

Online Recording - Are you feeling baffled?



We are often asked how the Cofnod Online Recording System (ORS) relates to other systems such as iRecord, iNaturalist, and the LERC Wales App (to name a few) and where recorders should submit their data to ensure that it is available for the benefit of nature conservation in North Wales. It may seem at times as though there is a proliferation of systems available for use, which can lead to confusion.

The most important thing to remember is that 99% of the time **you shouldn't have to submit your records twice**. To do so not only wastes your time but may also lead to two slightly different versions of the same records in circulation, or at the very least a duplicate set of records. If you are not sure whether we will be able to access records entered as part within a particular system then please do contact Aisling (Cofnod's Data Manager) to check.

The second thing to realise is that each system is different, and **one may be right for some of your records but not others**. If you are someone with wide-ranging recording interests, especially if you record inside and outside the Cofnod area, you may need to use more than one system.

If you record quite a few different species groups, and are potentially quite new to recording, it is likely that you will find it easiest to use one of the **generalist online recording systems** such as the **Cofnod ORS** or **iRecord**. These are actually quite similar, in fact the Cofnod ORS, BirdTrack and the online recording system developed by our neighbouring LERC in Cheshire all pre-dated iRecord and we were happy to contribute our ideas and experience during its initial development. **BirdTrack** can also now be used for more generalist recording as it allows records of some other species (including Mammals and Dragonflies) to be entered.



Using one of these systems means that your records should be available **immediately** to the relevant County Recorder or other expert covering a particular area and species group, usually representing a **National Recording Scheme or Society**, who will check and **verify** many of the records. There are local verifiers set up on the Cofnod ORS for all the most frequently recorded species groups – not all of these individuals also verify on iRecord although there are national experts who play a role in verifying some of these groups. On the Cofnod ORS automated checks are used to **prioritise** the records which are most in need of verification, either because the species concerned are relatively **difficult to identify**, or because the species is **outside its known range**. It may also be that the **time of year is unlikely** for this species.



Records submitted using the **LERC Wales App** are actually held in the iRecord database, as this App is based on a number of others that feed into this system. **Data held in iRecord is available to Cofnod** but must be downloaded on a regular basis and imported into our database. There have been technical difficulties with managing this data flow, but we hope that the process will be speedier and more efficient in the future. However, without considerable technical advances there will be at least a **delay** of several months between a record being entered onto iRecord (or using the LERC Wales App) and it being available for use in the Cofnod database. We also have to wait until records are verified on iRecord before we use them on the Cofnod database, **so depending on the species group, verification may take place more rapidly when records are entered directly onto the Cofnod ORS**.

Using an **app** has the advantage of you being able to submit your records while in the field, if you have **mobile phone coverage**. Apps generally store the information temporarily on the phone until you do have coverage. **The Cofnod ORS can be used very effectively on a smartphone**, but only where you have mobile signal. Whether you are using an app or a smartphone you need to have **GPS coverage** to generate an accurate grid reference while in the field.



iNaturalist is a relative newcomer to the Wales recording scene – it is an internationally used online recording platform with an emphasis on attaching photographs to records and gathering consensus from other users as to the correct species name. iNaturalist records are now being shared with iRecord, and are being verified as part of that system, at which point it would be available to us together with all other iRecord data. **BirdTrack data** is also available to Cofnod but this is supplied to us annually, so there is a longer wait before records are available.

If you are collecting records as part of a specific **monitoring project or to contribute to a particular Recording Scheme or Society** then there will generally be a recognised method for data submission, and that is the one you should use for those records, as there will be quite **specific information** which needs to be captured. It may be that it is based on one of the systems mentioned above, for example there are quite a few monitoring projects which have been set up within the Cofnod ORS for certain species, covering North Wales and even Wales as a whole, but potentially another system will be preferred. In some instances **County Recorders** may also advise that they prefer records to be sent to them directly, for them to submit to Cofnod as part of annual updates, or entered onto a specific system such as the BTO's **BirdTrack**.



In summary, please talk to us or the relevant County Recorder if you are unsure as to the best method of data submission for you. Perhaps try out one or two of the options discussed above to see which one suits you best, and remember the wider your recording interests, the more options you may need to use. At the end of the day, data will be shared between the systems referred to above and Cofnod, as well as with County Recorders, but the speed at which this happens will vary.