



Don't worry if you don't feel confident about accurately identifying wildlife; there is no better way to get started than by going to a park or nature reserve and simply watching.

We can also learn from each other and from naturalists who live in South Devon. We will be arranging training courses for our ACT Wildlife Wardens, using a mixture of site-visits and Zoom meetings.

Getting started:

When you are visiting a wildlife site, take some of these:

- Pocket-sized identification books (Mitchell Beazley books are very small and good)
- The free Seek app is great for beginners. https://www.inaturalist.org/pages/seek_app . You take a picture and it usually tells you what it is (not 100%, but not bad!). It is best at wildlife that doesn't move too fast, like plants!
- The iRecord app is also free <https://irecord.org.uk/app/> . iRecord is the National Biodiversity Network tool for sharing wildlife observations, including associated photos. It aims to make it easier for wildlife sightings to be collated, checked by experts and made available to support research and decision-making at local and national levels. Once you've registered, which is free, you can add your own wildlife records for others to see.
- Websites such as www.firstnature.org are very helpful for identifying wildlife.
- A notebook and pencil to make notes and simple drawings (even if you think you can't draw!)
- Take binoculars if you have some - they don't need to be expensive.
- Take your mobile phone or a camera for pictures. Pictures of plants and slower-moving insects can be very helpful when identifying to species level - filming birds, mammals and fast-moving invertebrates can be a bit of a challenge! You could also use the voice-recording facility on your phone to record bird song and/or your comments.

On site:

- Always start by noting the place, the date, the rough temperature and the weather conditions.
- Then allow yourself time to stand and watch for at least 10 minutes in each of 3-4 different places/habitats. Look for a tree to lean on, somewhere quiet to sit, or a bush that will hide you.
- Make a list of everything you see that you either recognise or can describe. (If I don't know a species' name, then I sometimes invent one that describes it to me, until I find its real name).
- If you are watching an animal, note what it is doing (eating - what? - preening, gathering nest material etc). It will help you to understand what sort of habitat and food it needs.
- If you want to learn bird songs, try watching a bird singing, then close your eyes as you listen and imagine what it looks like. Next time you hear a song, but can't see the bird, close your eyes and listen - and with experience, you will be able to 'see' the bird that you are listening to!
- When I identify a plant, I say its name (quietly if there is anyone around!) and then I say it every time I see it. It makes a double imprint in my brain!

When you are home:

- Check your notes, check descriptions and birdsongs online or in books for identification.
- Don't worry if you can't identify everything - every time you watch wildlife your knowledge will grow.
- If you are confident of your identification, you can record wildlife using iRecord or the DBRC recording system (see below).

Recording species and sightings:

Recording is an interesting and really useful way of finding out which wildlife species are in your Parish; if you don't know what is there, you can't look after it! Without local information we wouldn't know what wildlife there is and what is special about each Parish. Unfortunately, few people note down the wildlife they see and fewer still submit those records to recording schemes.

It is also important to try to work out how common different species are - and to know how common they should be in a given habitat. Working out whether our own activities are affecting them is also useful.

You can get the whole community to help you make a '**Parish Plants Species Diary**' writing the date of the first sighting by each species. Everyone can join in if you use Google Sheets - just 'invite' anyone

interested in plants and animals to use the sheets (it's a good idea to have one table for plants and one for animals). If Google Sheets are a bit too tech for some, use emails as well.

Citizen Science:

Here are some national Schemes which are designed to be easy for everyone to do, which you can encourage your community to take part in and to copy to you.

The [Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' annual Big Garden Birdwatch](#), [Nature's Calendar](#) from the Woodland Trust.

Butterfly Conservation's [Big Butterfly Count](#) and their newly launched [Garden Butterfly Survey](#)

Also [OPAL's explore nature](#) projects; there aren't any new ones to take part in at the minute, but you can use their methodologies and then check your results against theirs.

Submitting records to national and regional recording schemes:

It is important to be confident of records before submitting them, as bad records can result in the wrong management decisions. Recording common species is as important as rare ones; it is helpful to add numbers seen and any behaviour in the 'notes' section.

Devon Biodiversity Record Centre

ACT's Wildlife Warden Scheme is working with the **Devon Biodiversity Record Centre (DBRC)**, our local, county-based organisation, so that we can add to their records and benefit from ones they already have. DBRC is run on a 'not for profit' basis. It was set up and is hosted by Devon Wildlife Trust to act as a central reference point for anyone who wants to know about wildlife in Devon. DBRC is supported by a large partnership of organisations and individuals including Teignbridge District Council.

DBRC is supporting the Wildlife Warden Scheme by supplying us (whenever they have time) with information such as Parish Maps. These will show key habitats and areas that need surveying/ground truthing. (Ground truthing is information provided by **direct observation** as opposed to information provided by inference - for example by interpreting aerial photographs). Working in this way, we can help each other. We are currently working together to find ways of producing Parish species lists, so that you can learn more about your local area.

You can record wildlife that you see at <https://www.dbrc.org.uk/wildlife-sightings/>. If you have many records to upload, use the Excel spreadsheet provided [here](#) and email it to the address on the DBRC website. <https://www.dbrc.org.uk/>

To submit records, you need the following information:

- **What have you seen and how many?** You need to be certain of your identification, so if you're not sure take some photographs and ask for some expert advice.
- **Who took the record?** It is always important to provide the details of who took the record so that the record centres can get in touch with the recorder to verify details.
- **When was the sighting?** Be specific about the date to make the record valid - you need to note down the **day, month and year**.
- **Where was the sighting?** Give as much detail as possible, so the record can be accurately located. Usually, a 6-figure grid reference (or eight) is best, but you could also include descriptions of locations and post codes.
- **iRecord** and DBRC records are now compatible, so if you use the iRecord app in the field, DBRC will be able to access the records.

We hope to be able to provide Wildlife Wardens who are proficient at plant species identification with opportunities to attend DBRC courses on surveying habitats. This could lead to surveying possible County Wildlife Sites.



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ACT supports Teignbridge District Council, town and parish councils, community groups and residents to make the district carbon neutral, sustainable, resilient and healthy.