

January EcoQuest: Make the Grade

iNaturalist has unwrapped the [Year in Review](#), showcasing highlights and scientific triumphs from the year. Let's take a moment to celebrate our local community.

For the Denver-Boulder metro EcoFlora project, in 2023 we contributed over 80,000 total observations—10,000 more observations than last year. We spotted 1,250 plant species and 255 fungi and lichen species, for 1,505 total species observed in the area. Kudos to the 5,500+ observers and nearly 1,500 identifiers who made this possible! Shout out to the Research & Conservation Department at Denver Botanic Gardens who contributed over 500 observations in 2023.

Despite this achievement, over 52,000 observations are eagerly awaiting their research-grade gold star. In fact, of the 323,560 observations included in the Denver EcoFlora project, 51% have not made research grade status. This month let's work together to practice our identification skills by reviewing these observations so they can make the grade.

To achieve research grade, two or more reviewers must agree on the same species name. Once they've made the grade, these observations are uploaded to the [Global Biodiversity Information Facility](#) database of more than 1 billion biodiversity records. Your observations can then be used by researchers worldwide to answer questions such as the past and potential spread of invasive species, the influence of climate change on biodiversity, the role of rare species in protecting critical ecosystem functions, and the identification of priority areas for plant conservation.

You can also use this opportunity to hone your plant identification skills. Pick a few species – maybe your favorite wildflowers, or a group that has piqued your curiosity. Learn the characteristics of these, and then apply this knowledge to the Denver EcoFlora observations. From the project page on [iNaturalist](#), simply click on "Observations" and then "Identify." You can narrow this list down by entering a specific species in the search box. We can't wait to see how many observations make the grade.



Spargularia media, [erniem](#), some rights reserved, CC BY 4.0



Platanthera dilatata, [zerkenbeck](#), some rights reserved, CC BY-NC 4.0



Hydnum peckii, [alexmerryan](#), some rights reserved, CC BY-NC 4.0

What is an EcoQuest?

EcoQuests, part of the Denver EcoFlora project, challenge citizens to become citizen scientists and observe, study and conserve the native plants of the City via iNaturalist, an easy-to-use mobile app.

How Do I Get Started?

1. Download the iNaturalist app or register online at [iNaturalist.org](#).
2. Take photos of the plants in bloom that you find on your daily neighborhood walk. It is ok if they are weeds! But avoid taking photos of cultivated plants in gardens or in your home.
3. If you are concerned about revealing the location of sensitive organisms or observations at your own house, you can hide the exact location from the public by changing the "geoprivacy" of the observation to "obscured."

4. Post your findings on iNaturalist via the app.
5. Your observations will automatically be added to the [Denver EcoFlora Project](#).
6. You can add an identification to your photo when you post your findings on iNaturalist, or leave it blank for others to identify.



Photo by Scott Dressel-Martin

What is the Goal?

The EcoFlora project is designed to meaningfully connect citizens with biodiversity, and to assemble novel observations and data on the metro area's flora to better inform policy decisions and conservation strategies.