Verification guidance for iRecord–BirdTrack record exchange

This document contains information on:

Background

[BirdTrack](#) (the online recording system that is provided by the British Trust for Ornithology and partners) is the main tool for bird recording in the UK. For some time it has also had options for recording additional species groups.

BRC has been working with BTO to develop a two-way exchange process, so that bird records added to iRecord can be shared with BirdTrack and verified at the BirdTrack end, while non-bird records from BirdTrack can be shared with iRecord for verification there.

This has been a complex piece of work but it is almost ready to go live, and we expect that it will be in place during February. The majority of records that will come through to iRecord initially will be of mammals and dragonflies/damselflies, which have been a part of BirdTrack for some years. From July 2021 coverage has been extended to include butterflies, amphibians, reptiles and orchids as well. For more information see this [BTO news page](#).

This will produce an additional influx of records for mammal and dragonfly verifiers, and over time verifiers for the other groups mentioned above will see records arriving from the BirdTrack source. BirdTrack records will form part of the main set of records on the "Verify – main" page. The notes below give some more information on the records and some issues that verifiers may need to bear in mind, as well as information on how to filter the records to view them separately and to check for levels of uncertainty in the grid references.

Contacting recorders

Records can be queried by adding comments, and these, along with any verification decisions, will be passed back to BirdTrack so that the original recorder can be notified of them. However, it will not be possible to email BirdTrack recorders directly.

Editing and redetermining records

It will not be possible to edit or redetermine BirdTrack records in iRecord (and these buttons will not be available for BirdTrack records on the verification page). If errors or misidentifications are found, the record will have to be rejected with a comment explaining what the problem is. Once the BirdTrack user sees that comment they may choose to edit their record in BirdTrack, in which case the corrected version will be re-imported to iRecord.

Photos and records

At the moment, few BirdTrack records are submitted with photos, and those that do will not be passed to iRecord. This situation may change in future as both systems continue to be developed.

Locations and grid references

Records arriving into BirdTrack have coordinates for latitude and longitude. In most cases these coordinates refer to the centre of the site (technically the centroid of the site polygon). Depending on how the record was entered, there may be a measure of uncertainty associated with the central coordinates, and the size of the uncertainty will vary depending on the size of the site to which the centre coordinates are linked. However, there will also be some records that have the central coordinates but no associated uncertainty measure (see Appendix below for more information).

In iRecord the centre location will be transformed into a grid reference ("output spatial reference") that will specify a grid square at the centre of the site. Where an uncertainty measure is available, the size of the grid square will reflect the uncertainty (i.e. on how large the site is). (The size of the grid square is equivalent to its precision, and determines whether the grid ref is shown with six figures, or four figures etc.)
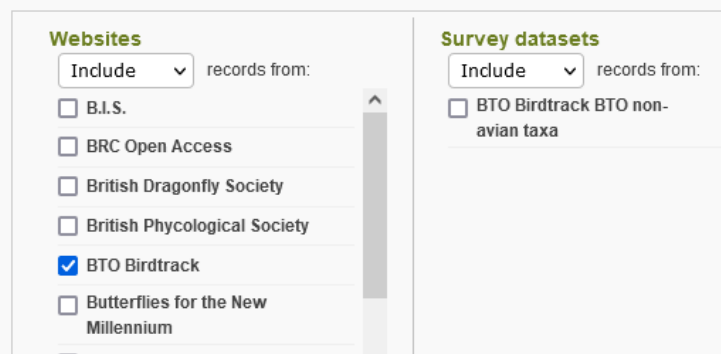
Where an uncertainty measure is not available, a Sample comment will be added, stating "BTO Coordinate Uncertainty: not recorded".

See also our separate guidance document on **filtering by coordinate uncertainty**, which shows how to select any records with high values of uncertainty in the grid reference. This is available on the verifiers' resources page on iRecord. The issue of imprecise grid references can also apply to records imported from iNaturalist, and a similar approach to filtering may help with those.

How to use filters to view BirdTrack records as a separate dataset

If you wish to view all BirdTrack records separately from your other records you can do by using the "Create a filter" button, then clicking on the "Source" settings. In the list of Websites, tick the box to include "BTO Birdtrack".

If you wish to exclude the BirdTrack records from your main set of verification records you can use the same settings, but change it to Exclude the BTO Birdtrack website.

If you would prefer to have a separate verification filter set up for BirdTrack, so that it is provided as a choice in the "Context" list at the top of your verification page, please contact us to request this (via irecord@ceh.ac.uk).
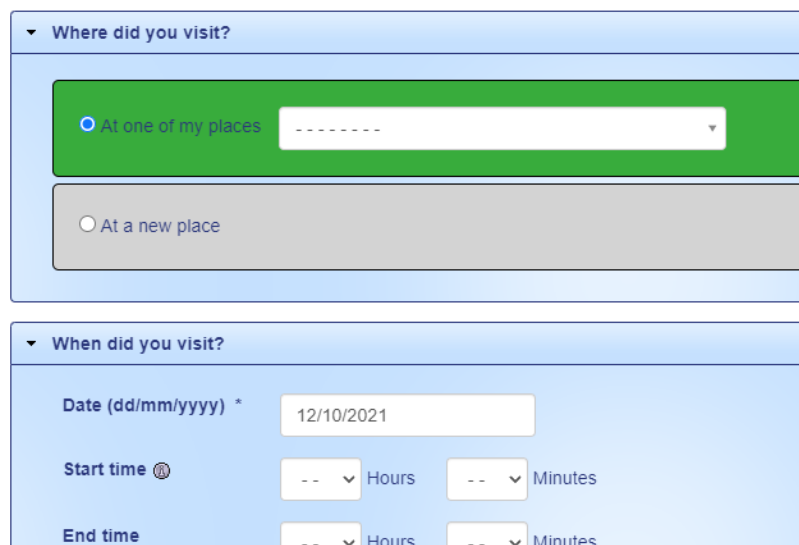
APPENDIX: how BirdTrack users supply location data

(Based on information provided by BTO in October 2021.)

Records entered on the BirdTrack website

Locations are usually referred to as "places" within BirdTrack. If a user if visiting a place that they have been to before, they would usually pick this place from their list of "My places":

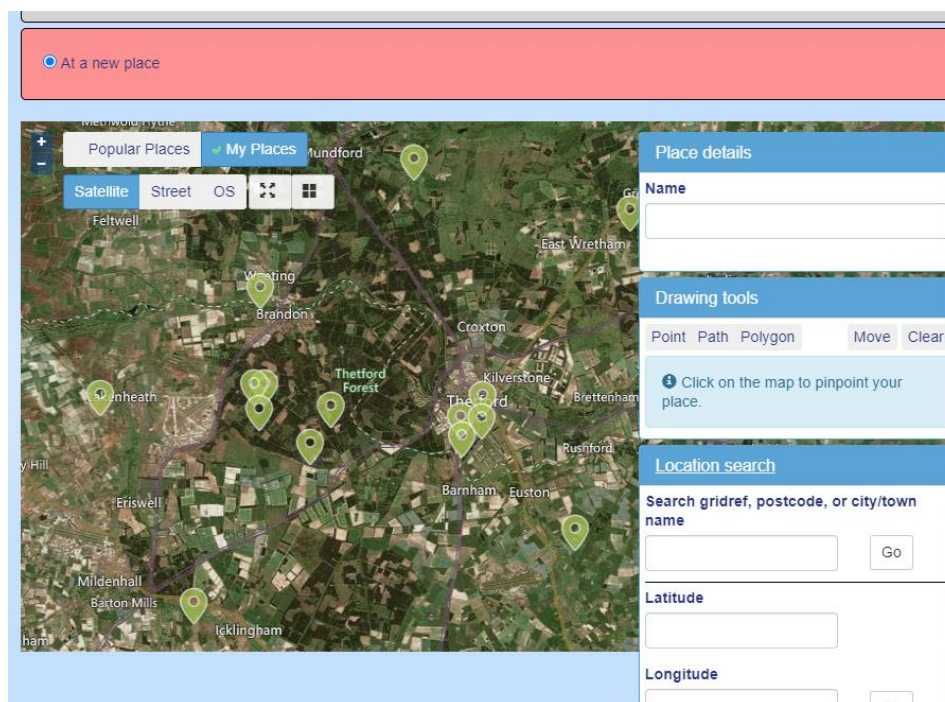**Add records - step 1 of 2**

A number of "Popular places" are pre-defined in the system, e.g. RSPB reserves. Observers can use these to record against, however they are also free to modify the boundary to reflect their own use of the site (the "Popular place" is then copied into their "My places" list). This means that each observer has their own "My places" list, and one observer's definition of, say, "RSPB Otmoor" may be different to another's.

The use of "Popular places" is optional. Observers can just define the places themselves (as a point, path, polygon or gridref).

When specifying a new location, the simplest option for recorders is just to click on the BirdTrack map, which gives a Point (but no idea of extent). Alternatively they can pick Path or Polygon, and draw these on the map. Or they can enter a gridref or postcode, which gives a square (a polygon) of the appropriate size (always 1km for postcode). Or they can enter a specific lat/long, which gives a point (again, with no idea of extent).

They must do one of these - otherwise they can't enter the records.

There are also places that were defined on the old BirdTrack system, where the observer entered a gridref and was shown a map with 1km, 2km and 10km squares - they were asked to say which size square their place fitted in. We don't have geometries for these places, unless the observer has chosen to edit their place and provide a boundary - which many users have done.

Records entered on the BirdTrack app

Records entered via the BirdTrack app are treated differently. New places on the app can only be defined as points, either from GPS or coordinates entered by the user. The uncertainly associated with the mobile device's GPS is not retained, as the recorder is likely to be walking some distance from the point where they create the site - this isn't a pinpoint for a specific record.

The user can also pick from the list of "My places" they've set up on the online system (webapp), which may have been defined as polygons, grid squares, etc.

The user can edit app-created places in the online system, to provide a more precise definition of the places after the event.