

Guide to Hosting an iNaturalist Identification Party



An Identification Party is a fun, social way to help improve data quality on iNaturalist while building community knowledge about nature. Whether in-person or virtual, these events can help participants learn how to identify observations, meet others with shared interests, and make a real contribution to biodiversity science.



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Before the Event

1. Define the Focus

Decide what kind of observations your group will work on. You might focus on a:

- **Project:** Help identify observations from a recent iNaturalist bioblitz project or another local effort.
- **Place:** Focus on all observations from your city, a local park, your county, or your state/province.
- **Taxonomic Group:** Choose one or more groups of organisms—such as plants, birds, insects, fungi, or crustaceans.
- **Theme:** Try something creative, like “Arachnid Autumn,” “Urban Nature,” or “Marine Mysteries.”

Tip: Choosing a clear focus helps participants feel part of a shared goal.



2. Choose a Format and Location

You can host an identification party:

- **In-person:** At a museum, library, classroom, community center, or café with good wi-fi.
- **Virtual:** On Zoom, Google Meet, or Discord. Share your screen to walk through the Identify page together.
- **Hybrid:** Combine in-person and virtual participation with a shared chat space.

Make sure everyone has what they need:

- Internet access and a laptop or tablet (phones can work, but the Identify page is best on larger screens).
- Optional: Field guides, species checklists, or reference books for your region or taxa.
- Snacks and a relaxed atmosphere — this is supposed to be fun!

3. Recruit Participants

Invite a mix of people — experienced identifiers, regular iNaturalist observers, and newcomers who want to learn. Remind people that you don’t have to be an expert to help!

Ways to recruit:

- Announce the event on your institution’s website or social media (or your own!).
- Post in relevant iNaturalist project journals and reach out to observers and identifiers in your area.
- Invite nature clubs, photography groups, or volunteer networks, including online interest groups for virtual events.



4. Prepare Your Resources

Before the event, you may want to:

- Create a short slide deck or demo of how to use the Identify page.
- Prepare direct links to the Identify page with the observations you want people to work on (e.g., using filters for location, project, or taxon).
- Make a shared doc or chat space (Google Sheet, Slack, Discord, etc.) where people can post cool finds, ask for help, or coordinate who’s identifying what.
- If possible, get some “before” numbers that you can use to track how many IDs get added during your party (e.g., number of research grade observations in your project, ask people to check their total identifications before the event).

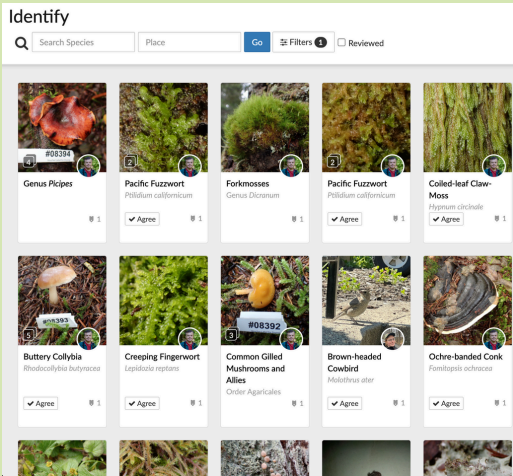


During the Event

1. Welcome and Orientation

Start with a quick overview:

- Remind people of the focus of your identification party (and why it matters!).
- Review best practices for identifying (e.g., only add IDs you can back up, only ID to the level the evidence supports).
- Reassure people that it's okay not to know everything – adding coarse IDs to *unknown* observations (like “Plants” or “Birds”), or sorting higher taxa into lower groups (like “Flowering Plants” into “Monocots” and “Dicots”) is still helpful!
- Do some introductions – encourage everyone to say hello and share what taxa or regions they're most interested in (this could be done in the chat for large virtual events).



2. Demonstrate the iNaturalist Identify Page

Walk participants through:

- How to open the Identify page
- How to use filters to focus on your chosen project, place, or taxa.
- How to view photos and add identifications or comments.
- How to use keyboard shortcuts (tap the keyboard icon on for a list).

Show how to:

- Add broad identifications (“Plants,” “Fungi,” “Insects”) to unknowns.
- Add specific IDs if confident.
- Mark observations captive/cultivated.

3. Facilitate Interaction and Learning

Keep the mood light, curious, and collaborative. Try some of these ideas:

- If everyone is working on the same set of observations to identify, have people start on different pages in the Identify page to spread out IDs.
- Encourage people to share interesting or tricky observations: show it to others at an in-person event, or share your screen at a virtual event.
- Have “breakout groups” (or tables) for different taxa.
- Periodically pause to highlight fun finds or collective progress (“We’ve helped ID 300 observations so far!”).
- Encourage experienced identifiers to mentor beginners, showing how they check visually similar species or indicate problems with data quality.

(Optional) Create mini-challenges, like:

- “Who can find the funniest observation?”
- “Let’s get all unknowns from our park to at least family level.”



4. Keep It Relaxed and Fun

- Play background music (have everyone contribute songs to a nature-themed playlist!).
- Have snacks or coffee (or make it a potluck and have people bring food and drinks to share).
- Celebrate small successes.
- Remind everyone that even adding one identification helps improve iNaturalist’s data and our understanding of nature.

After the Event

1. Wrap Up and Celebrate

Thank everyone for participating and share highlights:

- Total number of observations improved or IDs added.
- Favorite species or observations people identified.
- Screenshots or anecdotes from the event.

If your group was working on a specific project, post an update in the project journal or on social media.



2. Encourage Continued Engagement

- Invite participants to keep identifying on their own or join a monthly ID hour.
- Share helpful resources, like:
 - iNaturalist Help: [How to use the Identify Page](#)
 - iNaturalist Help: [How to refine observations stuck at a high taxonomic level](#)
 - [How to Help with Identifying and Data Stewardship: Deep Dive](#) resource
- Encourage people to make new observations – they'll have a better eye for interesting species to look for after doing IDs!

3. Reflect and Plan Ahead

Take a few minutes to note what worked well and what you'd change next time.

Consider making it a recurring event – monthly or quarterly ID parties are a great way to build community and keep up with new observations. Keep it fun with:

- **Theme nights:** e.g., “Mollusk Monday,” “Fungi February” or “Bug Bonanza.”
- **Special guests:** Invite local experts to do short talks or ID demos.

Thank you!

Thank you for hosting an identification party and helping others learn to make identifications on iNaturalist! Your efforts strengthen the iNaturalist community and turn observations into valuable data for biodiversity science and conservation.

