

Becoming an URBAN FIELD NATURALIST in

# A FEW SIMPLE STEPS



## 2. OBSERVE

We can hone our skills at really paying attention to what is happening in front of us and around us. Use all your senses to **OBSERVE CLOSELY**. Watch for those small movements, those tiny differences— which insects are visiting this particular flower, what are they up to? Listen carefully to how a bird's call changes in different circumstances. Smell the different scents on the wind at a given time of day or season. We might even touch and taste the world around us, too (albeit only when we know it is safe to do so—don't go tasting mysterious plants or mushrooms). To observe in this way is to go well beyond creating an inventory of the particular species we've spotted; it is to take the first step towards crafting new understandings.

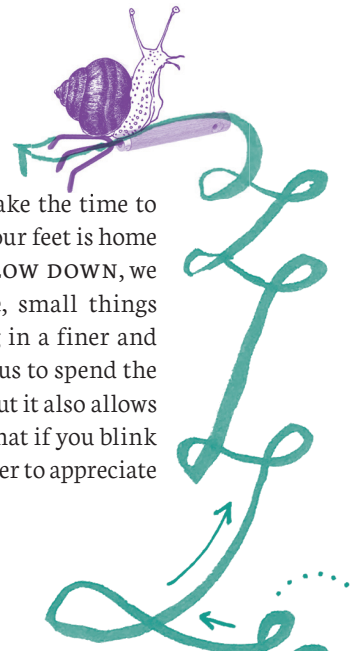
## 4. ASK QUESTIONS

Cultivate our curiosity about why the things we're observing are as they are. This requires us to move beyond absorbing facts and experiences and into a genuine inquisitiveness about what they mean: **ASK QUESTIONS**. Why are some animals more abundant on some days? Why do some plants thrive in cities and others disappear? The more we observe and learn, the more we realise we don't know, and the better our questions become. Becoming curious about the 'why' behind what animals and plants do makes everything that much more interesting. All sorts of resources exist for learning more about animals and plants, including their behaviours, in ways that can inform our questions. The guides and stories on this site are intended as information and inspiration in this endeavour, but you might also consult materials specific to your particular place and the species that interest you.



## 1. SLOW DOWN

There is a world of activity going on all around us; take the time to pause and really pay attention. Even the soil beneath our feet is home to a startling variety of diverse creatures. When we **SLOW DOWN**, we move beyond the immediately obvious and visible, small things become noticeable and we can appreciate everything in a finer and more nuanced grain. This kind of attention requires us to spend the time necessary to see slow-motion processes unfold, but it also allows us to tune into things that are happening so rapidly that if you blink you might miss them. When we **SLOW DOWN** it is easier to appreciate the living world in all its diverse scales and paces.



## 3. RECORD AND COLLECT

Keep close records of observations. We can do this in a variety of ways, from writing or drawing in a field journal to a photograph, a video, or an audio recording. Whatever way we **RECORD AND COLLECT**, it's a good idea to keep track of when and where things occurred, perhaps also the weather and environmental conditions. In general, the more detail we're able to capture, the better—we often don't know what is most interesting or important about an observation until much later. Videos, in particular, can allow us to revisit a particular interaction or behaviour, to slow it down and pause, to listen and glean things that we might otherwise have missed. In some circumstances it may be appropriate to collect specimens that can be shared and studied further. There are also now a variety of online biodiversity databases—like iNaturalist and eBird—that allow us to both record and share observations.



## 5. SHARE

We can pass our observations, our insights, and our questions on to others. There is a whole world of interested people out there who we might learn from—or even have something to teach. Our observations might be invaluable to others; they might feed into a broader web of information that helps us all, as a community, to see and understand the world a little differently. Some of the online biodiversity databases mentioned above provide a platform not just for recording but to **SHARE** and discuss observations. Of course, you can also send The Urban Field Naturalist Project a short story.

Finally, we begin the process again, with all that we have learnt informing our efforts to appreciate and understand our living world in all its complexity, beauty and rawness.

