

# CREATING A FIELD NOTEBOOK

## OVERVIEW

Students create their own field notebook for use during the lesson to conduct a study of an outdoor site. It can also be used in future lessons or as a homework tool, as students can survey different areas.

## INTRODUCTION

When scientists go into the field, they record all their observations, thoughts and questions in a field notebook. These journals are essential to their fieldwork. Your field notebook will be unique to you, reflecting your personal style.

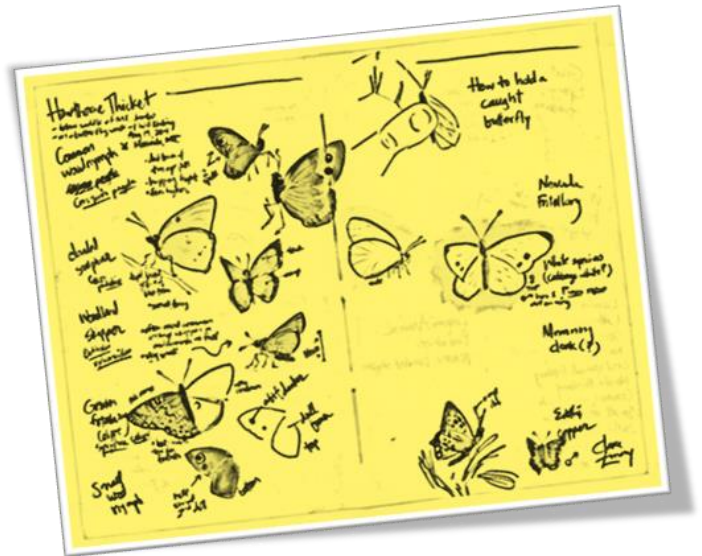
There are many ways information can be recorded.

Some scientists sketch simple pencil drawings, and others paint colourful, detailed images. They make use of things like, lists, diagrams, graphs and flowcharts, or write long, detailed descriptions.

Some researchers write down everything – from measurements and data to observations and specimens collected, while others only record some of this information.

A field notebook can even include a diary-like account with records of feelings and emotions.

You can use whatever tools work best for you. The important thing is to record the information so you can later recall what you saw.



## TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED

1. Begin each field session by writing down these basics:

- time (use 24-hour clock format)
- date
- locality (place, latitude, longitude, GPS read)
- route to study site (how did you get there?)
- weather (temperature, wind, rain..)
- habitat (e.g. back garden, forest, wetland)

2. Record your observations. E.g.:

- species seen
- fruits or flowers on individual trees or plants
- interactions such as insects mating, fighting, or pollinating plants
- any changes since you were last there
- general notes (sketches, maps and photos)

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3. Think of some questions that may help you get started:

- What do I see?
- Do I see anything that surprises me?

### FIELD SKETCHING

Seeing and observing are different things. When we look at something, we are usually just trying to identify it, with little focus on the detail.

Field study drawings are detailed to capture in two dimensions some aspect of what you are observing.

The first thing to do is determine what aspect(s) of your subject you want to

record. For example, do you want to know the relative height and width of your subject? Are you recording colour? How much detail are you interested in?

### EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Research examples of notebooks by famous naturalists such as Alfred Russel Wallace, Charles Darwin and Gilbert White, or notebooks from historic research voyages.

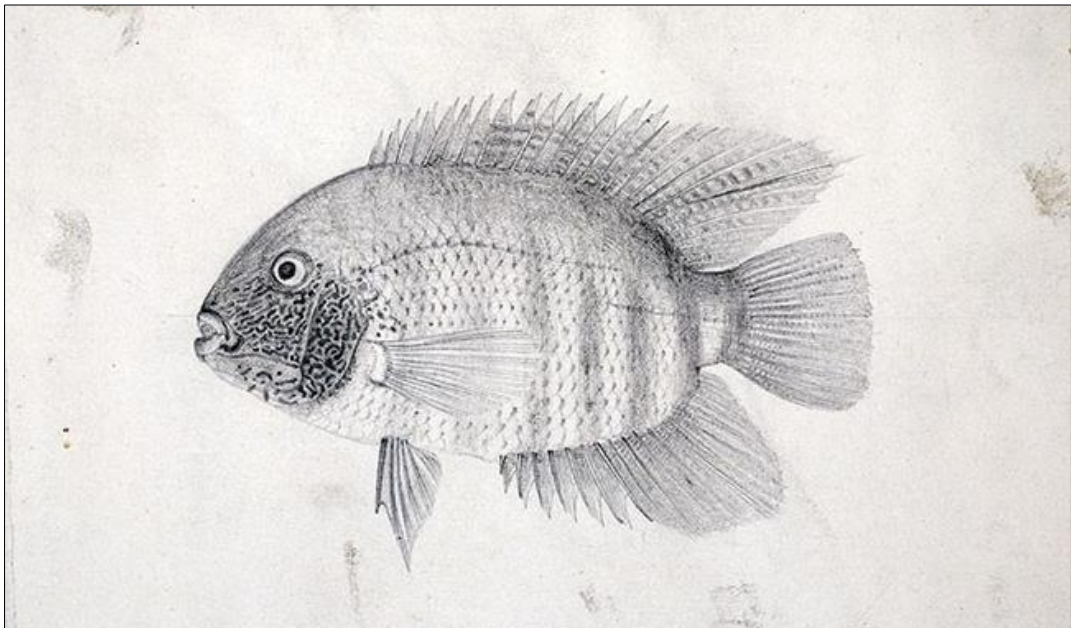
<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/news/2014/november/evolution-pioneers-illegible-notebook-brought-back-life.html>

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/hms-endeavour-250.html>

Ask students to consider the untold stories behind research endeavours.

Search the Natural History Museums Library and Archives for more examples:

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/departments-and-staff/library-and-archives.html>



One of Alfred Russel Wallace's fish drawings from the Rio Negro