

## January EcoQuest: Make the Grade

iNaturalist has unwrapped the [Year in Review](#), showcasing highlights and scientific triumphs from 2024. We'd like to take a moment to celebrate our Denver-Boulder metro community by sharing local statistics and photos.

For the Denver-Boulder Metro EcoFlora project, in 2024 we contributed over 90,000 total observations, about 10,000 more observations than last year! We spotted 1,378 plant species and 228 fungi and lichen species, for 1,606 total research-grade species observed in the area. Around 20 of those species are threatened, vulnerable or endangered. Kudos to the 6,200+ observers and over 1,500 identifiers who made this possible!

Despite this achievement, over 55,000 observations are eagerly awaiting their research-grade gold star. In fact, of the nearly 420,000 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 better understand topics 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 and fungal identification skills. Pick a few species – maybe your favorite wildflowers, or a group that's piqued your curiosity. Learn the characteristics of them, 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.



Brittlegills (*Genus Russula*), [rhiannatruex](#), some rights reserved, CC BY-NC.



Wood Lily (*Lilium philadelphicum*), [astrobirdr](#), no rights reserved, Public Domain.



Hyaline Liverwort (*Clevea hyalina*), [wardrop](#), some rights reserved, CC BY-NC.

### 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.

### 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.

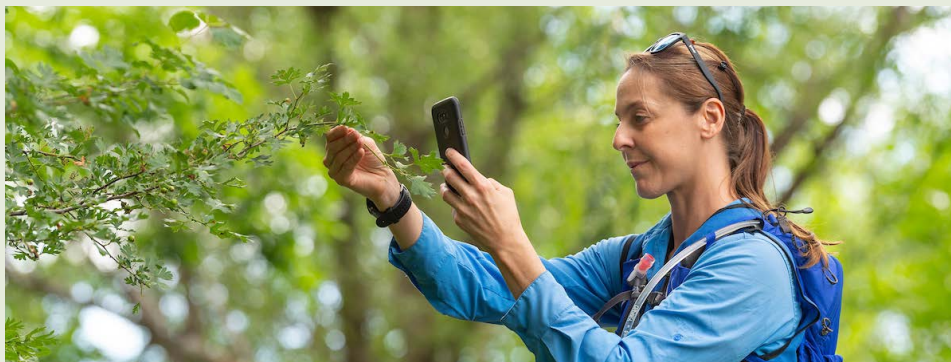


Photo by Scott Dressel-Martin