How to record wildlife

Knowledge of the species present in an area can help protect important habitats, support scientists in monitoring populations, and help conservationists see how effective their work is.

All you need to do is note the wildlife you see around you. As long as it's not a pet, livestock, or an animal in the zoo, it's wildlife! There are some simple rules for recording them...

Follow the four Ws:

WHAT you saw

WHEN and **WHERE** you saw it

WHO is making the record (that's you)

You can note down any wildlife you see whilst out and about – this is called opportunistic recording. However, you can be more methodical by following an imaginary line, known as a transect, and recording at set distances along this line. For example, you could imagine a straight line all the way across your garden and record every five steps. Record for the same amount of time at each point so you can compare your data more easily.

If you want to quickly find out which wildlife is in a particular area, you can also conduct a BioBlitz: select an area (e.g. your garden, a park, or a bush), choose a short time (anywhere from five minutes to one day), get some people to help you and record as much as you can as you race against the clock.

However you decide to record, you don't need much equipment to get started. At minimum, you'll need a pen or pencil and something to write on. You could also bring a camera or smartphone to photograph your findings to help you identify them later. And you could use equipment to help you find or observe wildlife, such as binoculars, magnifying glasses, beating trays, or collection pots.

Some animals can be difficult to spot, but there are other ways to record them. You could look out for tracks and signs (footprints and poo) to know which animals have been visiting.

Once you have your record, make sure you submit it to an official scientific database so that it can be used to protect wildlife! Each area of the UK has its own Local Environmental Records Centre (LERC) that handles these records.

Chester Zoo's local LERC is called RECORD and you can send your wildlife records to them here: record-lrc.co.uk/swift/ You can also find your local records centre by visiting alerc.org.uk

RECORD

You can join a local group or take part in nationwide surveys like the Big Butterfly Count or the Big Garden Birdwatch to take your recording to the next level. Visit your local LERC website or get in touch with them to find surveys and groups in your area. And look at other Chester Zoo Awards sheets for ideas about other ways to help wildlife in your area.

Wildlife recording sheet

Chester Zoo LEARNING

What?	When?	Where?	Who?	How many?	Sex and life stage	Notes
Put the species name if you know it. It's important not to guess! Try to get a photo so you can ID the species later using a book, website, or the experts at your Local Environmental Records Centre (LERC).	The date you saw the species	Use a map or online tool https://record-lrc.co.uk/swift/mapapp/ to find the grid reference (six figure is best) as you may need to fill this in later. And note down a brief description of the location (e.g. "garden" or "nature reserve").	Your name and the name of the person who identified the species (this might also be you!)	How many individuals of that species you saw. If there are too many to count, or you're not sure, just write "present".	Put this down if you know it, or make a note to help you figure it out later.	Jot down any other interesting information about the record (e.g. a behaviour).

Bird food investigation recording sheet

Bird species	Tally of visits to...		
	Feeder 1 Type of food: _____	**Feeder 2** Type of food: _____	**Feeder 3** Type of food: _____

Bird food investigation - results

How many visits were made in total? _____

What was the most popular type of food? _____

What was the least popular type of food? _____

What percentage of all visits were made to each of the 3 types of food?

Food 1 **Food 2** **Food 3**

_____ _____ _____

Could create some graphs to present your results to others? You could try...

- A graph for each type of food showing how many of each species have visited
- A graph for each species you've seen, showing which type of foods they visited

Do you think different species of bird prefer different types of food?

Yes No

Why do you think this might be?

_____

_____

Further investigations

Try different foods.
Pick another 3 types of food from the list and repeat the investigation with these.

Does location make a difference?
Repeat the investigation using 3 of the same type of food but in different spots. Do you find that some locations are visited more than others? Why might this be?

Does time of year make a difference? Repeat the original investigation at a different time of year. For example compare the results for Spring and Winter. Are there any differences? Why do you think this is?

Research birds.
Use books or the internet to find out more about your garden birds. Why do you think they eat different foods? What adaptations do they have to these different foods? Why is it important to feed garden birds?

Garden bird spotter's guide

Chester Zoo LEARNING


Blue tit


Robin


Wren


Greenfinch


Starling


Magpie


Male
House sparrow


Female
House sparrow


Jackdaw


Male
Blackbird


Female
Blackbird


Wood pigeon


Great tit


Goldfinch


Collared dove

chesterzoo.org/learning