

Nature Journaling



Chapter Goals:

After completing this chapter, volunteers should be able to:

- Describe what a naturalist Journal is
- Discuss the reasons for keeping a naturalist journal
- Describe different types of entries that can be used in a nature journal

What is a nature journal?

A nature journal is a place where you can record observations about nature. Thankfully, there is no one way or right way to keep a nature journal. A nature journal can be a place where you record interesting things you see in nature. You can keep a record of seasonal events in a nature journal. Using a journal to record your thoughts about what you see and how you feel is appropriate as well. Since nature is so diverse, there is always something new to see and discover. Recording it is a way to remember it and build to your ever-growing body of knowledge about the world.

Consider it like a diary about yourself and nature. “A nature journal may not be as private as a personal journal. Often, it is meant to be seen and reviewed by others (Walker Leslie, 2000 pg. 7).”

Why keep a nature journal?

There are a variety of reasons for keeping a nature journal. Some find journaling about nature to be an interesting hobby, a way to express their passion for nature while using writing and drawing skills. Others like to record more scientific data and observations in a journal as they work or recreate in the outdoors. Using a nature journal as a way to remember an experience or a feeling is common. Recording what you learn about nature, what you observe with your senses, and what questions you have can also be a great reason for keeping a nature journal. Nature journaling, no matter the reason helps people get connected to nature and encourages the practice of tuning your senses into the world around you.

The use of nature journals is not new. Aristotle, Leonardo de Vinci, Queen Victoria, Charles Darwin, Louis Agassiz, John James Audubon, Lewis and Clark, Thomas Jefferson are just a few famous journal keepers you might know (Leslie and Roth, p 208).

“Field journals make nature the subject, and use observation, reflection, drawing, and writing as the process for learning. As [you] observe and record nature through drawing and writing, [you] can get to know an area intimately and personally. They will use both intellectual and sensory “ways of knowing” that can be both more immediate and deeper than “left-brain” data collection skills alone.” (Matsumoto, 2005)

If you don’t consider yourself to be a writer or an artist, a naturalist journal might seem like a challenging job. However, just like other skills, journaling takes practice and patience. There are endless ways you can create a journal entry, and you need to find what you enjoy and what works for you. Your journal does not have to be a work of art...it is a work in progress. It does not have to be beautiful or profound. Try a variety of techniques at first, challenge yourself to draw or write, to take a photo, or write a poem. Remember, this journal is for you...to help you learn, express yourself and record your experience.

Types of Nature Journals

- Grinnell-type journals are popular among biologists worldwide. They have two parts: they generally include daily accounts of observations at a location, combined with a running record of individual species of plants or animals (see appendix A).

- A phenology journal is an account of seasonal changes that affect plants and animals in a given location, and the biological effects of those changes. This can be an on-going journal, or it can be as simple as recording events on a calendar.

- A journal of a special location is intended to create a comprehensive account of the natural history of a limited area such as a park or schoolyard, and might include observations of weather, plants, animals, species interactions, and human-caused changes.

A chronological journal of a trip or camp experience can include many types of observations and feelings, and will provide a personal account of an experience from the perspective of a single observer (Matsumoto, 2005).

You do not need to pick one of these types of journals. Use a record of

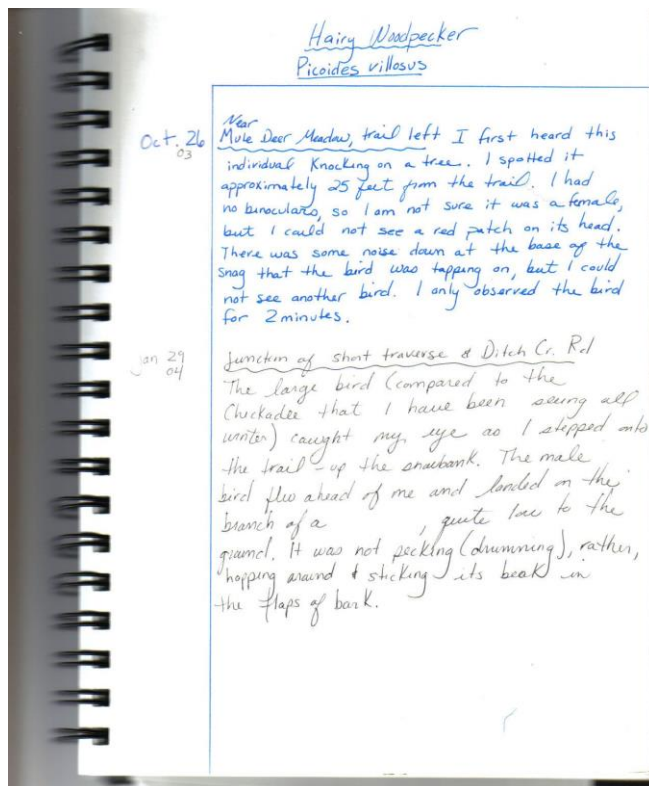
Every entry, no matter what kind should include the **date, time** and **location!**



Entry Ideas for your Nature Journal

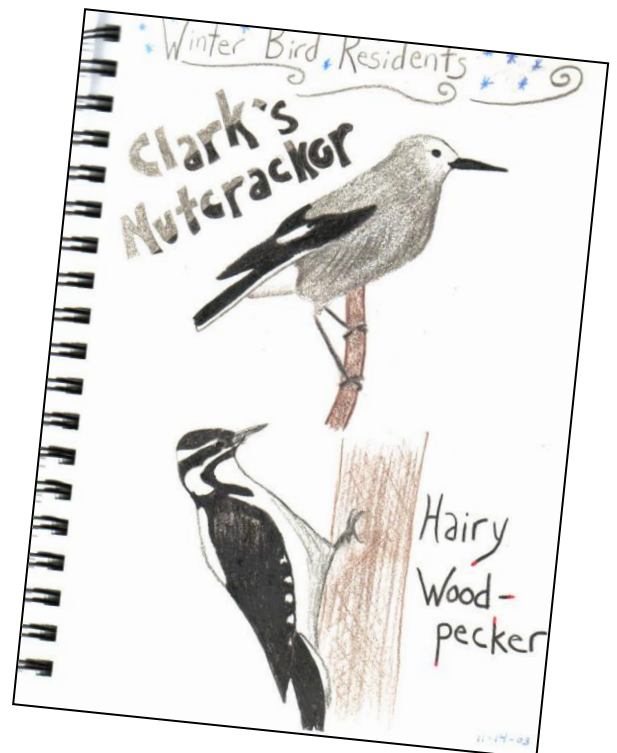
Species accounts	Poetry
Sound	Feelings
Sketches	Sensory poem
Class notes	Sensory information (what do you see, hear, taste, smell, feel)
Photos	Ideas you have
Questions	Volunteer experiences
Observations	Memories
Data collection	Pressed plants
Weather data	Animal behavior

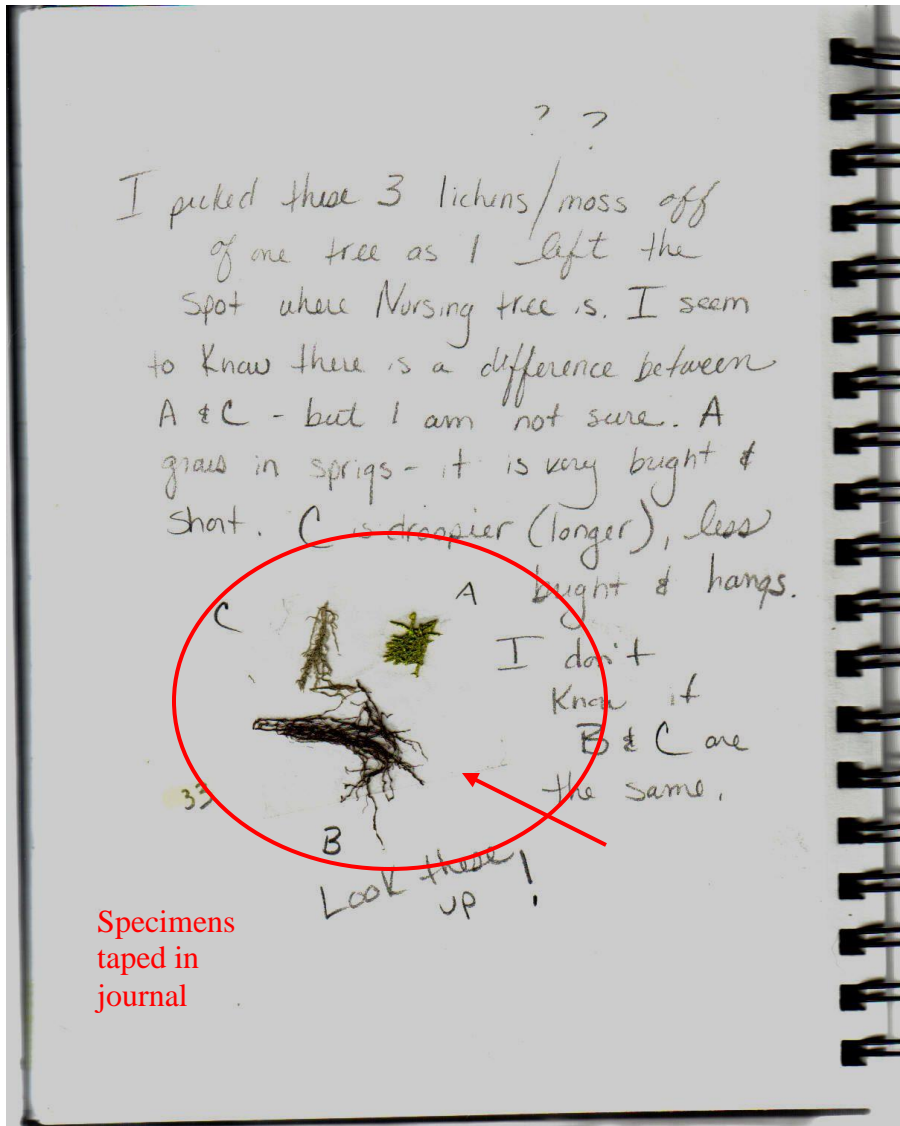
Following, are a few journal entries from a nature journal. Note that there is a mix of scientific and artistic content.



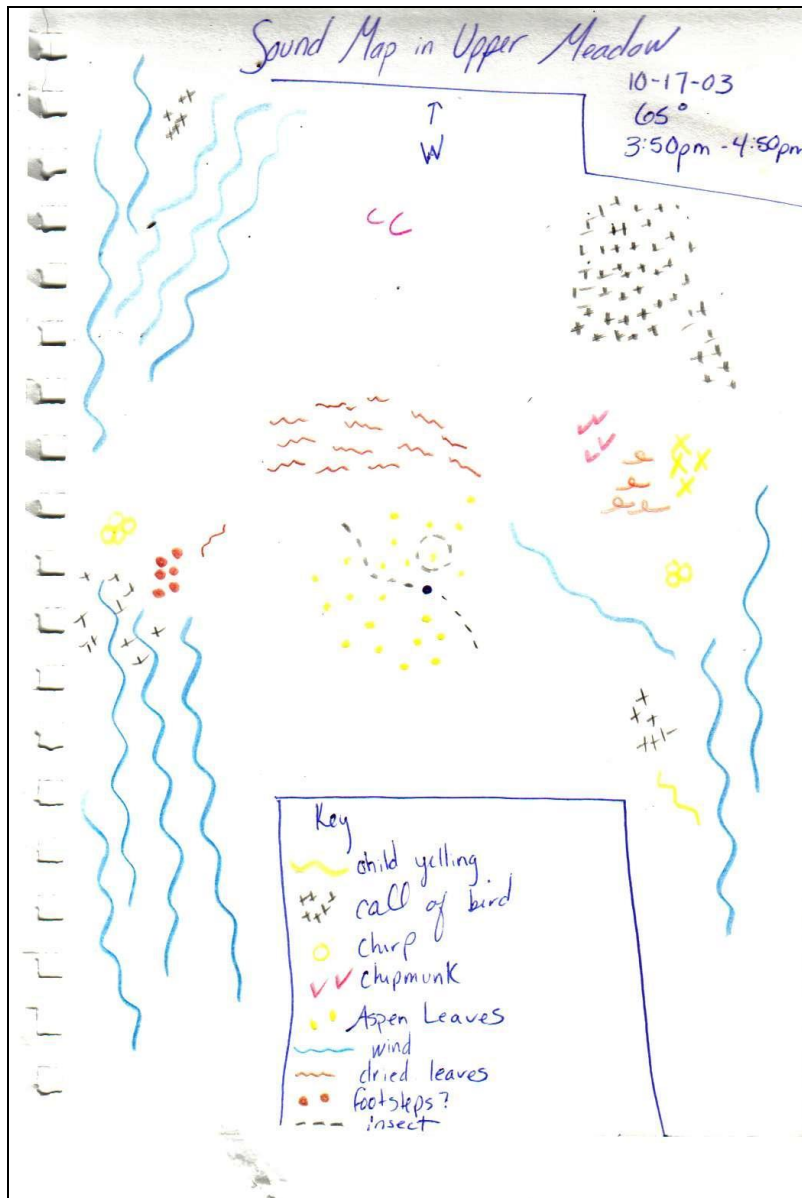
The journal entry to the left is a classic species account. The name of the species is at the top and along the left margin are dates the naturalist saw the species and what it was doing. This species account goes on for several more pages (Focht 2003).

The journal entry to the right is an example of an artistic entry. This person set out to learn the major bird species that reside in her community during the winter. There were several pages of sketches. After completing the sketches, this person, who does not consider herself much of an artist claimed she felt a sense of accomplishment from the drawings and never again had to look up these birds in a field guide. She could identify them all.





This journal entry may not be much to look at, but it is a very important type of entry. Notice the question marks near the top. The author did not know if what she collected was a lichen or moss. She collected small samples and taped them on the page, labeling them with A, B, and C. This is a great example of scientific inquiry. Later, in this same journal, the author has species accounts for each type of lichen and notes from a book about lichens along with several photos (Focht, 2003).



Journal activities that focus on sensory activities are excellent ways to get you to pay more attention to nature around you and practice using your senses to “observe” the world around you. This journal entry is a sound map. The dot in the middle of the page represents the person making the map. For 10-15 minutes, the person records sounds they hear in relation to themselves using different colors and symbols. You don’t have to know what every sound is in order to record it. (Focht, 2003).

In their book, “Keeping a Nature Journal,” Clare Walker Leslie and Charles E. Roth give many ideas for daily journal entries. (Indicates the page number in the book)

Systematic record keeping. (44) Try recording the same thing every day, such as the temperature each morning, the birds at the feeder, sunrise time.

Hunt for connections. (45) Always be looking for connections between the objects you are observing and recording.

Set up a research project. (46) Go through the steps of the scientific process and do a simple experiment.

Reflect on one place or one thing over time. (49)

Keep a journal on a trip or outing. (50)

Keep a group journal with family or friends. (51)

Journal while hiking. (53)

Draw or take a photo. (54)

Write a family story in your journal. (55)

Write about holidays. (56)

Reflect on other’s words. (58)

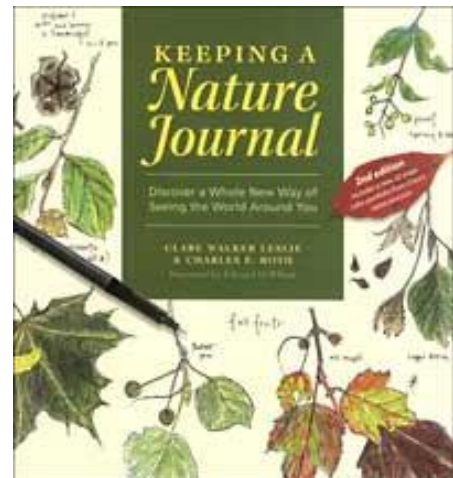
Record daily images...even the simple ones. (59)

Vary your layout-don’t make every page the same. (60)

Draw a map-paste in a newspaper clipping. (61)

Record the phases of the moon. (67)

Visit a new place. (82)



The Idaho Master Naturalist Program has been designed and strives to be a science-based program. Many scientists and naturalists use nature journals and field notebooks for recording observations and events. Poets, artists, writers and amateur naturalists keep field notebooks and journals too. Feel free to make your journal your own. Your nature journal does not have to be purely scientific. Use it however you feel it will make you a better observer of nature. Whatever method of journaling you choose, consider sticking with the journal. You will undoubtedly be proud of your journal when you have the chance to look back on it.

Throughout the curriculum, you will find journal entry prompts. Your IMN chapter leader may assign or encourage journal use too. Feel free to do things on your own with your journal. There is no right way to do it!

Journaling Ideas you have:



References and Credits

Focht, S. (2003). Phenology Journal: Teton Science School.

Leslie, C. W., & Roth, C. E. (2000). *Keeping a Nature Journal: Discover a whole new way of seeing the world around you* (2nd ed.). North Adams, MA: Storey Publishing.

Matsumoto, K. (2003). The Nature Journal as a Tool for Learning. Retrieved February 16, 2007, from <http://www.newhorizons.org/strategies/environmental/matsumoto.htm>

Smithsonian Institute (2007) Introduction to the Nature Journal. Retrieved February 18, 2007 from http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson_plans/journals/index.html

Grinnell System Overview. <http://donnallong.com/2011/01/17/grinnell-system-overview/> This entry was posted in **nature journal keeping** by **Donna L. Long**.

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Appendix A

(Used with permission from the Virginia Master Naturalist Program).

Grinnell Field Journal Procedure

The Grinnell Method of the field journal writing process is simple but time consuming. First, notes are taken in the field notebook while in the field or laboratory. All notebook entries should begin with the date, time, specific location, and weather conditions (cloud cover, temperature, and wind speed). This information is placed in the upper right corner of the first page of the new notebook entry. Any change in location will require that that writer begin a new page with a new header. This ensures that the reader always knows the exact location and conditions in which observations were made. All notes to follow should be taken in chronological order of the observation and/or events being described. This is particularly important if the notes are taken while hiking a trail or anytime the observer moves from one location to another. The notes should be written into the field journal at the end of the day.

The field journal should be kept in a binder and on lose-leaf note paper. Before writing, vertical and horizontal margins must be drawn on the paper. The horizontal margin must be drawn over the first horizontal line of the page and the vertical margin should be drawn 3cm from the left side of the sheet. The name of the observer and the year are written in the upper left corner on each page, inside the square created by the two margin lines. All journal pages should be titled with the word “Journal” in the upper center of the page. Writing is only done on the front of each page, reserving the back for drawings, maps, etc.

The Species Account Page is titled with the common name of the species of record with the scientific name written below and includes all the information learned about the particular species along with dates and locality of sightings. Attention should be paid to including the species’ ecology, morphology, distribution, phenology, and data from other observers. Entries in

the Species Account are made by date with a horizontal line drawn between each date. Species Accounts will understandably grow over the years as the observer finds new opportunities to observe the species and learns more through research.

If the observer is also taking specimens of particular plants or animals then they will also include a Catalog Page that details the specimens taken, the date taken, and the location of the specimen. The Catalog Page is titled “Catalog” in the upper center of the page. Catalog entries are not as common today as they were in Grinnell’s time. Emphasis is no longer placed on the collection of specimens. However, there are times when collection is required, particularly when a voucher specimen is needed, and good records of those collections will never go amiss.

The Grinnell Method is rigid, time consuming, and requires a great deal of dedication and discipline in order to maintain its format. This is not a format for the faint-hearted; however, if kept faithfully, there is no better way to document field observations, particularly if those field observations are to be used for the purpose of research. The scientist will be rewarded with an easy to read, highly organized record of their work.

