iNaturalist Program and Adopt-A-Pond Transition FAQs

This document may change over time based on feedback from the community.

Up to date as of April 2024

What is iNaturalist?

iNaturalist is a nonprofit community of naturalists, Community Scientists, and biologists seeking to map and share observations of biodiversity across the globe. With its vast range and dedicated personnel, it serves as a powerful facilitator of community science projects.

What platforms is iNaturalist available on?

iNaturalist is available as an app on the iOS Apple App Store and Android Play Store, as well online on their fully functional website.

Will the current Adopt-A-Pond app continue to be in use?

The current app will continue to be operable through to the end of 2024, after which the app will no longer be able to receive submissions. Submissions will then continue to be received through the iNaturalist app or website.

What about the website?

Sightings will continue to be accepted via the website through to the end of 2024. Following this, sightings can be submitted to the projects through the iNaturalist website or app.

Will I lose access to my submission history? Can I save my submissions history?

When the app closes at the end of 2024, your submission data will no longer be accessible to you via the app. If you want an exported file of your submission data, please contact our team with the name and email associated with the account. Through iNaturalist, you will be able to download and save your observations yourself.

Why are the Community Science programs transitioning to the iNaturalist platform?

The transition to iNaturalist was decided to make more effective use of our resources, as well as expand our reach and maximize the impact our programs have on protecting wildlife and their habitats. iNaturalist was designed with the intention of promoting Community Science initiatives, and acts as an effective facilitator of Community Science projects. Additionally, with the large-scale backing that iNaturalist has, there are consistent and high-caliber tech support staff who maintain the app and frequently provide updates as needed.

What about vulnerable species? Who decides what information is restricted?

With a conservation focused backbone, iNaturalist has built-in protocols to protect vulnerable species by restricting information as appropriate.

There are 2 mechanisms that determine if information is restricted:

1) Personal geoprivacy. Each observer can change their geoprivacy settings from "open" (default) to "obscure" or "private". Changing the geoprivacy settings to obscured or private will restrict public access to this information.
2) Depending on the classification of concern, geoprivacy for certain taxa and species will be limited to obstructed or private as appropriate. This is done to protect these sensitive and high-risk species from poaching.

What is the difference between open, obscured, and private observations?

Open observations will have publicly viewable geographic locations, while obscured photos will provide a random point within a large geographic area near the observation. No geographic information is publicly available for private observations.

How does iNaturalist work?

iNaturalist functions in a very similar way to the existing Adopt-A-Pond submission process. When on the app or website, you simply select "Add Observation" and begin entering your data. If you are unsure about what species you are observing, iNaturalist may suggest an identification using its integrated computer vision software, which learns to identify species based on existing verified photo submissions.

After you join our projects (direct links found at the bottom of this document), you can add your submission to the project. Because the projects are private, **you must join the projects in order to submit observations to them.** Other community members can verify your submission or add notes and annotations. A member of our team will continue to monitor and verify submissions, as we do now.

For more information on using the iNaturalist app, please visit this link: https://cwf-fcf.org/en/resources/downloads/booklets-handouts/iNaturalist-App-How-to.pdf

For more information on how to submit an observation through the website, please visit this link: https://cwf-fcf.org/en/resources/downloads/booklets-handouts/iNaturalist-Web-How-to.pdf

When will the programs launch on iNaturalist?

The Ontario Turtle Tally and FrogWatch Ontario iNaturalist programs have launched! The existing Adopt-A-Pond app and website will run concurrently with the iNaturalist pilot projects through the 2024 season. For the 2025 season, our Community Science programs will be operating exclusively through iNaturalist.

How much personal data from members is stored? How is this data used?

The only data stored by iNaturalist is the email and username used to create the account. This data is not shared externally; the only time it's used will be email communication through the iNaturalist platform.

When submitting observations, the program will use your phone's location to determine the geolocation of your submission. Your phone's location information is not stored; however the geolocation of submissions will be stored alongside your observation.

Will Adopt-A-Pond events continue to run?

Yes! We are still committed to engaging with our community as much as possible and will continue to operate the Adopt-A-Pond events that you know and love.

PLEASE NOTE: if you would like to receive communications about Adopt-A-Pond events (such as Appreciation Day), you must complete the form on the Adopt-A-Pond iNaturalist Umbrella project, found in the About section https://inaturalist.ca/projects/adopt-a-pond

What are the names of the iNaturalist projects? Which should I join?

There are 3 Adopt-A-Pond projects that have launched through iNaturalist: Ontario Turtle Tally, FrogWatch Ontario, and Adopt-A-Pond.

Ontario Turtle Tally and FrogWatch Ontario are the taxon specific community science projects that you know. It is through these "Traditional" projects that you can submit your observations.

The project titled Adopt-A-Pond is an Umbrella Project that includes the Traditional projects, as well as any future projects our team may launch. All communications will be going through this Umbrella Project, so we highly suggest joining this project to ensure you receive updates and communications. Links to each project are below:

Adopt-A-Pond Project: https://inaturalist.ca/projects/adopt-a-pond

Ontario Turtle Tally: https://inaturalist.ca/projects/ontario-turtle-tally

FrogWatch Ontario: https://inaturalist.ca/projects/frogwatch-ontario

If you have additional questions not covered by this document, please visit the iNaturalist FAQ page https://inaturalist.ca/pages/help or reach out to aap@torontozoo.ca.