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Top 5 Free Mac Data Recovery Software to Recover Lost Files

Our Friends · Saturday, August 15th, 2026

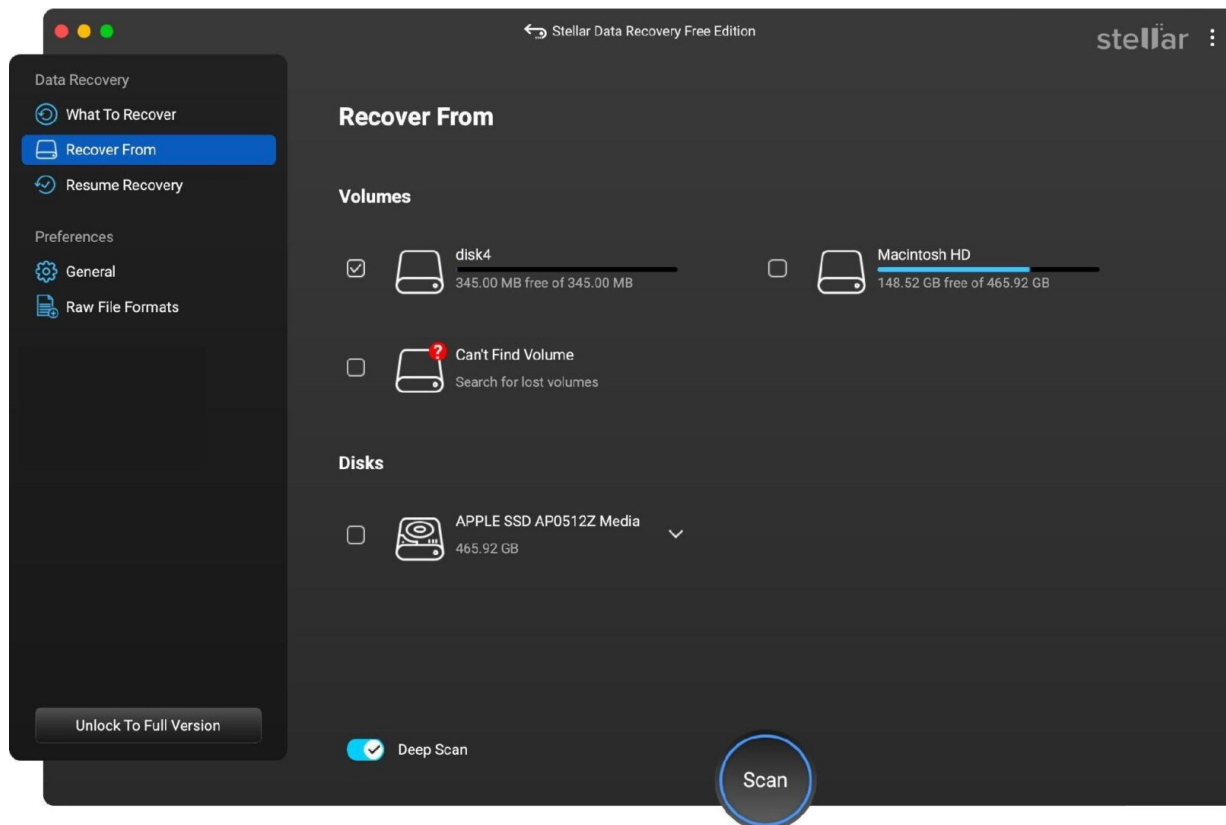
I am a freelance writer for some publications. I was working on a long-form content for three weeks, and drafted rewritten file multiple times. While cleaning up my desktop one evening, I selected that file, hit delete, and emptied the Trash without a second glance. I started searching over Internet, and found that there's actually a good amount of free Mac data recovery software out there that claims to recover deleted file. The problem was figuring out which one to trust with something I couldn't afford to lose twice.

So instead of picking one at random, I tested the top five myself on a MacBook Pro with M3. In this article, I will share my honest experience so anyone can get help.

Quick Comparison of 5 Free Mac Data Recovery Software:

Software	Free Recovery	macOS Support	User Interface
Stellar Data Recovery	1 GB	10.13+	?????
R-Studio	Files under 256 KB only	10.6+	???
EaseUS Data Recovery Wizard	2 GB	10.9+	????
iBoysoft Data Recovery	Paid	10.11+	????
PhotoRec	Unlimited	10.6+	??

1. Stellar Data Recovery for Mac



If I had to call one tool the most well-rounded option for everyday Mac users, Stellar Data Recovery for Mac would be it. I have tried it on both a formatted external SSD and a corrupted USB drive, and both times it surfaced files I genuinely thought were gone for good including some older JPEGs that had been sitting in deleted folders for weeks.

The interface is cleaner than you'd expect from a recovery tool. There is no cluttered sidebar full of technical jargon just a clear list of your drives, a scan button, and a preview pane that actually works without making you upgrade first. That last part matters more than you'd think. Many tools let you scan but blur out previews or show filenames without thumbnails. Stellar shows you the actual file before you commit to anything.

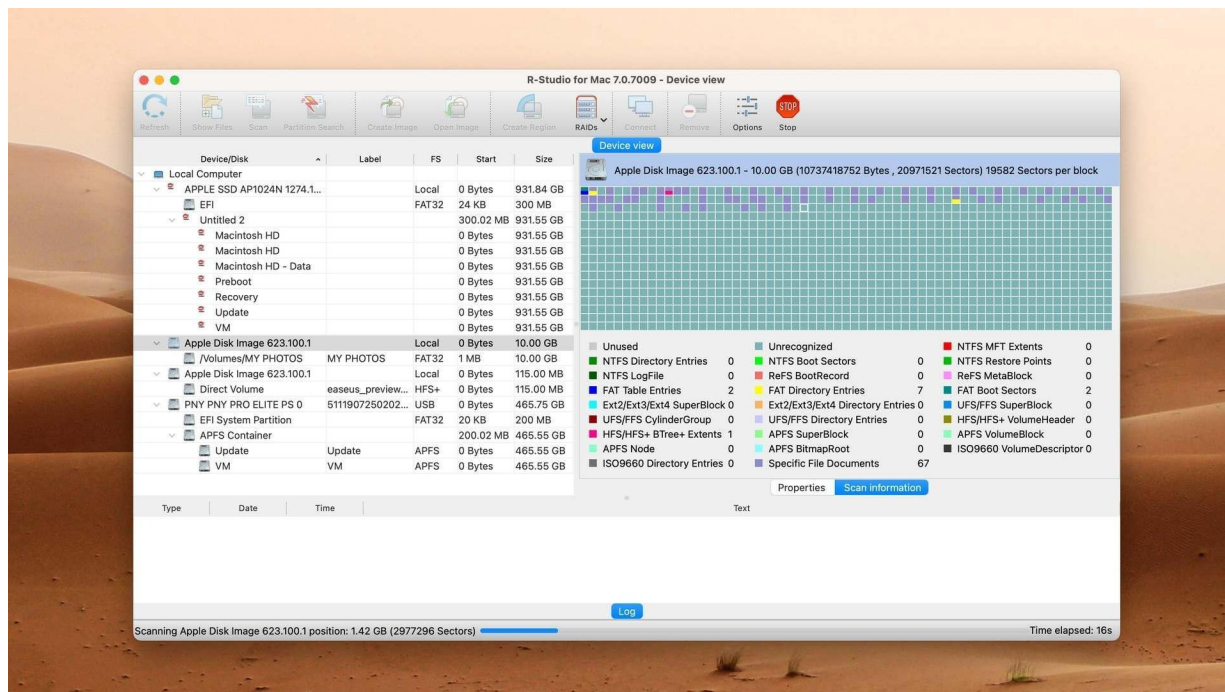
The free version of Stellar Data Recovery offers 1 GB of actual recovery, which is enough to test it on a real loss scenario before deciding whether to pay. For anything bigger, the paid license starts at \$69.99.

What I liked most about Stellar Data Recovery: The scan-save feature of this software. You can pause a deep scan, save its progress, and resume it later. On a 1 TB drive, that's not a nice-to-have — it's essential.

Specification:

- Supports APFS, HFS+, HFS, exFAT, FAT32, NTFS
- Works on Intel and Apple Silicon Macs (M1 through M4)
- Compatible with macOS 10.13 through macOS Tahoe
- Recovers documents, photos, videos, audio, emails, and more
- Bootable recovery media for crashed Macs

2. R-Studio for Mac



R-Studio is the tool I reach for when a drive is genuinely messed up — not just a Trash-emptied mistake, but something with a damaged file system or a partition table that's gone sideways. It's built by R-Tools Technology, a company that's been doing forensic-grade recovery since 2000, and the software feels like it was made by engineers for engineers rather than for someone in a panic.

That's both its strength and its weakness. In testing, I threw it at the same corrupted USB drive I used for Stellar, and R-Studio pulled back file structures that other tools didn't even attempt to reconstruct — it works at a much lower level, with raw disk imaging, a built-in hex editor, and support for RAID reconstruction that none of the other tools on this list even offer. If your data loss involves a RAID array or a drive with real physical or logical damage, this is the one built for it.

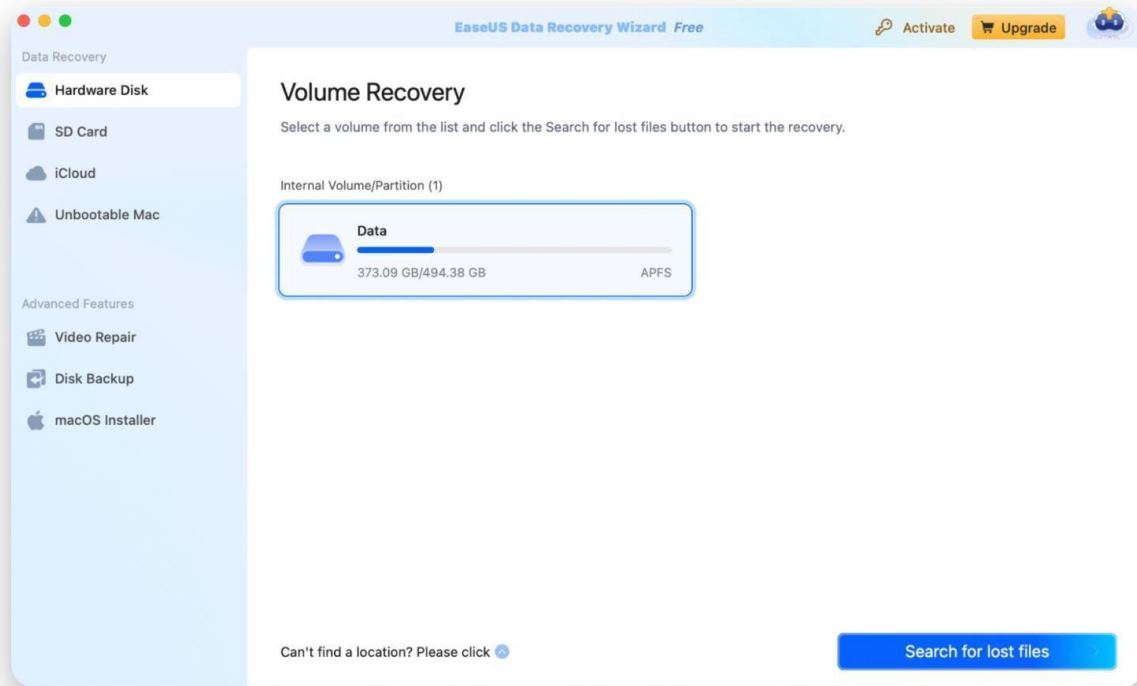
The interface, though, is dense and dated. There's no hand-holding here — you're looking at a window full of technical options, and if you've never used a recovery tool before, it can feel overwhelming in a moment when you're already stressed. It's also the stingiest free tier on this list: the demo lets you scan and preview everything, but actual recovery is capped at files under 256 KB, which is barely enough to save a text file, let alone a photo.

What I liked most about R-Studio: how it handled a drive with a corrupted partition table. Where Stellar and EaseUS both struggled to see the volume at all, R-Studio reconstructed enough of the structure to get a usable file list.

Specification:

- Supports HFS+, APFS, FAT, NTFS, ext2/3/4, UFS, ReFS, and more
- Works on Intel and Apple Silicon Macs
- RAID reconstruction and byte-to-byte disk imaging
- Built-in hex editor and S.M.A.R.T. drive monitoring
- Standard one-time license starts at \$79.99

3. EaseUS Data Recovery Wizard

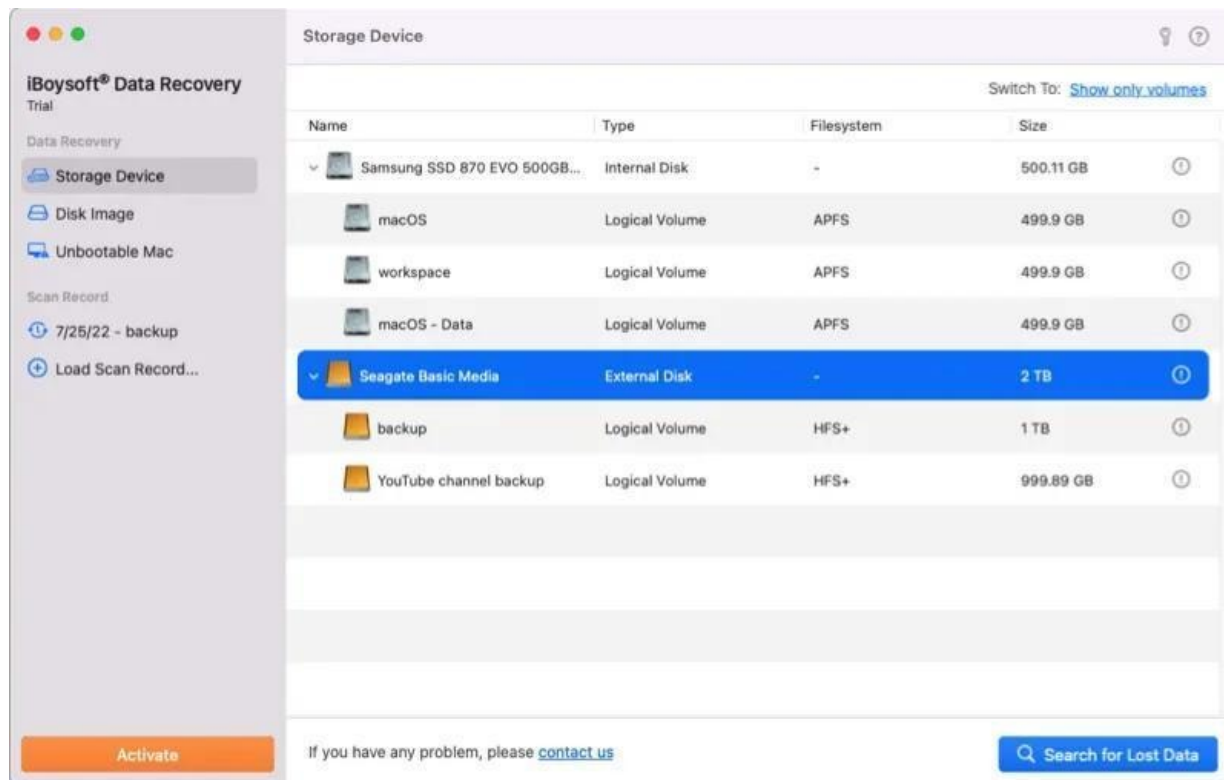


If you want the most generous genuinely-free tier on this list, EaseUS is your answer. Two gigabytes of actual recovery without paying a cent that's more than enough to rescue a batch of photos, recover a lost document folder, or pull back a week's worth of work files. For a lot of everyday data loss scenarios, 2 GB is all you'll ever need.

The interface is beginner-friendly in a way that doesn't feel condescending. There's a three-step process — select a drive, scan, recover and it walks you through each step clearly. It also has one feature I haven't seen elsewhere on this list: the ability to save recovered files directly to cloud storage like Dropbox or Google Drive. If you're trying to recover data from your main system drive and don't have a spare external drive handy, that's genuinely useful.

My main gripe after testing it is the upsell pressure. The free version throws up prompts fairly frequently nudging you toward the paid plan, which gets annoying when you're already stressed about lost data. Scan time estimates were also wildly off in my testing — it told me 4 minutes, took 22. Minor, but worth knowing.

4. iBoysoft Data Recovery for Mac

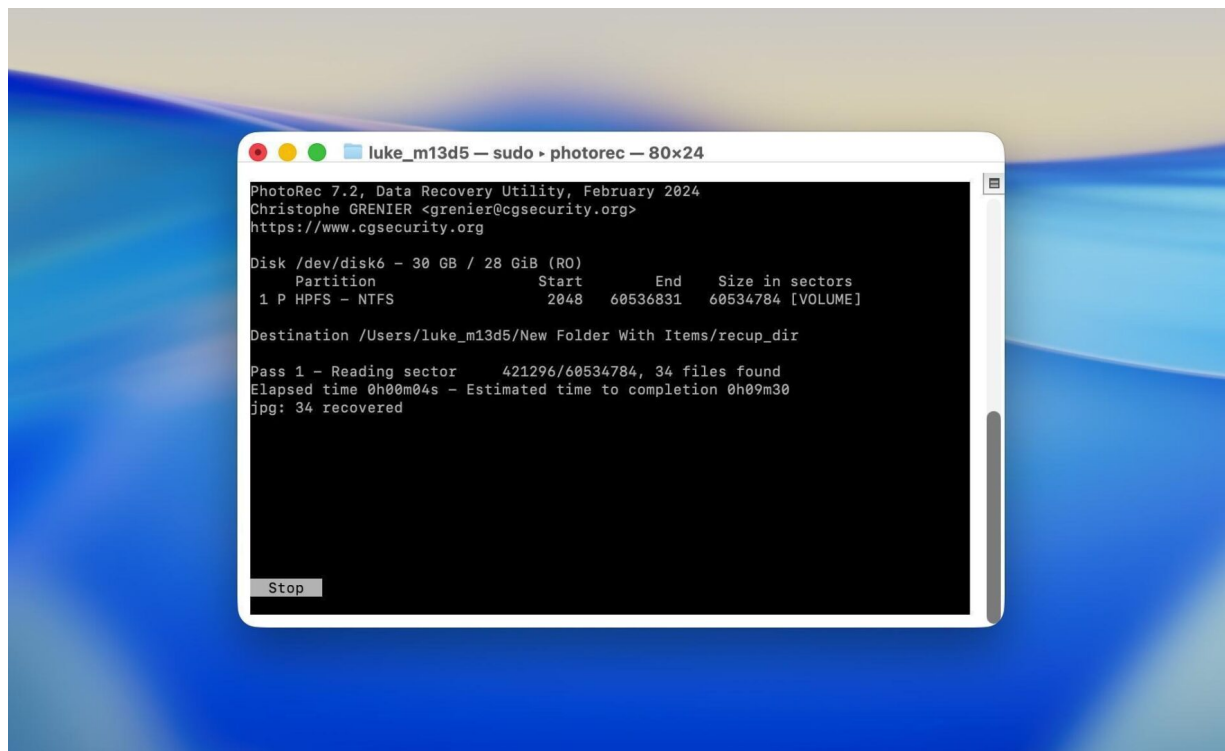


iBoysoft is the only tool on this list built exclusively for Mac, and that focus shows. Where some cross-platform apps feel like Windows software awkwardly ported over, iBoysoft fits naturally into macOS. It handles APFS (including encrypted volumes), runs in macOS Recovery Mode for unbootable Macs, and works with T2 security chip machines — things that trip up less Mac-aware tools.

In real-world use, it performed solidly on standard deletion scenarios. The interface is clean, filtering is easy, and file preview worked well for photos and documents. It struggled a bit on a heavily fragmented test drive — deep scans were noticeably slower than R-Studio and Stellar — but for typical use cases it gets the job done.

The pricing model of this [free data recovery software](#) is where iBoysoft loses some ground. There's no lifetime license option, only monthly and annual subscriptions starting at \$89.95. For occasional use, that's hard to justify. It also doesn't include much beyond core recovery — no disk monitoring, no backup features, no extras. You're paying purely for the recovery capability.

5. PhotoRec



PhotoRec deserves a spot on this list for one simple reason: it is the only tool here that is genuinely, completely, no-strings-attached free. No 1 GB cap, no preview-only nonsense, no subscription. You can recover unlimited files from any drive, forever, at zero cost. For that alone it earns serious respect.

There's a catch, and it's a big one: PhotoRec has no graphical interface. You run it through the Terminal, navigate using keyboard inputs, and the recovered files come back with generic names dumped into auto-generated folders. If you've never used command-line tools before, it will feel alien and stressful — especially in an already stressful data loss situation.

For what it's worth, the recovery itself is excellent. It works at the raw disk level, meaning it doesn't rely on file system metadata. That makes it surprisingly powerful on corrupted drives where graphical tools sometimes give up. I've used it successfully on a drive that other tools reported as mostly unreadable.

Final Word

Data recovery is one of those things you don't think about until you desperately need it and then you need it right now. Hopefully this breakdown saves you the hour of panicked Googling I spent the first time it happened to me.

Out of everything I tested, Stellar Data Recovery for Mac hits the best balance of usability, free recovery allowance, and actual performance across different scenarios. It's the one I'd recommend to a friend who just emptied their Trash by accident and is currently staring at their screen in quiet horror. But truthfully, all five tools here have legitimate uses — the right one depends on your situation, your comfort level, and how much you're willing to spend.

Photo: Kindel Media via Pexels

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