

Strengths and limitations and of iNaturalist for plant research

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iNaturalist (<https://www.inaturalist.org/>) defines itself as an ‘online social network of people sharing biodiversity information to help each other learn about nature’, and it is likely the largest citizen science web portal of the world as it includes over 88 million observations of nearly 345,000 species produced by a community of almost 2 million users by January 2022 (for plants, about 36 million observations of nearly 128,000 species by 1,3 million users). The strengths and potentialities that explain the success of the platform are reviewed and include, among others, its easiness of use and low technical requirements (just a camera and internet connection are needed), immediacy (with the App installed on a mobile phone the observations are published instantly, linking the images taken with the GPS coordinates), open-access (released under a Creative Commons license by default), the possibility of interacting with other users (which allows, among other things, to be helped and to aid identification--crowdsourced species identification), artificial intelligence-aided identification (only for the App), versatility ('projects' can be created for certain species or regions or a certain time scale, which makes it a very useful tool for educational or Bioblitz-type projects), and the automatic incorporation of the ‘validated’ records (labeled as research grade) to GBIF, the main platform for biodiversity data on a planetary scale. Limitations of iNaturalist are also identified (e.g. lack of representative photographs for many observations, or the relatively high frequency of identification errors) with suggestions to fix them being finally provided.

