FAQ's for Event Organizers for City Nature Challenge 2025 (Updated 2/2025)

(Written with DC area in mind but I hope will be helpful elsewhere!-Deborah Barber, dbarber@tnc.org)

This document focuses on field events. We are also developing a how-to document for identification parties. iNat observer extraordinaire Katja Schulz has developed this excellent presentation for iNat trainings.

Useful links:

Citynaturechallenge.org :

- FAQs about dates, what counts, etc.
- Education toolkit
- Press and Publications

Citynaturechallengedc.org :

- Events page: map of project area, map of events
- Virtual Events: virtual trainings, identification events, and a post-CNC celebration!
- Participating Partners
- Resources for Participants (Observers and Identifiers)
- Resources for Walk
- Leaders
- Resources for Youth Leaders (Teachers, Scout Leaders, parents)
- Resources for Event Promoters

iNaturalist:

- Sign Up
- City Nature Challenge Washington Metro Area 2023 project-join here!
- City Nature Challenge Washington DC Metro Area 2022 Project –See stats and what we saw
- Extensive Help Section

Planning Your Event

What do I need in order to host an event?

You will need a place, a time, a leader and an audience. Special themes are optional but add to the fun!

Place: A nature preserve, a local park, your favorite trail, the grounds of your place of worship, a public garden…all work well for using iNaturalist! Please make sure you have the permission of the landowner.

Time: Anytime between 12:01 am on Friday and 11:59 pm on Monday will count!

Leader(s): Someone who knows the area you'll be exploring and can help guests use iNaturalist. It's helpful to have one person familiar with each mobile device operating system (iOS and Android).

Audience: Members of your community groups, homeowner's association, employees, etc. and/or members of the public.

What types of events work well?

Group walks/hikes/bikes/paddles, "walk the park" forays, bioblitzes, and identification parties all work well….

- Group walk/hike/bike/paddle: A leader accompanies the group on a land or water trail.
- Walk the park foray: After getting situated with iNaturalist, participants explore a park on their own or in small groups.
- Bioblitz: An effort to document as many organisms as possible that occur in a certain place within a short time.

ID party: Indoors or online events where people get together to provide missing ID's for iNaturalist finds.

Optional themes: Creek seining, pond dipping, mothlighting, bird walks to record audio files and take photos, bug safaris, biocube projects, square meter projects…

I'm new to iNaturalist…how can I learn to use it better?

- iNaturalist has an extensive help section with lots of help and video demonstrations.
- Attend an iNaturalist workshop offered around the DC metro area.
- Practice on your own. You can even upload photos that are already in your smartphone.

- Attending an ID party can also help you learn to use the system more effectively, and tune your eyes to the early spring phenology that we'll see during the CNC.

Publicizing your Event

How do I list an event on citynaturechallengedc.org?

Fill out this form and your event will soon appear on the Events page of our local website.

How do I edit an event once I've submitted it?

You'll receive an email after you've filled out the form with a link to edit your event. Hold onto this in case any of your details change. If you've lost that email, contact Deborah Barber for help.

What other resources are available?

If you'd like to order postcards, Attend the kickoff!

To get the latest updates, join the Google group for CNC-DC event organizers or contacting Carrie Seltzer if that doesn't work.

What should participants know before the event?

- Participants should bring a well-charged smartphone with the iNaturalist app downloaded and a user account set up, or a camera.
- Participants should bring drinking water, sun protection, bug protection.
- If your event involves a walk, give late-arriving folks some way of finding the group.

What should event leaders bring to the event?

- Liability and photo release forms.
- You may want to bring a clipboard to capture participant names and emails for later use by your organization.
- An external battery for phones can be a huge help.
- Consider providing for each participant: How to Take Good Photos for iNaturalist–Pocket-sized guide (print double-sided and cut; 6 per sheet)

How can I increase the educational value of my event?

See this great Education toolkit!

For events in Northern Virginia, see the Plant NOVA Natives CNC page for ideas on how to help people make the connection between the health of the ecosystem they are documenting and the native or invasive plants they use in their own yards.

What about offering prizes for participants?

We have found that prizes can alter people's behavior in undesirable ways. Here are some things to consider:

- Think about giving the prize to the observer with the most verifiable or research grade observations, instead of just total number of observations - or the person who found the most verified species
- Think about giving a prize to your top identifier
- Keep monetary value low
- Offer an experience or small physical gift instead of money (e.g., a behind-the-scenes tour of your organization, a chance to have lunch with you, a water bottle, a free spot on your next guided walk or program, etc.)

Running Your Event

How long should I schedule for an effective event?

It depends on how much ground you're trying to cover. Unless participants are experienced iNaturalist users, build in 15-20 minutes reviewing how to use the app before you start walking around.

What are some other resources for conducting bioblitzes?

UK Guide to Running a Bioblitz

After Your Event

What happens after Monday May 1?

Cities have until the following Sunday night to finish identifications on their observations. This is a good chance for you to review your own and your

participants' observations and try to get as many as possible to Research grade by having them correctly identified to species. If you know any good naturalists who are not on iNaturalist (even if they aren't local), invite them to sign up and join in the fun!

What do I need to do after my event?

Make time for these steps and encourage your event's participants to do the same. Consider sending a follow-up email to your participants with some reminders and helpful links.

- Upload all observations within one week (earlier is better to increase chance of getting good ID).
- Check your iNaturalist updates each day to see if anyone has suggested ID's for your finds.
- Observers are also welcome to offer ID's for others...this is good iNat citizenship, enhances the data quality of our city's findings, and makes us all better observers and photographers.

What happens to CNC data?

See last year's leaderboard for global city results.

What happens to iNaturalist data?

iNat data is publicly available for individuals and organizations and can answer questions about species distribution, phenology, and shifting ranges in response to climate change. Many examples can be found via the Global Biodiversity Information Facility.

What about ID parties?

Identification parties are a separate kind of event that can take place before, during, or after the days of the City Nature Challenge. Read more here about how to host one. Starting in 2020 our network of inaturalist users started hosting virtual ID events, many of which are described here.