



Recording Wildlife

All sightings of wildlife are important and everyone is encouraged to submit records so the data can be used to help conserve species by gaining a better understanding of abundance, distribution and trends of species across the UK. In Sussex, records are held by the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre (SxBRC) and citizen scientists provide an essential input to their dataset.

To supply a record all you need is:

- What - the name of the species,
- Where - usually a grid reference,
- When - the date of the observation, and
- Who - the person who found the species.

All submitted records are then verified by an appropriate expert to ensure the integrity of the dataset.

Determining the species name is often the hardest part but there are lots of resources available such as identification guide books, numerous web sites and Apps. In this article we'll take a look at some of the Apps and web sites that you can use to help with identification and recording.

One of the most popular Apps is called Seek created by iNaturalist (<https://uk.inaturalist.org/>). Seek is free to use and will help with the identification of anything from fungi to birds.

There are two ways of using Seek. The first is to run the App, point the camera at the animal/plant and Seek will attempt to identify it. The other way is to take a photo with your phone, run Seek and then select the photo you've just taken. You may find, in practice, the second way more practical.

Once Seek has made an identification, you can then post the record to iNaturalist and the date/time and location will be automatically added. Other iNaturalist users can then confirm the identification or suggest alternatives.

Another App I've recently encountered is ObsIdentify, which works in exactly the same way as Seek but, in my experience, seems to do a better job at identification. ObsIdentify assigns an accuracy level to its identification. If it's certain, it will rate the identification 100%. If it's not 100% certain, ObsIdentify will often give several other possibilities with an accuracy percentage for each. Using both Apps together will obviously give a high level of confidence.

You can use these Apps for bird identification but getting a photo is often difficult. In this scenario a guide is essential and Collins have produced a Bird Guides App along the lines of their excellent book.

Although the App also contains songs and calls, you can't use it to check a recording made in the field. For this there are a number of other Apps available such as BirdNET and the one I've found most useful is the Merlin App by Cornell Lab. However, none of them are perfect and can't be totally relied upon to get it right. Seeing a bird you know and hearing it sing is the best way to learn its song.

So far, I've mentioned a few Apps for identifying wildlife but the second key part is recording. For that there are a few essential Apps:

- BTO's Birdtrack app for birds, whether for a one-off sighting of a White-tailed Eagle flying over Plumpton for example (I can dream!) or a list of birds seen during a walk. Records for both common and less common birds are always welcome.
- Butterfly Conservation's iRecord Butterflies App is great for recording either one-off sightings or a list of butterflies found during a walk. This App also gives some help with identification as it has a built-in identification guide.
- The Mammal Society's Mammal Mapper App is also a good choice for recording any mammals encountered.
- iRecord is good for anything else you will come across in the UK. There is an App which is easy to use but the Web Site (<https://irecord.org.uk/>) has more functionality and is better suited for recording a list of species.

This article is not a comprehensive list and there are many other Apps and Web sites out there that will help with identification but hopefully these suggestions will inspire you to get started.