

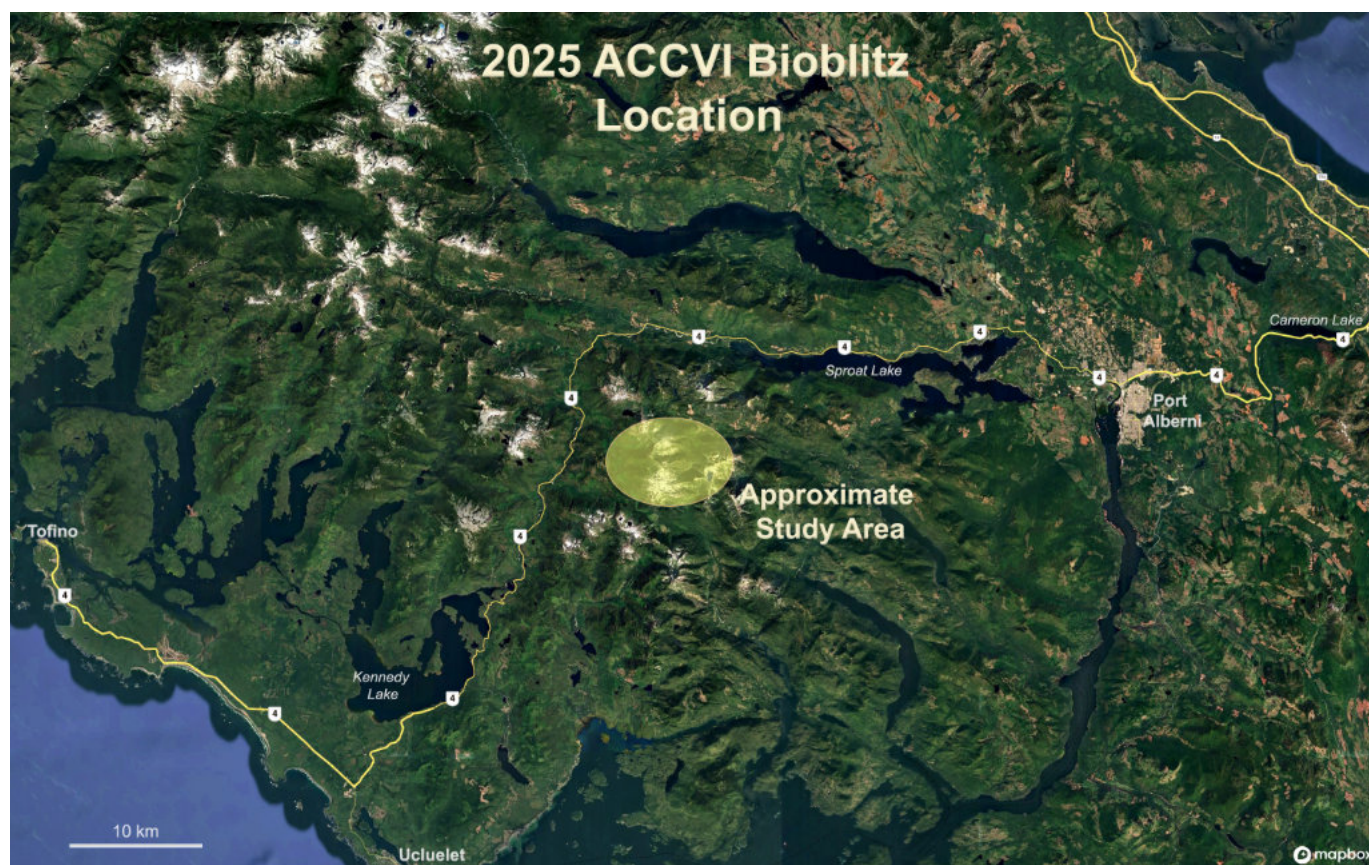
2025 BioBlitz at 5040 Peak*

Catrin Brown

July 29 - 31, 2025

What we planned

“I'm in! Happy to block those dates in my calendar”. Chad's quick reply to our email “Shall we BioBlitz again this summer?” was typical of the enthusiasm for the project generated from a similar event the previous summer. And so, with the support of a grant from the [ACC Environment Fund](#), Mary Sanseverino and I were again able to muster a fine team of experts and enthusiasts, and put our plan into action for a three-day BioBlitz at 5040 Peak in July 2025.



The yellow circle shows the area of study relative to HW 4 which runs east to west across central Vancouver Island. MAP DATA © GAIA GPS, © MAPBOX, © OPENSTREETMAP CONTRIBUTORS. IMAGERY © MAPBOX: [MAPBOX.COM/ABOUT/MAPS](https://mapbox.com/about/maps) . OPENSTREETMAP DATA: [OPENSTREETMAP.ORG/COPYRIGHT](https://openstreetmap.org/copyright)

*This report was submitted to ACC National as part of the terms of acceptance of a grant received from the ACC Environment Fund in 2025.

The BioBlitz concept is expansive but simple. At heart it is a communal effort to record as many species as possible, within a designated location and time period. The data collected provide a snapshot of local biodiversity. This is a baseline that can help track change in species composition over time, identify endemic species, and inform decisions of environmental management and stewardship. The communal part is important too – working together, people with diverse interests and depths of experience spark curiosity and learning within the group. In short, with the right group in the right place, a BioBlitz is a lot of fun.

The environs of 5040 Peak[1] was clearly the ‘right place’ for our planned BioBlitz. Situated on Vancouver Island west of Port Alberni, the area is accessed by steep trails leading to the peak at 1535 metres. With an altitude zonation of 900 metres from trailhead to summit, the region includes old growth forest, a treeline lake, alpine tarns and meadows, and the cliffy peak itself. Just below the peak’s east col is a limestone plateau with some unique geology[2]. This rich diversity of ecosystems represented in a relatively small area makes it a naturalist’s treasure trove.

The west shoulder of the peak is the site of the first (and so far the only) Alpine Club hut on Vancouver Island, Hišim’yawił[3], built by the Vancouver Island section and opened in 2018. Our section therefore has a strong interest in the stewardship of this region, and facilitated our use of the hut as a comfortable base for our three-day project.

The ‘right people’ also fell into place perfectly. We shoulder-tapped a few friends with known expertise in different areas, then advertised the event on the ACCVI schedule for open participation. The result was a diverse and happy team of twelve,



From Cobalt Lake there is a glorious view south to Triple Peak, 1557 metres. PHOTO BY DAVE SUTTILL



The geology on the plateau is beautiful as well as fascinating. PHOTO BY CATRIN BROWN

with different areas of knowledge and interest, eager to learn together and from each other. By the time we reached the trailhead on a sunny morning in late July, new friendships were forming and plans were set.

What we did

We had barely left the cars when the observations started. Using the app iNaturalist, we got to work observing and recording species as we hiked. The app makes it easy, as photos can be uploaded to the site at

the time or later, where they are identified by AI and a community of experts. All our observations over the three-day BioBlitz are then organised into one project on the iNaturalist site, with geotagging giving the exact location of each observation. And so we hiked, and looked, and took photos, and compared thoughts on identification, and hiked some more, and listened for birds, and took more photos. We may have set a new record for the slowest hike up the mountain — and possibly one of the most enjoyable getting up there too.



(L): Maddy and Aeltie checking out plants in the wet area at the base of the small waterfall, slightly north of the trail below Cobalt Lake. PHOTO BY DAVE SUTTILL



(R): Cobalt Lake is at 1160 metres on the route up. The summit of 5040 Peak and Hišimyaŵił are off to the left of the photo. PHOTO BY SIMONE LITLEDAL



Hišimyaŵił, the ACC hut, sits on the west shoulder of 5040 Peak. Not a bad place to work! PHOTO BY CATRIN BROWN



Dave at work. Slender Bog Orchid, *Platanthera stricta*. PHOTO BY CATRIN BROWN



Joel, Maddy, Catrin, Dave and Simon setting off. It's a steep climb through the forest to the lake and plateau above. PHOTO BY DAVE SUTTILL

Groups spontaneously formed with different focuses. The birders set a faster pace, perhaps trying to listen more clearly away from the group's chatter. For others the interest was closer to the ground, studying invertebrates and swamp plants. Some spent longer on the relatively dry slopes above Cobalt Lake. Everyone was busy.

After a busy day observing, it was good to re-group at Hišim'yawił in the evening to enjoy a shared dinner and spectacular sunset.



Hišim'yawił is a perfect place to enjoy a convivial meal after a long day's work.
PHOTO BY CATRIN BROWN

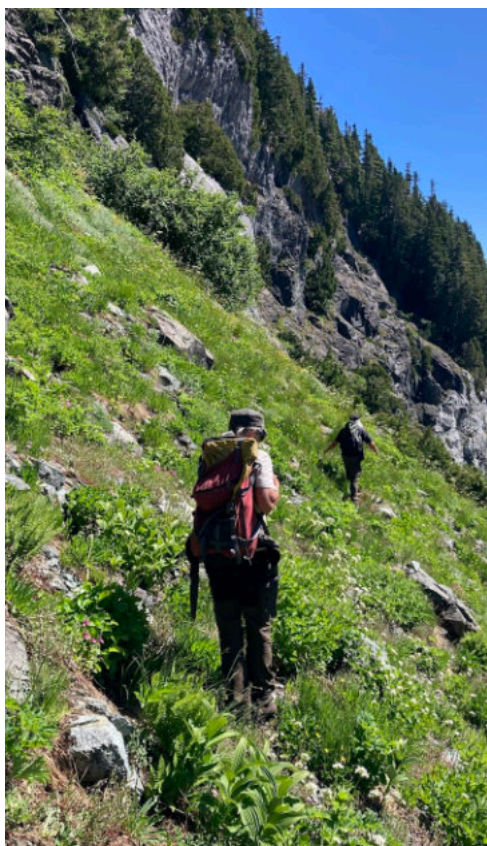


Sunsets from Hišim'yawił are often spectacular, showcasing the Island mountains as far as Strathcona Park to the north. PHOTO BY ALCINA DE OLIVEIRA

Setting out from the hut on the second day, we spread out in small groups, covering a great deal of the chosen terrain.



Rick at the east col looking up at the ridge towards Nahmint Mountain. PHOTO BY PHEE HUDSON



(L): Alpine botanists Paul and Chad making their way across some little explored terrain to the south of the Nahmint Mountain west ridge. PHOTO BY AELTIE NOYES

(R): Looking down from the col at Catrin and Alcina exploring the limestone plateau. PHOTO BY PHEE HUDSON



Top: Joel making observations as he and Dave scrambled up from the plateau to the north ridge of 5040 Peak.
PHOTO BY DAVE SUTTILL

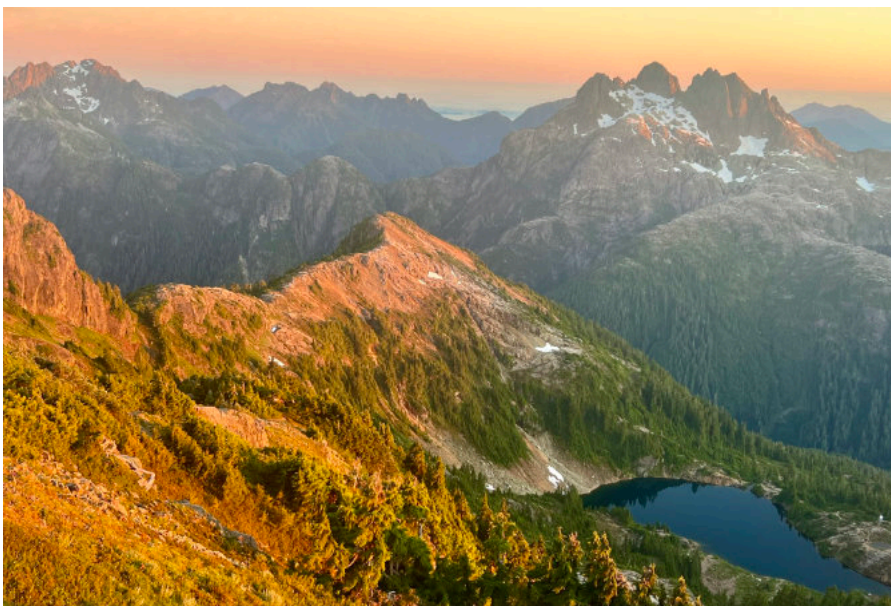
Centre: Simone and Simon making sunset observations just below the summit.
PHOTO BY CATRIN BROWN

Bottom (L): Sunset view over Observatory ridge and Cobalt Lake to Triple Peak. **Bottom (R):** Broad-lipped Twayblade, *Neottia convallarioides*, a species of orchid, took some focused searching.
PHOTOS BY CATRIN BROWN



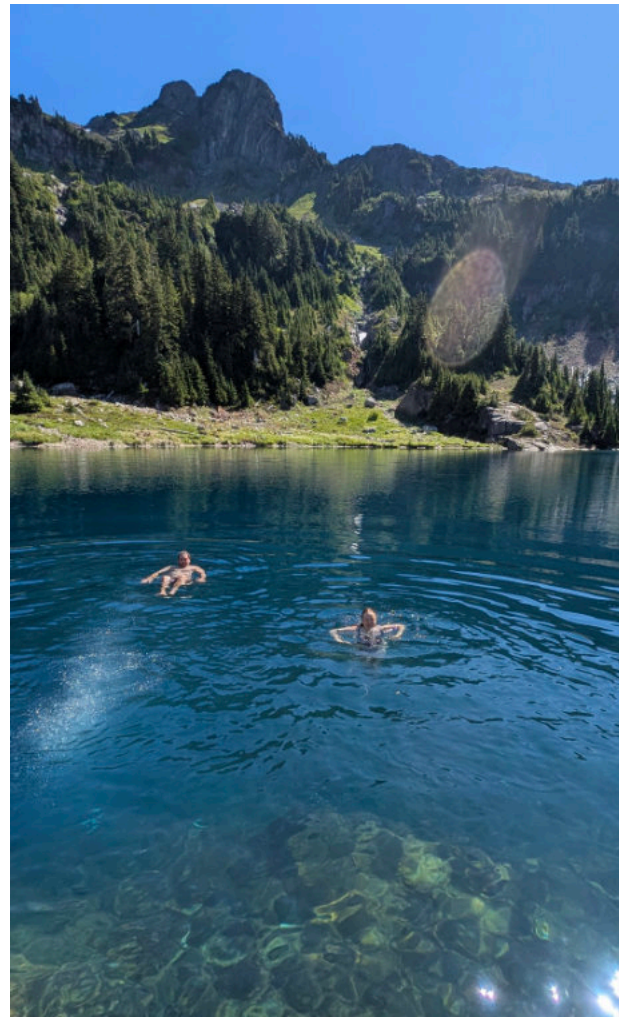
As dusk became night, a small group climbed to the summit and observed roosting bird behaviour and enjoyed more glorious sunset views.

Back at the hut, we used white sheets and UV lights to study moths on Hišim'yawił's deck. There was no shortage of fun and lively commentary on the day's findings, and discussion of some of the challenges of changing taxonomy that seem to beset the botanists particularly. Observations continued on the third day as we packed up from the hut and slowly made our way back down the trail, making sure we had time for a cool swim in Cobalt Lake. Very welcome.

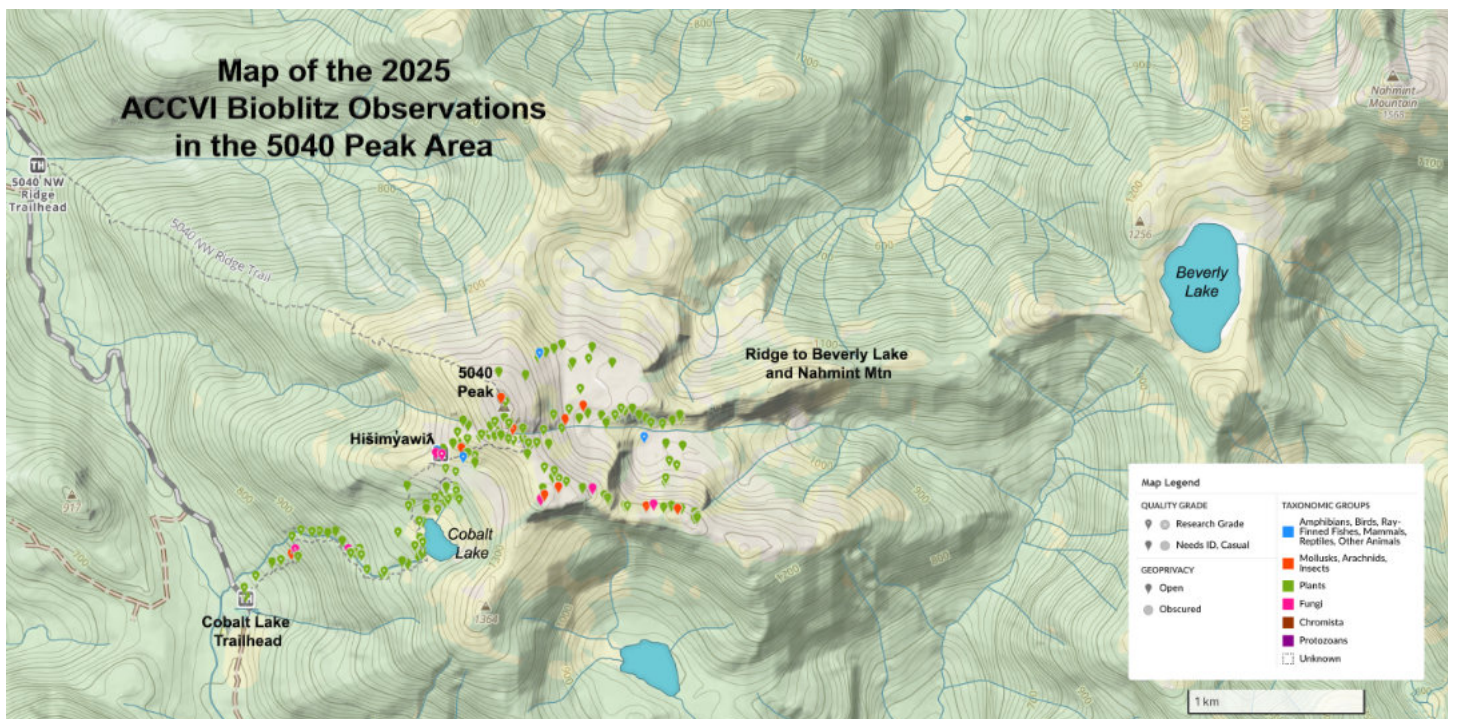




BioBlitzers leaving Hišim'yawił on Day 3. Left from top: Martin (hut manager), Alcina, Catrin, Paul, Chad, Dave. Right from top: Joel, Simone, Maddy, Simon, Aeltie. (Rick and Phee Hudson missing from photo.)
PHOTO BY CATRIN BROWN



Final swim in Cobalt Lake on the hike out.
PHOTO BY SIMONE LITLEDAL



Map of all our observations, colour coded according to type. MAP DATA © GAIA GPS, OPENSTREETMAP CONTRIBUTORS. OPENSTREETMAP DATA: [OPENSTREETMAP.ORG/COPYRIGHT](https://openstreetmap.org/copyright)

What we learned

Mary helped to collate our observations into a unified data-set on iNaturalist:

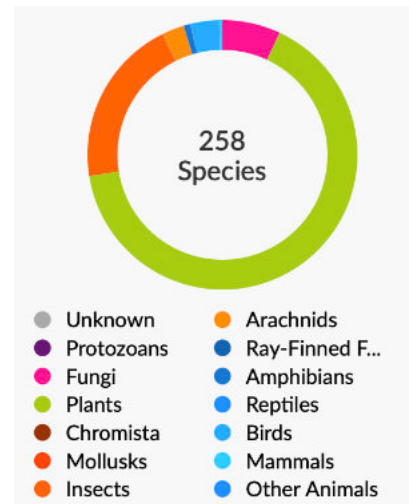
www.inaturalist.org/projects/2025-acc-vancouver-island-5040-peak-bioblitz

The headline results are as follows:

- **1021 observations**
- **258 species identified**

The project record on the iNaturalist website features a captioned photograph of each observation, with common and scientific names. Observations marked 'research grade' have been validated by more than 1 identifier, and may be especially useful in scientific research.

*iNaturalist-generated summary of the numbers of species found by kingdom or class. **INATURALIST** ACCESSED 28 FEBRUARY, 2026*



Species of note

This iNaturalist designation is given to species which are unusual or rare for a location.



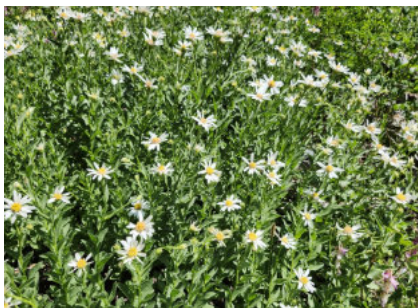
*Mountain Deathcamas, **Anticlea elegans**. The second Vancouver Island record, the only other location on the Island is the Clayoquot Plateau. OBSERVATION BY PAUL SPRIGGS*



*Bruce's Tiger Moth, **Chelis brucei**. Only the third one recorded on Vancouver Island. OBSERVATION BY PHEE HUDSON*

Vulnerable Status (VU on iNaturalist)

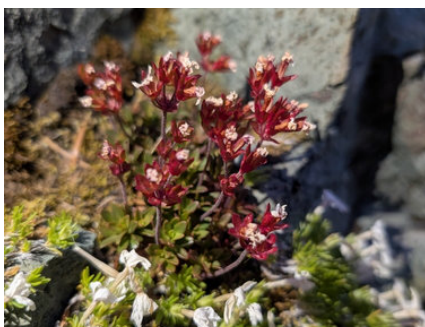
This designation is given to species which are officially threatened/at high risk of extinction. The location of these observations are obscured on iNaturalist.



***Top (L):** Vancouver Island subspecies of White-Tailed Ptarmigan, **Lagopus leucura ssp. saxatilis**. OBSERVATION BY SIMONE LITTLEDALE*

***Top (C):** Olympic aster, **Doellingeria paucicapitata**. OBSERVATION BY PAUL SPRIGGS*

***Top (R):** Cascade Wallflower, **Erysimum arenicola**. OBSERVATION BY CHAD KREUTZENSTEIN*



***Bottom:** Cliff Douglasia, **Androsace laevigata**. OBSERVATION BY SIMONE LITTLEDALE*



The beautiful environs of 5040 Peak. PHOTO BY CATRIN BROWN

Species of mention

- Cliff paintbrush, *Castilleja rupicola*
- Band-tailed pigeon, *Patagioenas fasciata*

These data are now in the public domain and so are available for reference and research. In addition to these records, anecdotal observations were shared. For example, Paul was noting how the avalanche lilies seem to have aborted seed setting after flowering this year, likely stressed by the prolonged seasonal drought. Observations like this may help to support research projects such as the impacts of changing climate on species health and distribution.

And this is an environment that may be changing for other reasons. In recent years we have witnessed a huge increase in the popularity of this mountain region, and the accompanying steep rise in human traffic. This is raising issues for us at ACCVI about the best responses in terms of stewardship and conservation. It is evident that the acquisition of as much primary data

as possible regarding species representation, will be increasingly important as we assess these concerns and consider mitigation strategies.

Needless to say, a project of this nature is dynamic, as observations from the area will continue to be added to the iNaturalist site. We look forward to following this expanding data base. We are very grateful to the ACC Environment Fund for granting us support with this project. Perhaps ACC members across the country might consider a mountain-based BioBlitz and contribute to citizen science in this way. With the right group in the right place, it's a lot of fun!

References

[1] '5040 Peak' refers to the height of the peak in feet (1536 metres). The name was submitted by ACCVI members Rick Eppler and Rob Macdonald after their early climbs in the area, and was officially adopted by the BC Geographic Names Office in November 1984.

[2] ["It's not only beautiful, it's interesting! The geology of the 5040 peak area."](#) Maija Finvers, Island Bushwhacker Annual 2019 Vol. 47.

[3] Hišim'yawił means "Gather Together" in the Barkley Sound dialect of the Ucluelet First Nation. It is pronounced [Hi-SHIM-ya-wit].

PARTICIPANTS: CATRIN BROWN, SIMON DAKIN, ALCINA DE OLIVEIRA, MARTIN HOFMANN (HUT MANAGER), RICK AND PHEE HUDSON, CHAD KREUTZENSTEIN, SIMONE LITLEDAL, AELTIE NOYES, PAUL SPRIGGS, DAVE SUTTILL, JOEL USSERY AND MADDY VALLEE

Acknowledgements

Our work follows in the footsteps of earlier mountaineers and naturalists who recognised the ecological interest in the 5040 Peak environs. Between 2005 and 2007, ACCVI members Judith and Viggo Holm and Ken Wong, explored the area extensively, cataloguing the vascular plants under the expert eye of botanist Dr. Hans Roemer. We are grateful for their work, which has been summarised in the [5040 list](#) on iNaturalist compiled by Mary Sanseverino, and was available as reference material for our project.