

A GUIDE TO FIELD NOTES

The following is a guide to help you with the format of your field notebook. Joseph Grinnell, an excellent field biologist and the first director of the University of California's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology (MVZ), developed this format. His philosophy was that field notes were mainly for the use of other researchers, and so a standard format is necessary to help find information quickly and easily.

Detailed field notes are an extremely valuable part of natural history collections. They are used extensively for museum research, conservation, and management. For example, the distribution and abundance of plants and animals changes over time, due to natural causes as well as human-mediated impacts on the environment. By looking back at field notes from 100 years ago, we can accurately document the changing status of biodiversity in a given area.

The field notebook consists of three main sections: the **journal**, the **catalogue**, and **species accounts**. You can divide the three sections of your notebook with a page that says "Journal" for the journal section, another page that says "Catalogue", etc.

The Journal.

The journal is like a diary, containing a chronological sequence of your field trips with locality information, weather information, a list of the species you observed, a description of your activity, and the names of the people present. Usually, the journal entry will be written at the end of each period in the field. These pages should be headed "Journal". See the sample page entitled "Journal". Your journal entry should include:

- locality information (e.g., "Grinnell Natural Area, University of California, Berkeley, Alameda Co., CA")
- route of travel, including a map if possible
- hours of observation
- weather conditions
- participants (e.g., Mrs. Mertens' AP Environmental Science Class, Ryan Hill, Tom Devitt)
- habitats and topography
- list of species seen and estimated numbers of each species (at the end of journal entry)
- any general impressions

The Catalogue.

The catalogue section of the field notebook contains a list of specimens that were *collected* with all of the appropriate locality information. We will usually only collect specimens on our weekend field trips, and we'll discuss the format for this section in more detail once we begin collecting. See the sample page entitled "Catalogue".

The Species Accounts.

A species account is a page devoted to a more detailed description of a particular species. At first when you're learning to identify animals, you won't know what you're looking at. In that case, you should describe the animal as best you can. Once you've learned to positively identify a species, it isn't necessary to repeat the description each time you make a new account of that species. The questions you want to answer are:

- Where was the species found?
- What is it doing?
- How does it look and sound?

Some general guidelines for all sections:

- 1) Use the notebooks and paper we provide you.
- 2) Use black ink.
- 3) Write on only one side of the paper.
- 4) Don't skip lines.
- 5) In the upper left-hand corner of *every* page, left of the margin, write your name, last name, then first, and the year below your name. See sample pages.
- 6) On the first line of every page, write the locality (place) in full detail, including county and state. Go from the most detailed item in your locality-heading to the most general, ending with the state. Underline the locality with a wavy line. Enter the locality heading at the top of every page. See sample pages.
- 7) On the line below the locality, to the left of the margin, write the date, writing out the name of the month (i.e., do not use numerical abbreviations). See sample pages.

Stebbins, Robert 1956	<u>Black-tailed Rattlesnake</u> (<u>Crotalus molossus</u>)
	<u>Southwestern Research Sta., 5400 ft., Chiricahua Mts., Cochise Co., Ariz.</u>
Aug. 11	2:00 p.m. Large adult found by my son and Bill Miller, about 100 yds. south of the laboratory under a piece of tin. Snake was stretched out as though going somewhere. Caught in butterfly net. Rattled some but not vigorously. Again I gain the impression this is a rather docile snake. Capture site in oak-juniper woodland, along dry stream bottom.
	<u>2 1/2 mi. W Southwestern Research Sta., 7500 ft., Chiricahua Mts., Cochise Co., Ariz.</u>
Aug. 13	10:00 a.m. Bob Drake saw an adult black-tail in the canyon bottom. The snake rattled briefly, only once, then remained quiet. Mont Cozier got one in same general area but higher - probably around 8000 ft.
	<u>1/2 mi. E Bill Miller Ranch, 5000 ft., Post Office Canyon, Patagonia Mts., Hidalgo Co., New Mex.</u>
Aug. 24	Bill Miller showed me where a bobcat had killed and eaten a black-tail. The cat ate from the rear up to the belly region. The head had been chewed off and discarded. Miller said this was characteristic. He remarked

Sample **species account** page. Cut out and place in your field notebook.

Devitt, Tom 2004	CATALOGUE
August 3	<u>San Pablo Dam Rd. between Wildcat Canyon Rd. and Orinda, Contra Costa Co., CA</u> 116 M N 37.89088° W 122.19986° coll.: T. Devitt, Marcus Harvey
TJD 97	<u>Thamnophis elegans</u> DOR
August 18	<u>~ 2.4 miles (by road) W of Peña Blanca Lake on Ruby Road, Coronado National Forest, Santa Cruz Co., AZ</u> 1255 M N 31.38966° W 111.12360° coll.: T. Devitt, Mark McRae
TJD 98	<u>Hyla arenicolor</u> calling from stream across dirt road @ 21:25
TJD 99-100	<u>Bufo punctatus</u> (2)
August 19	<u>0.2 miles south of Ruby Road on spur 4112, ~ 1 mile E of Sycamore Canyon, Coronado National Forest Santa Cruz Co., AZ</u> 1266 M N 31.42675° W 111.17637° coll.: T. Devitt, Mark McRae
TJD 101	<u>Sceloporus clarkii</u>
TJD 102	<u>Holbrookia maculata</u>
TJD 103	<u>Masticophis bilineatus</u>
	<u>Sycamore Canyon, off Ruby Rd., Coronado National Forest, Santa Cruz Co., AZ</u> 1220 M N 31.42841° W 111.19077° coll.: T. Devitt, Mark McRae
TJD 104-105	<u>Holbrookia maculata</u>

Sample **catalogue** page. Cut out and put in your field notebook.