

Be Sure to Make Useful Observations

Here are a few useful pointers:

- **Take identifiable photos:** Photos of distant trees or speck-like birds will not garner much attention because they're usually hard to identify, so make sure you **fill the frame with your subject**, perhaps using the phone or camera's zoom. Because smartphone cameras are designed primarily for photographing humans and landscapes (and, apparently, food), taking an in-focus photo of an insect or a plant is actually quite difficult. Using your hand to hold a flower or plant still can be helpful, but **make sure the plant is not dangerous**. *It is not fun to realize too late that you have grabbed stinging nettle or poison ivy. :/*
- **If you do not know what something is:** It is better to guess or throw out your best guess to get the organism into the right hands of identifiers. There are all kinds of specialist citizen scientists on iNaturalist, but if you just drop the observation into the unknown category, they may never find the observation to help you identify it. If you are completely baffled by something, I find it helps to guess something wild and rare and see how fast you get told what it “really is”. 😊
- **Take multiple photos:** Many organisms, particularly plants and insects, cannot be identified to species from a single photo. Take multiple photos from different angles (top, bottom, side, front, back), and/or photos showing different features of the organism. For plants it's especially important to take pictures of flowers or fruit. Photos of flowers or fruit **AND** leaves are the most helpful. Be sure to add multiple photos of the same organism to the same observation. I like to take one overall photo of the whole plant, one with my hand in the photo for size comparison, & one without my hand. I also like to flip the leaves and get an underside picture of leaves and flowers. I find it helpful to start taking pictures of a “flight risk” animal or insect as soon as I see it, then move closer and get another picture, then closer and get another one and so on. I do not post all photos, but can later discard the photos that are far away and focus on the close up ones.
- **PHOTO TIP:** You can take the photos and edit, crop and add to iNaturalist at a later time to save time when BioBlitzing or when you are not in the field. Just remember to **POST THEM** and add one test observation when

you get started to make sure your location and metadata are on for ease of adding later.

- **Focus on wild organisms:** In general, the iNat community is more interested in wild organisms, and respond more to pictures of weeds and bugs than to cultivated roses and hamsters in cages. If you do make observations of garden plants or other non-wild organisms, remind them to make sure to mark those observations as "Captive/Cultivated" before uploading them.
- **Pay attention to metadata:** Metadata is the additional information associated with a photo that captures when and (often) where a photo was originally taken. If you post photos that are screen shots of photos, they will lose the original data which may result in incorrect data entry. Depending on the method used, sharing photos between two devices may also lose important metadata such as location. Watch for locations and dates that may not make sense and correct them. This can be as simple as *allowing* the location or GPS to be accessed by the iNaturalist App for photos you take with your phone.

For additional iNat help you can call, text or email:

Arica L. Shields {Class of 2022} at:

214-460-8222 or email Pontiac070404@yahoo.com

PS, Remember to also join this project -

BPTMN: Blackland Prairie Texas Master Naturalist project