etc. This will enable identifiers to suggest a more accurate identification.
- **One observation for each organism** - if you photograph an insect on a flower, be sure to specify which organism the observation is for. If you want to document both, add a second observation for the other one.
- **Don't guess on the identification** - only select the ID you are confident with. Other iNat users will refine your observation.
- **Be safe and respectful of private property** - Remember to tread lightly and avoid trespassing. Don't forget to leave no trace!

A few notes on using the Seek app:

Seek is an additional app made by iNaturalist that was designed to engage kids and beginners. With an interface half way between a game and citizen science, it is a fun and safe way to begin exploring local biodiversity. Seek users who would like to participate in the Observ-a-thon will need to link an iNaturalist account to their existing Seek account. This can be an existing iNaturalist account or you can create a new one. At the bottom of the Seek homepage, look for the buttons to log into iNaturalist.

A few notes: In order for your Seek observations to count towards the Observ-a-thon, you must join the project on iNaturalist. You can do so at any time before you start observing. Also,it is our understanding that posting to iNaturalist from Seek needs to occur at the time of observation. The Seek and iNaturalist apps might not sync if you are out of cell service range. If you will be making observations while in a remote location, one suggestion is to take photos with your camera, outside of the apps. Once you are back in cell or wifi range, you can upload the photos to Seek or iNaturalist from your phone's image library.

About the Project

Projects are a function in iNaturalist that allows users to collect and access observations that fit a certain set of criteria. For the Observ-a-thon, we are using a Bioblitz project, which includes observations that:
- Are submitted by users *that have joined the project*;
- Are located in AR;
- Are submitted within the dates of Oct. 2-8, 2022

It is very important that all participants join the project by clicking the "Join Project" link on the project page. Otherwise, your observations may not count.

Recruiting Sponsors and Spreading the Word

As with any pledge-based fundraising event, we need help recruiting sponsors for the event. As an observer, you can recruit from within your network of family, friends, coworkers, etc. to join the effort. To make this process easier, we have some helpful [resources and graphics](#) that you can use on social media. Additionally, see below for some verbiage that you can use to recruit sponsors:

"I'm excited to be participating in this year's Observ-a-thon, a pledge based fundraising event that supports the Arkansas Environmental Education Association. Throughout the week of Oct. 2-8, I'll be out documenting biodiversity in my area, and I need sponsors to make a pledge for the observations I submit. To become a sponsor, just complete [this form](#). Your donation will go towards supporting educators in Arkansas, making environmental and outdoor education more accessible to all. Any amount helps!"

As a sponsor, your friends and family will have the option to base their donation on the total number of observations you submit, or they can choose to donate based on the number of observations in the physiographic region or taxonomic group that they choose.

What To Do During the Event

Once the event starts on Sunday, October 2, you can start submitting observations. In addition, you can do the following to help spread the word:

- Post a cool observation onto social media (and invite people to join the event)
- Did you observe something super cool? Send it to arkansasee@gmail.com so that we can post it too
- Join the discussion on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)
- Keep seeking sponsors and observers to participate - the event isn't over until October 8!

For more information or with additional questions, contact arkansasee@gmail.com.