Reporting Sightings

Reporting data on sightings is one of the simplest ways that mammalwatchers can contribute to conservation. In this guide there is an overview of benefits, where and what to report and how to choose an appropriate reporting platform. Finally, we introduce some of the more common platforms to report your sightings and also plan your next trip. There is also a video on the topic on the [Mammalwatching Youtube channel](#).

Passing on your most valuable sightings takes very little time, yet can be important for the very species you were thrilled to see in the field. If you are concerned with your privacy, or sharing an animal's location, good platforms have options to obscure reports of endangered wildlife, sometimes automatically. Such platforms collect data in a standardized way with minimally the date, place and name. This information is always saved in the same way, making such observations more easily accessible and usable for conservation agencies and scientists.

Benefits are not just for conservation, but also for you. Your observations are stored somewhere safe, easily accessible and shareable. Stats and visual maps can help you go down memory lane, but also plan future trips. Interactions with experts and locals allow you to connect with the broader mammalwatching community and find shared passion along the way. Last but not least, you can get expert help to have your observations identified, not just mammals, but all biodiversity.

[iNaturalist](#) and [Observation](#) are two global platforms we can recommend, but there are many more local platforms that might be even more suitable for you. Many platforms have apps that allow you to record straight in the field, even offline, though Mammalwatchers do not yet have a well-established and extensive platform like ebird which allows to record also presence/absence data.

We recommend writing a trip report for mammalwatching.com of course and then sharing this report with those who might be interested such as a local conservation NGO. Additionally, at least the most valuable sightings should be logged on to one of the biodiversity data platforms. In the end, the choice is yours, just follow the T.A.P.I.R. protocol below and your sightings can make a difference in conservation!

Benefits

Conservation: Red List assessments, conservation priority area assessments, monitoring programs and even environmental requirements for development all use species distributions. The better known these distributions, the better the conservation of these species can be implemented.

Science: Researchers can also use observation data to answer more global questions. As an example, shifts in distributions through climate change could be studied to find out where wildlife corridors are needed, to mitigate climate change effects.

Observation repository: Using platforms that collect data in a standardized way also allows you to easily search past observations. Once you entered your sightings, they are organized and in case your friend asks you where you have seen that squirrel 5 years ago, it takes a couple of clicks to share the exact coordinates.

Visuals: Many platforms have great visuals, for example maps where you and others have seen a certain species, but also filtering options, so you can look at where you went on that Spain trip two years ago.

Armchair ticks: Platforms usually try to keep up with taxonomy, and so you are notified of changes and can then enjoy a tick sitting in your comfy armchair at home. Because you entered the exact place when reporting, you are also not left with trying to work out where exactly on that trip you have seen this new potential split. A split is when a species turns out to be two or even more species.

Planning: With the data available on these platforms, you can better plan your trip. With exploring the observations of others, questions like where, how often and with what technique people find your target species can help you figure out how much focus a species needs. Recent sightings might also point you towards a new area, where these species are particularly visible at the moment.

Experts: Reporting platforms are used by amateurs and experts alike. Nowhere is it easier to interact with top experts and learn and discuss together. Do not always expect an immediate answer to all questions, but often, an identification pops in, always an excellent moment!

Species ID: If you want to familiarize yourself with the local wildlife or even have a go at some identification to improve your species skills, platforms like iNaturalist allow you to contribute yourself or at least look at some pictures. If you ID yourself, just be careful especially with species ID's and at the start maybe better leave a comment than an identification, or suggest genus only. Once an expert further identifies something you have looked at, you get a notification and can learn something each time.

Networking: In case you want to see a certain species but need some tips on where and how to search it, reporting platforms often let you see who has seen this species the most and drop them a message. Maybe they even take you along!

Where to report

Trip report: Non-standardized way, but valuable for the community. If you write one, put it on mammalwatching.com, even if you missed the target species or it was a short trip. The information of not seeing an animal is just as valuable to others as information that you saw it. And remember you aren't the first to miss out.

NGO/specialist: Writing the local NGO or species specialist a message and let them know about a sighting can be very beneficial, however it is sometimes unclear what is happening with this information later on. If you do, please try to secure that the information you share are used in an appropriate way to contribute to conservation/biodiversity.

Biodiversity data base: Along with a trip report this is the other best way to contribute! Many of these platforms have high ethical standards and are very valuable for conservation and science. Choosing an appropriate platform is detailed below in the TAPIR-protocol. It is best practice to support your sightings with descriptions, pictures and or sound recordings.

Publication: If you have a truly outstanding record, for example a major range extension of a species, or a species very rarely seen or a first record for a country, you can consider publishing a note in an academic journal. Do not hesitate to contact species specialists in such a case before publication to secure correct identification and that the record reaches the right places. You can also ask for advice on what to do on the mammalwatching.com community forum.

What to report

Important sightings: In case you don't want to report everything, but only your most valuable sightings, observations with some of the following characteristics are especially important:
- Red-listed or Data deficient according to IUCN
- Outside known distribution range

Proof: If you have proof, typically a picture or a sound recording, attach that to your observation. Proofs are valuable to validate the identification both now (we are all wrong sometimes) and in the future in case a species is split. Pictures and recordings can also be used by experts to study questions such as pelage coloration over the whole range.

Descriptions: Extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof – if you do not have a clear proof you can still report it, but it is important to give an honest assessment and share any doubts you might have. Add a description of the circumstances and what you saw, ideally done straight in the field when memory is fresh.

Biodiversity: That cool bug at the picnic place that you snapped a picture of? Report it! There are platforms such as iNaturalist that allow you to upload pretty much any biodiversity, even if you know only very broadly what it is ("insect" or "plant"). Other users with more experience in that taxa can then identify the "critter" you have seen. You might happen to make crazy observations, such as the first picture of this particular species alive. Even if you didn't even realize at the time…

How to choose a platform

Follow the T.A.P.I.R.!
Time: Is the data stored long-term?
- do you trust the platform to exist for a long time

Access: Who has access to your sightings?
- other users, if so who?
- relevant authorities

Protection: Can you obscure / protect vulnerable information?
- protection of your privacy and copyright of images
- protection of knowledge of guides
- protection of species threatened by poaching or disturbance

Information: Is the information passed on to GBIF?
- Global Biodiversity Information Facility
- THE global database for biodiversity data

Recording: Is the recording process beneficial to you?
- some platforms offer life lists, maps or stats of when and where you have seen which mammals
- some platforms make it very easy to upload and organize your pictures

Platforms around the world

iNaturalist.org: This global platforms is popular with mammalwatchers and many other biodiversity enthusiasts alike. The platform's system is based on pictures, which can be difficult with mammals, but provide valuable proof for an observation. There is a computer vision model that is often surprisingly accurate and can help to narrow down identification with some critical thinking. Very broad identifications are welcomed, such as "Rodent" or "Bat". There are some very good mammal experts on the platform who can help you identify those above-mentioned rodents and bats.

Observation.org: The other big, global platform. Most popular in Europe, this platform is also used by many mammalwachers. Observations can be supported with pictures and sound recordings and extra information on behavior and type of observation can be added in a standardized way. Both national and international experts validate observations to ensure an accurate database and help you ID species as well if you are stuck with a rodent species. Browsing observations is easy and together with the detailed locations (not for vulnerable species) allows you to easily plan your next trip.

Europe: Besides the big global platforms, Ornitho with the app NaturaList, is now set up in many European countries. This platform to report birds and other wildlife has a very high standard in reporting and ethics. However, even though species groups are generally slowly expanding, not all country branches have the possibility to report mammal observations yet.

Australia: Atlas of Living Australia is the national reporting platform in Australia. However, they managed to implement iNaturalist, so you can also use iNaturalist and the data ends up in the same place.

America, Africa, Asia: As far as we know, no other major regional platform exists. In North America iNaturalist is the dominating player.

Written by Valentin Moser with inputs from Jon Hall, Ruben Vernieuwe, Lars Michael Nielson, Mandy Jones and with ideas from the mammalwatching meeting and community. If you have feedback, think something is missing or know another big reporting platform, please get in touch with us at info@projectfelis.org