

Activity 1

Using A Field Journal



Handbook of Field Methods for Monitoring Landbirds

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Using A Field Journal

Objective:

Introduce students to scientific tools, using a field journal to record bird observations

Materials:

-  Copies of *Keeping a Field Journal* form for each student
-  colored pencils
-  bird field guides
-  binoculars

Background

A field journal is an important tool for every scientist. When studying ecosystems, scientists use them to record observations, data, notes, and drawings to help re-create what was seen in the field. If a scientist encounters a bird they cannot identify, taking notes on how it looks and its behavior can help identify it later when looking in a field guide.

Procedure

1. Construct a Field Journal. They can be used while doing any nature exploration.

Each student should have their own field journal. Have them create theirs by decorating covers and binding pages. Use the *Keeping a Field Journal* pages to start.

2. Together as a group, go over *Keeping a Field Journal*, the first and second pages in their journal. Explain that they do not always have to use the sample journal page but that it is important to include the following: date, weather, behavioral observations, observations, field marks, color, and a sketch of the bird.



Activity 1 (cont.)

3. Observe birds in the field. This can be done in your schoolyard or on a field trip.

Choose a site: Some good sites for observing birds include tidal marshes, riparian habitat (forested areas along a creek). Tidal marshes are excellent places for beginning birders because they often have waterfowl and shorebirds that will stay in one area for long periods of time, which makes them easy to observe and identify even without binoculars.

4. Have students find a place by themselves or in small groups where they can sit quietly and observe a bird. Have them fill out a page in their field journal on the bird. Explain to them that it is important to approach a bird slowly and quietly, and blend into the scenery (i.e., if the vegetation is not very tall, the observer should try to hunch down to the height of the vegetation). This will prevent the bird from being disturbed or scared away. Also stress the importance of patience when watching birds. Bring pencils, colored or regular, to sketch the birds and habitat.

5. In the classroom, following bird observations, have students share their observations and field sketches with the class. You could have students display their sketches, and names of the bird if they were able to identify it, in the classroom.

Keeping a Field Journal

A field journal is an important tool for every scientist. When studying ecosystems, we record detailed observations in our journals.

Here are the important details to record when observing birds:

NAME OF OBSERVER _____ DATE _____

LOCATION _____

WEATHER _____

STEP 1. On the back of this sheet, sketch, label and describe a bird.

Label and Describe:

- **Shape** of bird (tall, plump, sleek, long neck, long legs)
- Compare its **size** to other birds in area
- **Color** and **patterns** of body parts.
- **Bill** size (compare to size of head).

STEP 2. Observe and describe bird's behavior.

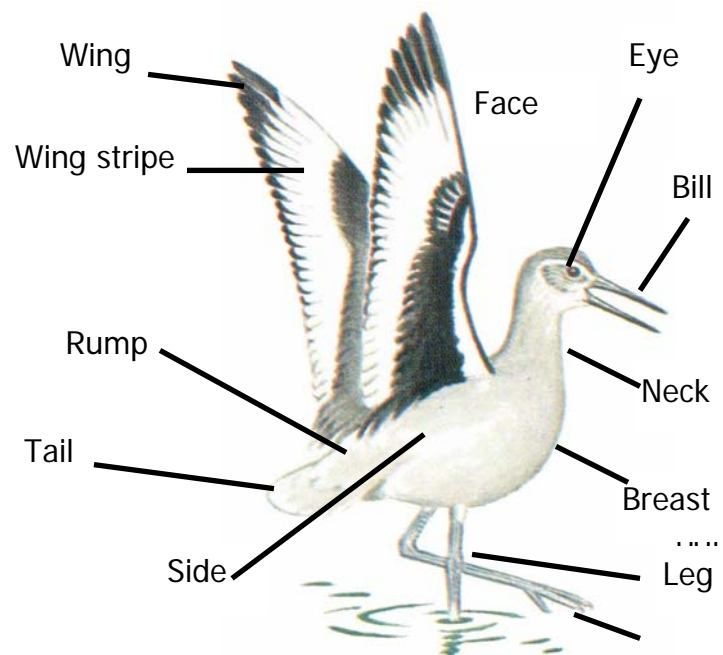
Answer these questions underneath your sketch:

- **Activity:** What is it doing? (flying, feeding, sleeping, calling, preening, or interacting with other birds)
- **Foraging:** How is it finding food?
- **Prey:** What is it eating?
- **Habitat:** What habitat is it using? (like, open field, wetland, creek forest)
- **Microhabitat:** What microhabitat is it using (like, water, mud flat, bushes on shore)?

STEP 3. Use a field guide to identify your bird.

Learn the Parts of a Bird—

A good field sketch includes detailed labels that describe the bird being observed.



Willet by Jerry Buzzell



Field Journal Observations & Sketch

Bird species observed and sketched _____