

What is Nature Journaling?



Purpose: Journaling as a way to cultivate attention and reconnect to the natural world. Engage prior knowledge about the natural world. Journaling will help to get the juices flowing.

Nature Journaling: Field journals are original records of discovery. They are primary source material describing a range of information, including **observations** of plants and animals, the native **environment** in which these live, and the varied **experiences** and **responses** of the naturalist to her or his subjects ¹

Two Approaches:

Field Notes: record what you observe on-site. They are mostly just for you, so they may be messy and disorganized.

Field Journal: revises and elaborates your on-site notes. A field journal may clean up, organize, and extend your field notebook observations, and perhaps supply additional information and/or research, in order to try to

communicate something about the natural world to someone, and/or to posterity.

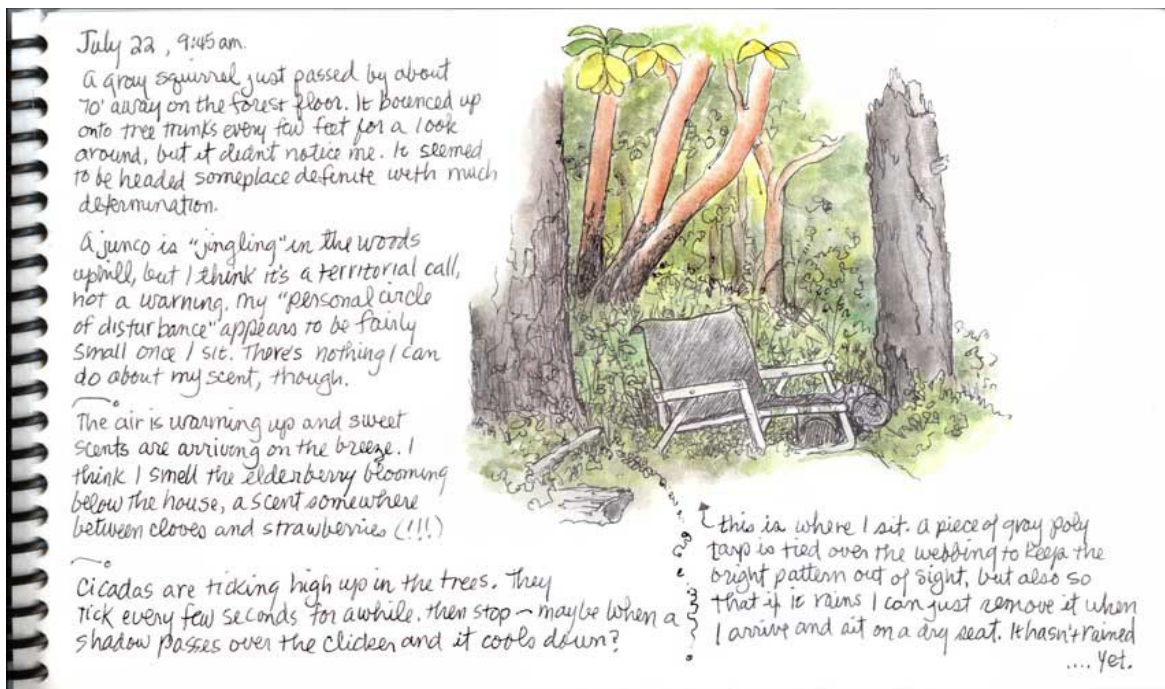
Standard Practices in Field Writing:

- Leave **every other page blank**, so you can elaborate your observations later
- Record **Time, Date, and Location**, as accurately as possible (may include GPS, street intersections, or even simply the "under the large sycamore by the creek")
- Route information and contexts** (how did you get there? What were you doing there?)
- Weather**, including temperature.

Typical Journaling Methods (choose methods you like best; try methods you're not as familiar with and see what happens):

- Writing:** record as much detail as you can, to revisit and revise later when developing and elaborating your on-site notes into formal observations
- Drawing:** make a quick sketch of what you see; use color!
- Collecting:** take a modest sample and press it into your notebook
- Counting:** e.g., how many birds did you observe?
- Listing:** e.g. how many different kinds of plants did you notice?
- Photographing:** snap a photo to help with your post-site development of your journal; or print it out later and paste it in your journal

¹Adapted from the LA River Nature Journaling Workshop organized by Friends of the L.A. River, and Cal Lutheran Professor Bryan B. Rasmussen on 7/20/19



Cultivating curiosity in 5 simple steps: ¹

Making observations in the field is a practice. The naturalist brings curiosity into the field; they don't expect to find curiosity in the field. Everything is "curious" if you have the right frame of mind. You can learn curiosity; you can also lose it, if you neglect it. At first, you will feel unsure and maybe even frustrated ("why am I doing this? what am I looking at?" what is it called?"). But soon enough you will begin to notice more, your questions will become more probing, your frame of reference will widen, and your comparisons will become more fruitful. **Be okay with being a beginner.** To make it easy, here are 5 simple steps:

- 1. I notice.** Examine whatever it is you're looking at. Say your observations aloud, to yourself. Write them down. Don't filter them: if you see it, say it and write it. When you notice yourself running out of things to observe, change your perspective: zoom in really close, what do you notice? Zoom out, what do you notice? Challenge yourself to make just one more observation.
- 2. I wonder.** After observing, come up with questions about what you observed. Say these aloud, too, as you write them down. You don't need to answer these questions. You may find yourself making more observations as you ask questions. This is good!
- 3. It remind me of.** Note everything your subject reminds you of. Your subject might remind you of something else you've seen. It might remind you of an experience. It might remind you of something you know. Try zooming in/out to take this step even further. Use the IRMO to shorthand the process.
- 4. Reflect.** Take a few minutes to reflect on your practice--maybe note something you were surprised by, how you felt (physically or emotionally), or what you might take away from the practice next time.
- 5. Share.** We learn best when we learn from each other. Share your observations, and your challenges with someone you trust and the rest of us.

Task: After completing your field notes (notes, drawing, pics, etc. you did at the site), take some time to turn it into a field journal (more composed and expanded).

¹ Adapted from [The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling, written and illustrated by John Muir LawsLinks to an external site.](#)