

Journaling

By Karen Lamb
4/8/2014



What are Nature Journals, and why do they play an important role?

It's been said that

*“The journal is
the most important tool
a naturalist has.”*

- Journals record observations, including weather, species present, animal behaviors, rare species, etc., which will help keep you from forgetting your observations in nature.
- Journals are a reference tool. Darwin, Audubon, Lewis and Clark all kept journals, and thank goodness they did!
- Journaling gets you to observe more closely, and hopefully with other senses than just your eyes.
- Journals help one learn about natural history
- Journaling gets you to think more deeply about what you are observing.
- Journals help us connect with nature, and reflect on one's place in nature
- Journals allow for personal expression

Different types of journals

Field journals and nature journals are not the same thing.

Field journals are tools for scientific study.

Nature journals are more personal and unregimented.

Field journals have very specific parts

Date. It's very important to know when an observation took place. Without it, trends cannot be observed, whether in the weather, seasonal changes, or species composition of an area over time.

Location

Weather, including temperature, precipitation, wind speed and cloud cover. The weather impacts what species are expected to be out and about.

Habitats, including the plant community, forest type, geology, soils, and water sources

Vegetation, including the dominant plant species, and what is blooming or in fruit or seed

General Commentary, which is a good catch-all phrase

Species List, including plants, mammals, insects, etc.

The rigorousness of field journals
gets even more intense!

Field journals have two components:

- The field notebook
- The field journal

The Field Notebook

The field notebook is a little notepad which you take out in the field with you, in which to record your observations as they occur.

It is suggested that it be able to fit in a pocket so you can easily stash it to look through binoculars.

Pencil is best to use because it doesn't run when it gets wet, and it will work on wet paper.

The Field Journal

After you return from the field you organize your observations into your field journal

This is traditionally a loose-leaf notebook. A composition notebook also works well.

Traditionally, people start a new field journal with the start of a new year.

I'm certainly glad that there are people out there who have kept field journals...but I'm exhausted just thinking about it!

Nature Journals

Nature journals don't have the structure that the field journal has.

There's no right way to do it.

Yours can be whatever you want it to be.

Entry ideas for your Nature Journal

- **Prose**
- **Poetry**
- **Sketches**
- **Lists**
- Species accounts
- Sound map
- Sketches
- Class notes
- Questions
- Observations
- Reflections and feelings
- Chronological account
- Data collection
- Sensory information (what you see, hear, taste, smell and feel)
- Weather data
- Seasonal changes
- Ideas you have
- Volunteer experiences
- Memories
- Photos
- Pressed plants
- Clippings
- Observations from one single location

Recommendations

Even with nature journaling, it is recommended that you always include the:

- Date
- Time
- Location

If you choose to journal,
Whichever route you choose,

The more scientific field journaling
Or the more relaxed nature journaling
(or if you do a bit of both!)

Enjoy!

Sources

- The Amateur Naturalist's Handbook, by Vinson Brown
- IMN manual
- Keeping a Nature Journal, by Clare Walker Leslie
- Natural History and Naturalist Skills, by Amber Parke

<http://www.gsmit.org/downloads/NaturalistSkillsReading2012.pdf>

Books

I have for you to look at:

- The Journals of the Expedition - Lewis and Clark (2 volumes)
- The Best of Thoreau's Journals
- A Sand County Almanac
- John Burroughs America
- Keeping a Nature Journal
- The Amateur Naturalist's Handbook