Using iNaturalist to Submit Observations to the Rare Plant Monitoring Program
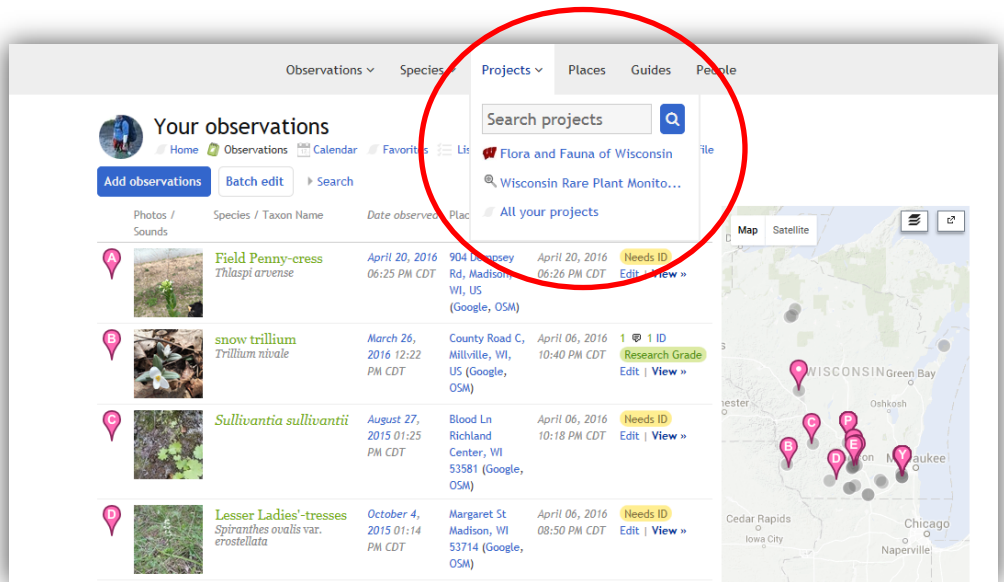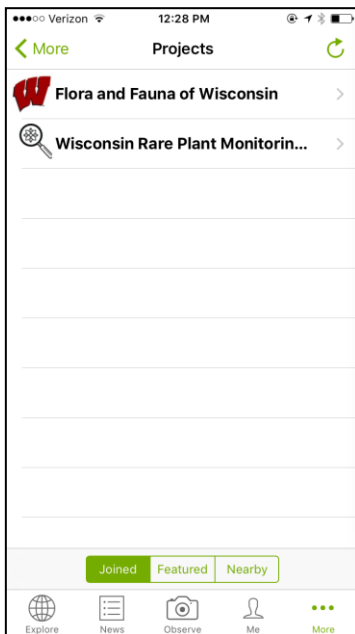
1. Set up an account on iNaturalist.
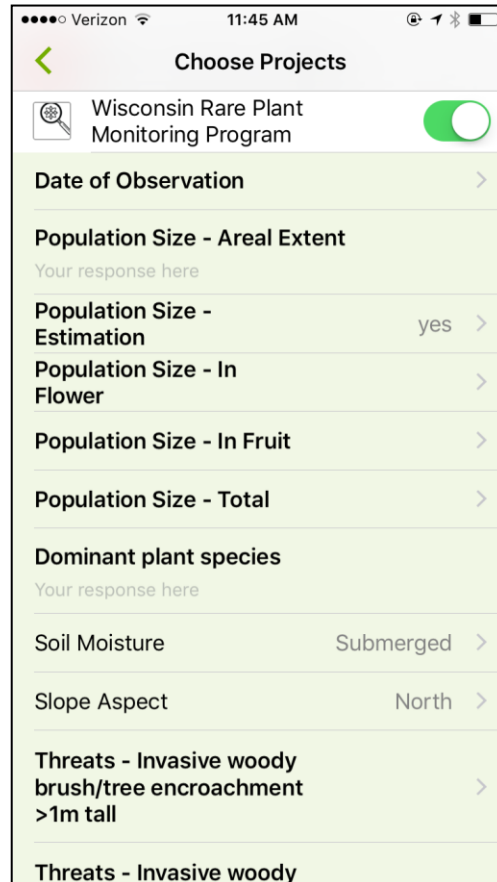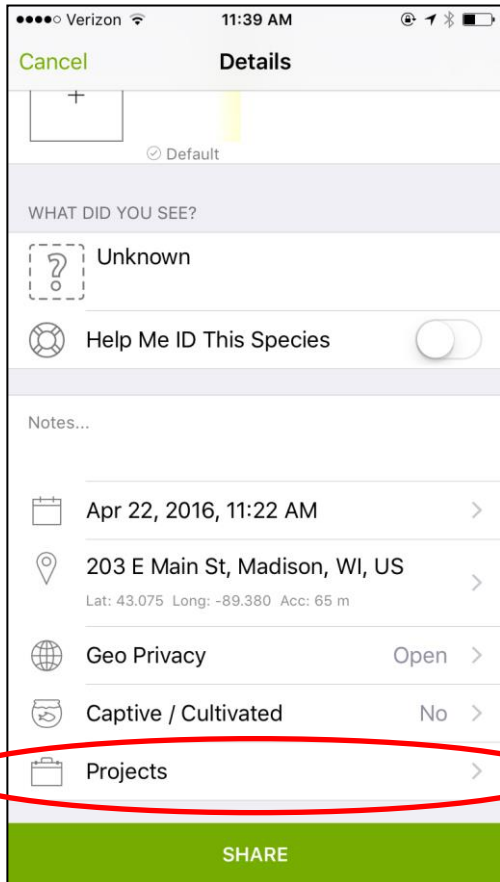
It's free! Sign up here.

2. Join the Rare Plant Monitoring Program project

Once you have an account, send your username to Kevin Doyle (kevinf.doyle@wisconsin.gov) so you can be invited to join the project. Once you've been invited you'll get an email notification, and the invite will appear on your iNaturalist dashboard. You can then start submitting observations to the project using your PC or smartphone.
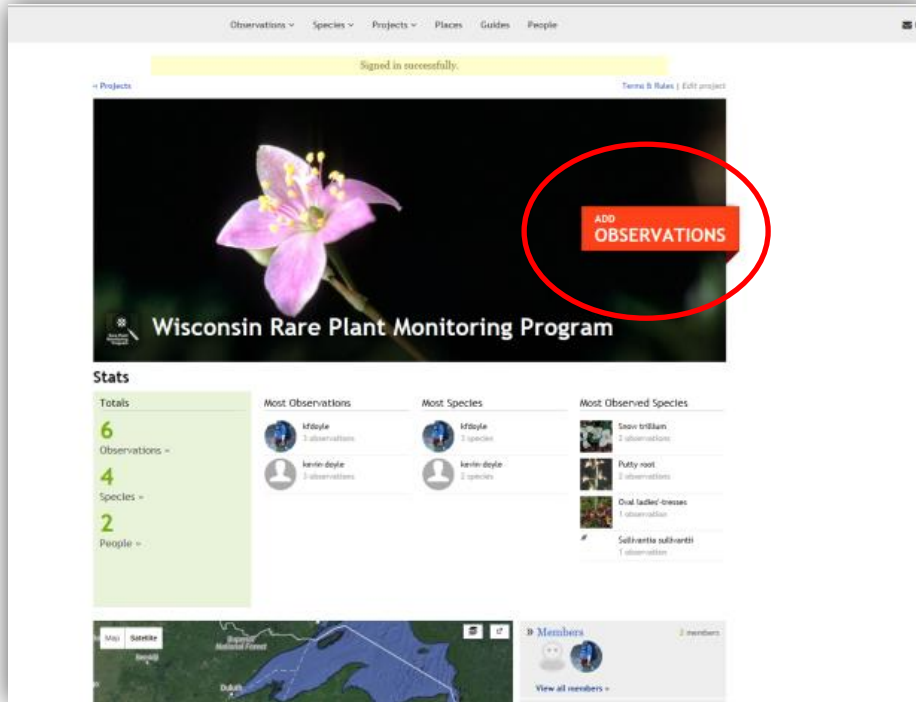
3. Add your observation to the Rare Plant Monitoring Program project.

Using the mobile app: When you make an observation, there will be an opportunity to add it to a project. Click the Rare Plant Monitoring Program project, and you will be prompted to fill out additional fields. These fields correspond to the data collection sheet (e.g., population size, associated species, management history, etc.). Note: Some of these fields are mandatory. Your observation will not be added to the project if you do not fill out all the necessary fields, add a photo, or GPS coordinates.
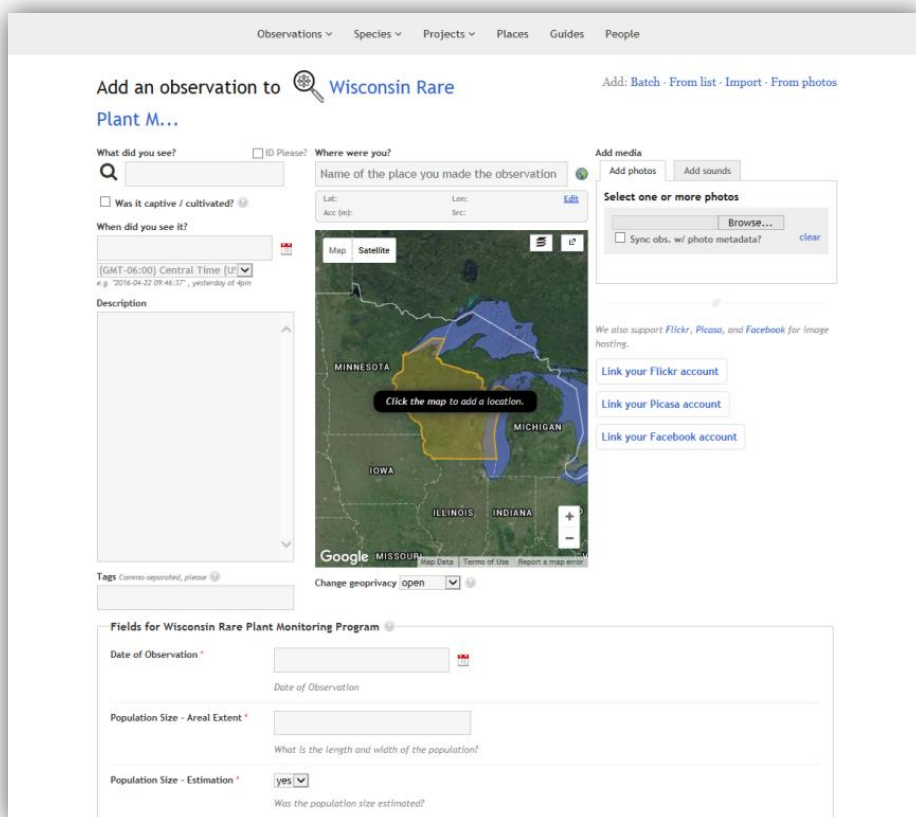

Left: The main page for submitting any observation to iNaturalist using the iPhone. You can touch "Projects" to add an observation to the Rare Plant Monitoring Program.
Right: The data collection form for iNaturalist on the iPhone. When you are finished filling out the data collection form you can go back to the main page, obscure the location, and touch "Share."

Using the website on a PC: If you want to submit your observations using your PC when you get back from the field that's fine too. Sign in to iNaturalist and navigate to the Rare Plant Monitoring Program project page. On the banner across the top of the page there is an option to "Add Observations." Click and you will be brought to the project's data submission form, which includes the data fields, a map and an option to upload a photo. Again, many of these fields are mandatory. If you don't fill out certain data fields, upload a photo or put a point on a map, your observation will not be submitted.
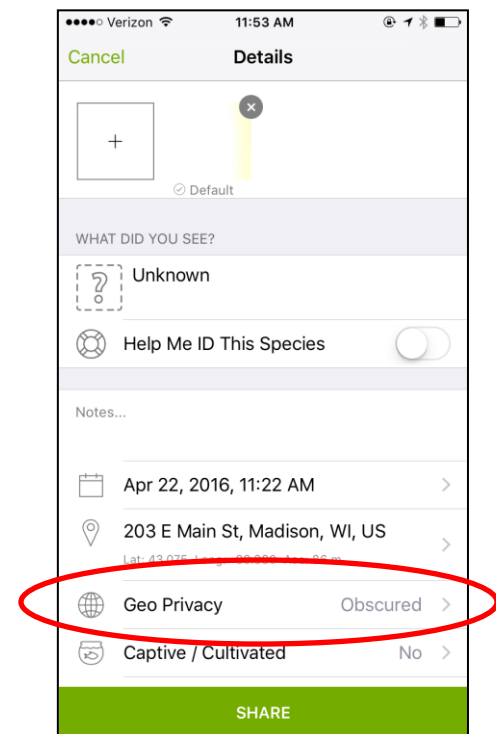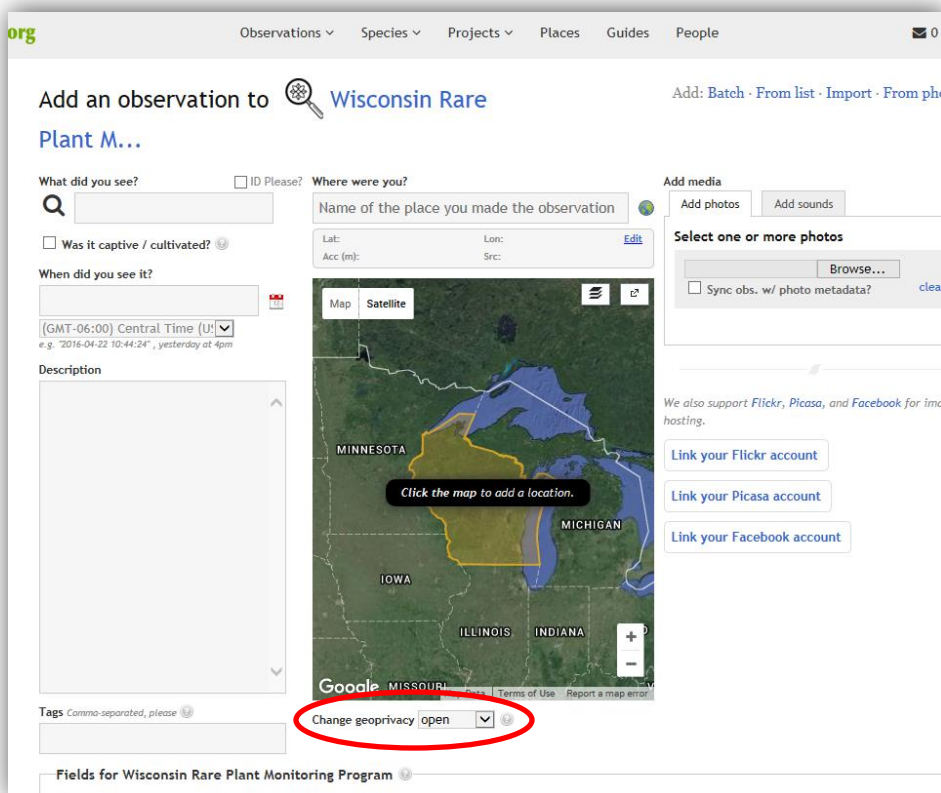

Upper: The Rare Plant Monitoring Program main page on iNaturalist for PC. Click the "Add Observations" in the banner to submit data. You can also see who is involved in the program, how many observations have been submitted, and where observations were made.
Lower: The data submission form on the iNaturalist website.

Obscuring the location of your observation **(VERY IMPORTANT!!!):** When you are marking the location of your observation (whether on the mobile app or PC) you will be given the opportunity to obscure the location. This is also called setting the "geoprivacy." Obscuring the location of your observation means that you and the program coordinator can see the exact location, but everyone else will only be able to see to within 10km of its true location.

Even though the Rare Plant Monitoring Program project is private, any observations you add to it can be viewed by people that follow you even if they are not in the Rare Plant Monitoring Program ("Following" people on iNaturalist is like being "friends" with someone on Facebook or following someone on Twitter; you will get updates on your observation feed whenever they submit data.). Therefore, you must obscure any observations you submit to the Rare Plant Monitoring Program project so people outside the program cannot see their exact locations.

4. See what other monitors have observed and comment on their observations

Along with submitting observations, you can also use iNaturalist to see what other monitors have observed, comment on their photos or contact them directly to schedule surveys. This is the social media component of iNaturalist and it is best utilized via the website. Although, you can see other people's observations using the mobile app, you can't filter for those made by Rare Plant Monitoring Program monitors only.

Frequently Asked Questions

You can find more help with using iNaturalist on their help page.

1. Do I have to submit data via iNaturalist or can I continue using the old data collection forms?

You can use either. The iNaturalist project was set up to give monitors another option for data submission and as a way for program participants to see what each other are doing. However, if you don't have a smartphone or computer or would just prefer to submit data the old fashioned way, that's ok too.

2. Do I need to obscure the location of all my observations whether they are of rare species or not?

You only need to obscure the location of observations submitted to the Rare Plant Monitoring Program project. If you have an iNaturalist account you can submit information on all kinds of species (birds, turtles, mushrooms, plants, etc.). So if you observe a common plant or turtle or bird and want to add it to iNaturalist, you do not need to obscure the location.

3. What if I don't have a cell signal when I'm in the field?

You can still collect the data on your smartphone even if you don't have a cell signal. The data will be stored on your phone until you get somewhere with better service and the observation will be automatically uploaded then. You can log into the iNaturalist app when you get better cell service to confirm that the observation was uploaded. If it still hasn't been uploaded, you can manually refresh the app by navigating to your observations page and dragging down.

4. I submitted data but I don't see it on the Rare Plant Monitoring Program page?

There are a couple things that may cause your observations to not get added to the project. First, make sure that you filled out all the mandatory data fields (these should have asterisks next to them), uploaded a photo and put a point on a map, marking the location of the observation. If you havent met these requirements, your observation will not get added to the project.

There is sometimes a lag between when the observation is uploaded and when it shows up on the project main page. If you just submitted the observation, wait a few minutes, refresh the page and see if it appears. If it still doesn't show up on the main project page, there may be something wrong with the data itself.

5. The data collection fields on the mobile app are out of order and I can't read the entire heading for certain fields. What's going on?

If you are using the iNaturalist app for an Android phone, you may run into some problems with the data collection fields. The fields may appear out of order and some of the headings may run off the screen. You should still be able to see enough information to understand what data to enter into each field, but it may be worthwhile, if you have an Android phone, to look at the data collection form before you go into the field or carry a hard copy of one with you so you know what the field. You can also log into the project on the iNaturalist website to see the entire field headings. Rest assured, your observation will still be successfully submitted to the Rare Plant Monitoring Program project from an Android phone.

6. Can I edit my observation after it is submitted?

Yes. If you go to your observations page on the iNaturalist website or app, you can view an observation and edit any of the data fields, change the photograph or the location.