

EEB 4261: ORNITHOLOGY LABORATORY
SPRING 2010
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.

So what should you be recording in your notebook?

- 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.

- Notes of field marks: plumage patterns, bill size & shape, estimated body size, leg characteristics (e.g. length and color), etc.
- Sketches of birds **do not draw from your Sibley guide**. Aside from the fact that you learn nothing by doing so, *this 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 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?)