

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

### Level 3: Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

a. Categorise the words below any way you like. Look up any words you don't know.

bunting	blackbird	constellation	fungi	hoopoe
kittiwake	lion	oak tree	oyster	planet
seagrass	star	temperate forest	tiger	tree monkey

b. Add different species to each category.

#### 2 Key words

a. Find words in the text to fill the gaps. An example sentence containing each word has been given. The paragraph number where the word can be found has also been provided.

1. If something is \_\_\_\_\_, it isn't easy to find or see. (paragraph 1)  
*Okapis are so \_\_\_\_\_ that Western scientists only discovered their existence in the early 1900s.*
2. \_\_\_\_\_ are types of organisms like mushrooms and mould that get their food from decaying material. (paragraph 2)  
*While we can eat some \_\_\_\_\_ like button and oyster mushrooms, many others are fatal when ingested.*
3. A \_\_\_\_\_ is an organism, such as a bacterium or fungus, that makes dead animal and plant material decay. (paragraph 2)  
\_\_\_\_\_ play a critical role in ecosystems by making nutrients available to other organisms.
4. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a creature. (paragraph 2)  
*South Carolina is home to the copperhead and several species of rattlesnakes. Please watch out for dangerous \_\_\_\_\_ in the area.*
5. \_\_\_\_\_ is when a bird or insect builds a structure to leave their eggs in to develop. (paragraph 3)  
*Warning: proceed with caution. A pair of falcons are breeding and \_\_\_\_\_ close to this trail.*

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6. If something is \_\_\_\_\_, it wears a piece of metal or plastic or an electronic device so that people can know where it is or get information about it. (paragraph 4)  
*The organisation studies \_\_\_\_\_ tiger sharks, great white sharks and whale sharks.*
7. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a person who works to protect the environment, usually from harmful human activity. (paragraph 4)  
*She has been named as \_\_\_\_\_ of the year and is one of the most influential people driving climate action.*
8. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a person whose job it is to protect a natural park. (paragraph 4)  
*The hikers lost their way in the storm but were found the following day by an on-duty park \_\_\_\_\_, who saved their lives.*
9. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a line of different bushes and small trees that grow together, usually along the side of roads or fields in the countryside. (paragraph 6)  
*More farmers are tearing down fences and planting more \_\_\_\_\_ to improve soil health.*
10. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a field with grass and sometimes flowers in it. (paragraph 7)  
*My favourite painting in the exhibit was the landscape of a beautiful \_\_\_\_\_ with dark clouds on the horizon.*
11. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a safe place. (paragraph 7)  
*With a thousand acres spanning over hills and valleys, the national park is a \_\_\_\_\_ for rare butterflies.*
12. To \_\_\_\_\_ is to step on, causing damage. (paragraph 7)  
*The farmers' crops were \_\_\_\_\_ by the herd of impala who wandered in from the reserve.*
13. If something is \_\_\_\_\_, it seems to surround the person so they feel completely involved in it. (paragraph 9)  
*Walking with gorillas, sure! But swimming with sharks is not the \_\_\_\_\_ experience in nature I would choose.*
14. A \_\_\_\_\_ is the leaves and branches at the top of a group of trees that form a roof. (paragraph 9)  
*The government has unveiled a new strategy to save the local tree \_\_\_\_\_.*

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***Phones often get the blame for distracting users, but technology can also be a powerful way to connect with the natural world***

**Anna Turns**

**26 October, 2023**

1 With a phone at your fingertips, the world is your oyster, or hoopoe, or oak tree. It's now possible to identify everything from mystery animal tracks to elusive birdsong via an app. Beyond that, your sightings could contribute valuable information to scientific studies and conservation efforts around the globe. While phones often get the blame for distracting users from their physical environment, technology can also be a way to connect with the natural world. Here's how.

#### 2 **Seek**

Perfect for curious kids who are keen to categorise the different plants, animals and fungi they come across: take photos with your phone and Seek will identify the species and outline some key facts. Depending on your region, the app will suggest common species to look out for and set you themed seasonal challenges so you can look for everything from decomposers to urban nature or pond critters and pollinators. The flagship iNaturalist app opens up access to a global community that can confirm logged observations – and is a great tool for local bioblitz surveys.

*Free. iOS and Android*

#### 3 **ChirpOMatic**

Identify songbirds with ChirpOMatic. Do you wish you could tell the difference between the call of a bunting and a blackbird? Listen to a soundscape with ChirpOMatic and all will be revealed. On iPhones, ChirpOMatic also has "bird-safe mode" – by holding your phone to your ear and listening to the app like you would a phone call, you won't risk disturbing nesting or breeding birds with confusing calls when playing back a recording. Designed by scientists, this simple-to-use birdsong-recognition app has versions covering western Europe, North America, the Caribbean and Australia.

*£3.99. iOS and Android*

#### 4 **Animal Tracker**

Follow the movements of wild animals being tracked in real-time. From tagged kittiwakes on the south Devon coast to lions on the prowl in Namibia, you can follow as they migrate, see past movements, or log your own sightings. Everything gets stored within the Movebank Research Database, a free online interactive mapping tool hosted by the Max Planck Institute of Animal Behaviour. Learn while contributing to a valuable citizen science resource for conservationists, rangers and researchers globally.

*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. You can explore popular hotspots in your area and record sightings while you're on the move. Real-time eBird alerts are especially useful if you're hoping to catch a glimpse of a rare bird.

*Free. iOS and Android*

#### 6 **LeafSnap**

Snap pics of unusual-looking plants in your flowerbeds, hedgerows and woodland to identify them. The app works best when you focus on one plant at a time. Just click on leaf, flower, fruit or bark to help the app categorise your plant, then 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. The paid-for version comes without pop-up ads and with extra features, including tips for plant care. You can also use the app to remind you of plant-care regimes so you won't forget to water or feed them.

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

#### 7 **Seagrass Spotter**

If you're swimming, rock pooling, kayaking or diving among the coastal shallows, you might wonder what the grassy meadows beneath you are. Seagrasses are the only flowering plants able to live in seawater, and restoring these underwater wildlife havens is a crucial step towards restoring ocean health. App users

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can log sightings of seagrass anywhere in the world. The Seagrass Spotter, hosted by marine conservation charity Project Seagrass, makes it easy to tell which seagrass is which. You can even record an absence of seagrass – they're vulnerable to damage, trampling and polluting – providing data used by marine scientists to build a more accurate picture of seagrass distribution and, ultimately, help protect it.

#### 8 SkyView Lite

Open a window onto the night sky – just point your tablet or smartphone camera up and you'll discover which stars or constellations you're gazing at. You'll know when the International Space Station is flying overhead or be able to identify distant planets. It's also easy to use without Wi-Fi, so it's perfect for campers and remote ramblers.

*Free. iOS and Android*

#### 9 WWF Forests

This is a playful option from environmental charity World Wide Fund for Nature, ideal if you're unable to get outside to experience nature first-hand. Using augmented virtual reality, the Forests app takes you on an immersive tour of temperate forests from the comfort of your living room. By clicking on symbols as you move the screen around the room, you can uncover facts about forests, including what is threatening the wildlife living below the canopy. Tree monkeys and tigers appear at various stages of the journey, and eventually, you can construct your own forest.

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### 3 Comprehension check

a. Complete the table with information about each app.

App	Whom it is aimed to	Main features
Seek		
ChirpOMatic		
Animal Tracker		
eBird		
LeafSnap		
Seagrass Spotter		
SkyView Lite		
WWF Forests		

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#### 4 Key language

a. Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right to make collocations from the text. Then, check your answers in the text.

- |                       |                 |
|-----------------------|-----------------|
| 1. valuable           | a. community    |
| 2. scientific         | b. conservation |
| 3. seasonal           | c. challenges   |
| 4. global             | d. charity      |
| 5. logged             | e. information  |
| 6. interactive        | f. meadows      |
| 7. coastal            | g. observations |
| 8. grassy             | h. reality      |
| 9. underwater         | i. shallows     |
| 10. marine            | j. studies      |
| 11. environmental     | k. tool         |
| 12. augmented virtual | l. wildlife     |

b. Write five questions containing one of the collocations from the previous activity. Discuss your questions.

#### 5 Discussion

a. Do you agree with these statements? Discuss your opinions.

- It is essential for all individuals, even those living in urban contexts, to familiarise themselves with the living organisms around them.
- Virtual nature experiences available on electronic devices will eventually eliminate the need for physical outings.
- Environmental education is essential. It is the best way to foster awareness and responsibility.
- Outdoor school trips will always impact young minds more than nature apps.

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#### 6 In your own words

a. Choose and download a nature app. Explore it and make notes.

- User-friendliness
- Features and functionality
- Interesting facts
- Educational content
- Quantity/Quality of logged data
- Community
- Playfulness
- Sharing options
- Price
- Other

b. Use your notes to write a review of the app.

#### Useful language

*Do you wish you could ...? This app can help.*

*Perfect for those who ... / This app is ideal if you ...*

*If you like ..., this app is for you.*

*You can ... / The app allows you to... / The app makes it easy to ...*

*Its ... feature is handy.*

*The paid-for version comes with/without ...*

*Designed/Hosted by ..., the app ...*