

On Field Notes

Field notes are essential to scientists. They provide a record of the places you visit and the plants and animals you see. Writing down this information is important, because your memory is often unreliable. The distribution and number of plants and animals changes over time, due to natural causes and human impacts on the environment. If you take good field notes, people can use them in the future—they can document the changes in biodiversity over time. Because your field notes can be shared with other scientists, it is important for all scientists to use the same format. Our field notes will consist of two parts: a Journal and a Species Account.

Keeping a Journal

The journal is the first part of a field notes entry. It is like a diary. We will use this format:

- Your name
- Date. Write out the name of the month; for example: September 27, 2005.
- Locality data. From the specific to the general should be included; for example: Room 213, Adams Middle School, Richmond, Contra Costa County, California.
- Weather conditions. Describe in words and numbers the temperature, precipitation, cloud cover, wind, etc.
- Habitat description. Describe in words, numbers, and pictures.

Keeping Species Accounts

A species account is a detailed description of a particular species. It can include a drawing of the species. The account should answer these three questions:

- 1) Where was the species found? (location and habitat)
- 2) What does the species look and sound like?
- 3) What is the species doing? (if it's a plant, don't worry about this one!)