

EEB 287: ORNITHOLOGY LABORATORY
SPRING 2008
FIELD NOTEBOOK GUIDELINES

Background: A portable and easy-to-carry field notebook is a ‘must have’ for any biologist. Over the course of this semester you and your field notebook will become very good friends, because **you should take it with you everywhere you go (this obviously includes lab on Fridays)**. Your field notebook is where you will record all of your ornithological sightings in a legible and systematic fashion. This notebook should be much more than just a list of the species you saw while birding at Eagleville Park one morning. This notebook will be a complete descriptive record of all of your birding experiences this spring. *Learning to take informative field notes is an integral part of becoming a professional field biologist* and you should take learning to do it competently at least as seriously as learning facts and taking tests.

Notebook Grading: Your notebook is worth a maximum of 30 pts. To receive these 30 points you will have to surrender your notebook to Jason for review (see *Grading Schedule*, below). You can receive a maximum of 10 pts each time you turn in your notebook, so you will have to turn in your notebook ≥ 3 times.

The notebook is a prerequisite for being allowed to begin independent observations at our class project site. The observations themselves account for 70 points of your overall class grade. Before you will be allowed to begin making, and receiving credit for, independent field observations, you must accrue these 30 pts and demonstrate birding competency to your instructors through in-lab exercises. The 30 points are a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to moving on to the independent observations. If you accumulate 30 points through 10 submissions of your notebook that earn only 2 points each, you may still not be approved for independent observations.

Obviously, you will want to start birding (and filling out your notebook) immediately and consistently. You should record at least 2 new observations between reviews of your notebook by Jason. The more observations of birds you make, the easier it will be for us to evaluate your progress and the quicker you will garner those 30 pts. However, we are looking for quality-not quantity. So what should you include with each observation?

The Minimum Requirement for each observation:

- Date
- Location: Name and description of where you are; full description of the habitat where you saw the bird
- Start & stop time of observation
- Other members of your birding party (first and last name). We encourage you to bird in groups; it’s friendlier, may be safer, and is often useful to have someone to discuss the bird you are looking at with.
- The characteristics you used to ID the bird observed, and if possible, the name of the species you saw. Sometimes you will not be 100% confident in your identification—that’s perfectly ok! Sometimes the most important thing you can

do is admit that you don't know what it is. In those cases, put down your best guess, and your reasoning behind that guess. Indicate your degree of certainty in the identification.

Ideally, all of the following items should also be included for each observation. It will be much easier to accumulate the 30 pts by including as many of these items as possible for each observation.

- Notes of field marks: plumage patterns, bill size & shape, estimated body size, leg characteristics (e.g. length and color), etc.
- Sketches of bird: **do not draw from your Sibley guide**. *This is a form of plagiarism, and we will treat it as such.* We want to see your interpretation of the bird, even if you can't draw. The idea of the drawing is to capture information about shape and pattern that you may not know you need until after the bird is gone, not to produce an artwork of realist genius. Some birds will be easier to draw than others (a sitting raptor vs. a fluttering chickadee in a bush).
- Notes on behavior
- Notes on vocalizations
- Notes on social interactions with other birds (or squirrels?)
- Notes on use of habitat
- Anything else you think is important or interesting about the bird! (e.g. is it all white? Does it have pink eyes? Is it one-legged? Missing a lot of flight feathers?)

Grading Schedule

Jason will be collecting all your notebooks every Wednesday at lecture, for as long as it takes to be sure that everyone is keeping notes competently. **If for some reason you have to miss lecture, it is up to you to arrange to meet with him and drop your notebook off.** He will return them to you at the beginning of labs on Friday mornings. If you are gung-ho to get your notebook back and get back to taking notes, you can get your notebook back from him on Thursdays, at his office hours. Similarly, if you have some observations you are anxious to have him review, (e.g., on a Monday after a particularly good weekend birding) you can arrange to have him review it (again) before Wednesday by connecting with him in lecture class, or phoning or emailing him. Properly employed, asking for extra reviews will get you your 30 points, and on to independent observations, much sooner. Improperly employed, it will annoy Jason and not hasten the attainment of notebook approval.