



Natural Values Atlas Newsletter

Issue 7. Autumn 2023

New records

Over 100,000 new species observation records have been added to the NVA since the 1st of September 2022. The major contributions were from Birdlife Australia (~33,000 records from King Island and NW Tasmania), Barcode of Life Data (~29,000 records) as well as around 20,000 research grade iNaturalist records. Another 3750 records from the NERP Marine Biodiversity Hub were also incorporated into the NVA. Just over 2270 records were submitted under the UTAS Wombat Mange project and around 1230 records under the Fish and River Health project. Approximately 1775 records were contributed by environmental consultancies (primarily North Barker Ecosystem Services, EcoTAS, Van Diemen Consulting and GHD) and around 2180 records were contributed by the Tasmanian Museum (1770) and Queen Victoria Museum (410). Kingborough Council submitted almost 1400 records.

iNaturalist

We are continuing to incorporate Tasmanian 'research grade' species records from iNaturalist into the NVA database, and as indicated in the 'New Records' section we have recently added around 20,000 iNaturalist records to the NVA. However, these data loads are now scheduled to occur on a six-monthly basis, rather than bi-monthly, or quarterly, as was previously the case. This is because, instead of harvesting the data ourselves, directly from

iNaturalist, the data is now being provided to the NVA in bulk by the iNaturalist Australia site administrators. The reasons we are now sourcing the data in this way are twofold: 1. it's a more efficient process than our previous method, and 2. sourcing the data this way means that the iNaturalist Australia site administrators can provide us with the accurate location coordinates for records of threatened taxa where iNaturalist is automatically obscuring the precise locations.



Tasmanian devils, Sarcophilus harrisii investigating a wombat carcass.
Photo: Bill Brown

In the case of obscured data, we should point out that the NVA is bound by iNaturalist's data licensing provisions, so while we are being provided with the precise location information, we cannot currently make the precise locations of any obscured iNaturalist records visible to general NVA users. Users who demonstrate a

NVA Support: support@naturalvaluesatlas.tas.gov.au

Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania

specific requirement to see these records may potentially be granted access to the data, on a case-by-case basis, provided they agree to abide by the relevant data licence conditions.



Broadlip bird-orchid, *Chiloglottis trapeziformis* flowering in Wynyard.
Photo: Angela Gardner

If, however, iNaturalist users would like to make sure the precise locations of their iNaturalist records are publicly available on the NVA, one way to ensure that happens, is to periodically (perhaps once every 2-6 months?) download your threatened species records from iNaturalist and send them directly to NVA support: support@naturalvaluesatlas.tas.gov.au.

To download your records, you need to:

- Log into iNaturalist
- Click on 'Your Observations'
- In the Location box type Tasmania and then choose 'Tasmania, Australia' from the dropdown list
- Click on the grey 'Filters' button (top right of the page)
- In the pop-up window tick the 'Threatened' and 'Research Grade' boxes.
- Toward the bottom right of the pop-up window there is a pair of date 'Range' boxes where you can (if you want to) specify start and end dates for the data export.
- At the bottom right of the pop-up window click 'Download'

- On the next page scroll to the bottom of the page and click 'Create Export'.

You can choose to wait for the data to be compiled and then click 'Download' on the screen, or have the system email the data to you once it has been compiled. Either way you should then attach the file you downloaded to an email and send it to NVA Support and we will then upload the data to the NVA.

Issues around restricted data

As we have indicated above, many data collection applications, including iNaturalist, automatically obscure the locations of records deemed to be 'sensitive'. The locations of threatened species records are often automatically obscured, and even where the precise locations are not obscured, these records may still be subject to restrictive data licencing conditions, or other proprietary restrictions, which result in them not being made available to the general public.

There are, of course, very good reasons for obscuring the locations of certain records. Some threatened species can be targeted by wildlife traffickers or collectors, and species can also be 'loved to death' by enthusiasts through over visitation to the known sites. Unfortunately, on occasion, some individuals have also been known to deliberately vandalise sites.



Australian Hobby, *Falco longipennis*. Photo: Adam Hardy



Currently only three plant species and one animal species have their data globally restricted on the NVA*. In the case of the plant species, the primary reason for restricting the location information is to protect the species from issues related to over visitation. In the case of the animal species, the data are restricted to reduce the risk of collection and trafficking of the species. The data for all other species are currently unrestricted on the NVA.



Dragonfly, swamp flat-tail, *Austrothemis nigrescens*. Photo: Michael Driessen

For many threatened species however, non-publication of their locations could potentially put them at greater risk. It is standard practice, for example, when conducting environmental assessments of proposed developments etc., to undertake a desktop analysis of the natural values in the area concerned, and in particular, to assess whether any threatened flora and fauna may potentially be impacted. Producing reports of this nature is of course one of the core functions of the NVA. If, however, the NVA data is unable to make precise location information available, or if relevant data is completely withheld, because the sensitivity of a species (perceived or real), vital information, which may help to protect species, may be missing from these types of assessments.

In general, the NVA team pursues a policy of minimising data restrictions. We understand and accept that it is sometimes necessary to restrict or obscure data for a species, but the following principles underpin our philosophy:

- maximise the free exchange and visibility of data.

- tailor obfuscation to fit the species concerned e.g. a rule devised for a bird may not work as well for an orchid.
- tailor any data restrictions to the Tasmanian jurisdiction – i.e. national rules often don't work well across all states and territories.
- minimise the degree of obfuscation and maximise data utility.

These principles are founded on the idea that most species will be best served by a robust and transparent environmental assessment process, and to support that process regulatory bodies, development proponents and the wider public, need to be fully informed about any natural values which may potentially be impacted.

* Note: Decisions around the restriction or otherwise of species data on the NVA are guided by advice from the Threatened Species Section within NRE Tas.

NVA User Tip – NVA Help

Recent discussions with NVA users have indicated that several people are unaware of the help that is available on the NVA website itself. On the blue menu bar at the top of the NVA web pages there is a menu item entitled Help and Support. If you hover your mouse over that menu, you can choose 'Help' from the dropdown list. This will open the NVA Help page. On this page you can search using key words to find information about different aspects of the NVA. Many help items are just simple explanations or definitions of NVA terms, but other items provide detailed step-by-step instructions about navigating particular areas of the NVA.



Deciduous beech, *Nothofagus gunni* leaves. Photo: David Storey



Some of the detailed instruction modules include:

- Geosite Search
- How to Enter Species Observation Data
- How to Submit a TASVEG Notification
- How to use the NVA Map Interface
- Interpreting Species Observation Data
- Natural Values Reports
- Range Boundaries

- Raptor Nest Records
- Searching for Shorebird Records
- Species Observation Search
- Species Search

The development and enhancement of help items is ongoing, so feel free to let us know if there is an area of the NVA for which you would particularly like us to develop a user instruction module.



Cool temperate rainforest at Sir John Falls, Gordon River, Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park Photo: David Storey

