Best Practice for Using iNaturalist in the UK:
A practical, optional guide to help your observations integrate smoothly with the UK biological recording system

This guidance is entirely optional. You can use iNaturalist however you like.
These suggestions simply help your observations flow more easily into the UK's national recording infrastructure (iRecord → County Recorders → NBN Atlas). Many UK verifiers and schemes have contributed to shaping this advice.

1. If you want your records to integrate with the UK's biological recording system, use your real name (via your Profile's Display Name):

This is **not** an iNaturalist requirement, and it is **not** a general iNat best practice.
It is simply something that helps the UK's iRecord system and County Recorders, because iRecord receives your **Display Name**, not your username.

Key distinction:

- Your **username** (e.g. "SteveMcBill") is *not* sent to iRecord.
- Your **Display Name** *is* sent to iRecord.

Your Display Name is set in your **Profile**.
You can keep any username you like — just ensure your real name appears in your Display Name/Profile if you're comfortable doing so.

This helps:

- County Recorders recognise you
- Verifiers contact you if needed
- Your records gain trust more quickly
- Your long-term contributions build a reputation

2. Record with Reasonable Location Precision:

Precise locations are one of iNat's greatest strengths.

- Use your phone's GPS or a dedicated GPS device
- Aim for a reasonably precise pin
- Avoid very large accuracy circles

(I tend to use a 2 metre accuracy circle for over 95% of my records)

- Only obscure locations for genuinely sensitive species

For an alternative to obscuration, see NBN's guidance on pinned locations: https://uk.inaturalist.org/posts/62014-location-location-location

The aim is clarity, not perfection.

3. Provide Clear, Diagnostic Photographs:

A record is only as strong as its evidence.

- Multiple angles
- Close-ups of diagnostic features
- Habitat context where relevant
- Sharp, well-lit images

Essential for tricky taxa such as leaf mines, galls, bryophytes, lichens, and many invertebrates.

4. Change Your Licence Settings:

To allow UK conservation bodies to use your data:

- Set your observation licence to CC-BY
- Set your photo licence to CC-BY

Otherwise Local Environmental Record Centres cannot use your Research Grade observations.

5. Match the Location Name to the Pin (when practical):

Autogenerated names ("Near X", "Somewhere in Y") are often too vague.

- Edit the location name to reflect the actual place
- Use official site names (SSSI, LNR, reserve) when relevant

If the pin and text name disagree, verifiers may question which is correct.

6. Add the Life Stage for Invertebrates (and for other Orders):

Many UK schemes treat life stages separately.

- Add life stage (adult, larva, pupa, egg, or relevant elements such as flowering, green leaves, etc.)
- Use the "Life Stage" annotation

7. Add Brief Habitat or Micro-habitat Notes:

Examples:

- "Damp hollow, north-facing bank"
- "On rotten birch log, shaded"
- "Calcareous grassland margin"
- "Compacted path edge"

Important: These notes do not transfer to iRecord, even though iRecord has a field for them. Verifiers can click through to the original iNat record, but they won't know to unless prompted.

8. Avoid Over-reliance on AI Suggestions:

The computer vision tool is helpful but not authoritative.

- Treat suggestions as hints
- Only agree if confident
- Choose a higher taxon if unsure

This prevents incorrect IDs becoming Research Grade.

9. Engage with Identifiers and Verifiers:

Communication is valued in the UK system.

- Respond to questions
- Provide extra photos if asked
- Clarify habitat or location when needed
- Be open to correction

10. Use iNat's Strengths — Don't Fight Them:

iNat excels at:

- Photographic evidence
- Precise GPS
- Timestamped observations
- Distribution mapping
- Long-term continuity

These complement the UK's traditional systems beautifully.

11. Record Common Species as Well as Rare Ones:

Common species are essential for:

- Distribution modelling
- Habitat assessment
- Climate change studies
- Baseline monitoring

Recording them is ecological mapping, not padding.

12. Respect the UK Validation Pipeline:

iNat → iRecord → County Recorders → National Schemes.

To help verifiers:

- Ensure IDs are solid
- Provide clear evidence
- Avoid speculative IDs
- Keep your profile transparent

13. Contribute to the Community Where You Can:

If you have expertise:

- Help identify observations
- Confirm common species
- Correct misidentifications gently
- Support beginners

Summary:

High-quality iNat recording in the UK is built on:

- Accuracy
- Transparency
- Good evidence
- Ecological context
- Constructive engagement