

The best apps for nature lovers – from identifying birdsong to tracking lions

Level 1: Elementary / Pre-Intermediate

1 Warmer

fungi: different types of organisms that get their food from dead things

a. Discuss the questions.

1. How many birds and other animals, plants, and fungi do you know that grow and live around you?
2. Is it important to know the names of the animals and plants around us? Why (not)?
3. Have you ever used an app to learn about plants or animals? Which one?

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

categorise

conservation

identify

sighting

track

1. A _____ is an occasion where you see something, especially something uncommon to see.
2. _____ is the protection of natural areas and the plants and animals in them, especially from human activity.
3. To _____ is to put things into groups with the same characteristics.
4. To _____ is to recognise something and say what that thing is.
5. To _____ is to follow someone or something using electronic equipment or other means.

coast

log

match

migrate

threaten

6. To _____ is to travel to a different place when the season changes.
7. To _____ is to put information into a written record.
8. If something is a _____, it is similar to something else.
9. The _____ is the land next to the ocean.
10. To _____ is to be likely to harm or damage something.

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b. Complete each sentence with one of the words from the previous activity. You may have to change the form of the words.

1. We are selling cakes to collect money for wildlife _____.
2. This is a memory game. You have to pick up two cards and try to find a _____.
3. The school is closed for today after there was a _____ of a lion.
4. Scientists _____ birds into different orders, like waterfowl birds, pigeons, parrots, and owls.
5. In our next biology test, we have to _____ all the different parts of a cell.
6. We always visit the Spanish _____ in April. Last year, we stayed at a beautiful hotel on the beach.
7. Monarch butterflies _____ from Canada to Mexico in the winter.
8. Scientists _____ the movements of whales that travel to Alaska.
9. For our biology class, we planted a seed. Now we must oversee it and _____ how it grows.
10. Too much fishing _____ ocean life.

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Anna Turns

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1 It's now possible to identify everything from mystery animal tracks to birdsong with an app. Your sightings could add important information to scientific studies and conservation efforts worldwide. Here's how.

2 **Seek**

Perfect to help you categorise the different plants, animals, and fungi you find: take photos with your phone, and Seek will identify the species and give you some facts.

Free. iOS and Android

3 **ChirpOMatic**

Identify songbirds with ChirpOMatic. Do you wish you could tell the difference between the sound of a bunting and a blackbird? ChirpOMatic can help. Designed by scientists, this simple-to-use birdsong-recognition app has versions for western Europe, North America, the Caribbean and Australia.

£3.99. iOS and Android

4 **Animal Tracker**

Follow the movements of wild animals that are tracked in real-time. From seabirds on the south Devon coast to lions in Namibia, you can follow them as they migrate, see past movements, or log your own sightings.

Free. iOS and Android

5 **eBird**

If, like many serious birders, you like a checklist, this app is for you. Available in 27 languages, eBird enables you to track your wild bird list by year, local path or however you decide.

Free. iOS and Android

6 **LeafSnap**

Take photos of the plants around you to identify them. Just click on leaf, flower, fruit, or bark to help the app categorise your plant, and LeafSnap will scan your image and show the closest matches. If more than one option is listed, it's up to you to compare and identify your plants.

Free or £3.59/month for ad-free version. iOS and Android

7 **Seagrass Spotter**

If you're swimming, kayaking, or diving along the coast, you might wonder what the grassy carpets under you are. App users can log sightings of seagrass anywhere in the world. The Seagrass Spotter makes it easy to tell which seagrass is which.

8 **SkyView Lite**

Open a window onto the night sky –point your tablet or smartphone camera up, and you'll discover which stars or planets you're looking at. It's also easy to use without Wi-Fi, so it's perfect for campers.

Free. iOS and Android

9 **WWF Forests**

This option is great if you cannot go outside to experience nature. The Forests app takes you on a tour of forests from your living room. As you move the screen around the room, you can learn facts about forests, including what is threatening the wildlife living below. Tree monkeys and tigers appear on the journey, and you can build your own forest.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Which app is each sentence talking about? Write the name of each app.

1. identify and log a sea plant
2. identify species of animals, fungi, and plants
3. identify the songs of different birds
4. learn about stars and planets
5. see where an animal is moving to
6. take a forest tour
7. take a picture and learn about a plant
8. track your wild bird list

4 Key language

a. Complete the *verb + noun* collocations from the article. More than one answer may be possible.

1. take _____
2. log _____
3. identify _____
4. categorise _____
5. scan an _____
6. experience _____
7. learn _____

b. Complete the questions with verbs from task A. Then, ask and answer the questions with a partner.

1. Do you like to _____ photos of nature?
2. Can you _____ three different plants? Which ones?
3. Would you like to learn to _____ plants/animals/fungi?
4. When was the last time you _____ nature? Where were you?
5. What facts have you _____ about nature?

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss the following statements.

- It is important to learn about the plants and animals around you, even if you live in a town or city.
- It's not necessary to go into nature when you can experience nature on your phone or tablet.
- When we learn more about the plants and animals around us, we want to take better care of them.

6 In your own words

a. Choose and download a nature app. It can be from the article or a different one. Use it and make notes about the points below:

- easy/difficult to use
- few/many features
- a lot of/not much information
- can/cannot connect with other app users
- fun/boring
- free/cheap/expensive

b. Write a short review of the app. Use your notes.

Useful language

It's ... to use.

It has ... features.

There is ... information about ...

You can ...

It allows you to...

It's ... (adjective).