

**EEB 3898: Field Methods in Ornithology – Summer 2013**  
**Field Notebook Guidelines**

**Background:** A portable and easy-to-carry field notebook is a ‘must have’ for any biologist. Over the course of these three weeks you and your field notebook will become very good friends, because **you should take it with you everywhere you go (this obviously includes all field trips and birding exercises).** 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 one morning. This notebook will be a complete descriptive record of all of your birding experiences. *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.

**What should you be recording in your notebook?**

**For each field trip:**

1. Date
2. Location: Name and description of where you are
3. Weather (Sunny, cloudy, rainy, windy, approximate temperature, etc.)
4. 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

**For each observation:**

5. Consecutive number (sketch if it is the first time you see a given species, a given sex of a species, age class, etc., or if you are just not sure)
6. Full description of the habitat where you saw the bird and general behavior (e.g. feeding mode)
7. Start & stop time of observation
8. The characteristics you used to ID the bird observed (field marks), 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 admitting 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.

- Sketches of birds (required for each time you register a new species, sex, type of plumage, etc. for the first time in your notebook). **Do not draw from your Sibley guide.** Aside from the fact that you learn nothing by doing so, *this is a form of plagiarism.* 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 flittering chickadee in a bush).
- Notes of field marks: plumage patterns, bill size & shape, estimated body size, leg characteristics (e.g. length and color), etc.
- Notes on use of habitat, behavior, vocalizations, social interactions with other birds (or squirrels?)
- Anything else you think is important or interesting about the bird! (e.g., is it all white (albino)? Does it have pink eyes (disease related)? Is it one-legged? Missing a lot of flight feathers?)