

## **The Lab and Field Notebook**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Field notes are one of the most important tools of a field ecologist. You should develop a habit of making careful ecological observations, and become proficient at recording, summarizing, interpreting, and reflecting on your observations.

***Carry your notebook with you whenever you are in the field. Write in it regularly.*** You should have at least one entry in your field notebook for each class period. Write at the time you make observations or as soon as possible thereafter. Don't wait until the end of the day to record all of your notes. You can leave space or add pages to enter interpretations and reflections later.

### **FORMAT AND INSTRUCTIONS**

Use a 8.5" x 11" 3-ring binder. **Do not** use a spiral notebook where you must rip out pages. I require a standardized format for entries because it is easier to remember what you should notice and record. Also, this makes it easier for you to find things later. All entries must be up-to-date, legible, and concise.

Write only on one side of each page (so notes and comments can be added later). Write in ink. Don't erase. Just cross through words once where it's necessary to make changes. You may well need the crossed-out information later.

In each notebook entry, include:

- **The date and time of observation**
  - **Specific location**
  - **Purpose of field work**
  - **Methods (where appropriate, but you can also refer to a specific handout)**
  - **Detailed observations (these may be recorded on a separate data sheet).**
- These will include both quantitative and qualitative observations.**

You are welcome to add into your notebook the forms on which you have recorded data, summaries of the specific procedure and purpose for exercises, maps, photos, and other documents as needed.

Make your observations as specific as possible. Both qualitative (descriptions) and quantitative (numbers) observations are appropriate. Choose your words carefully so that they explain as much as possible.

I expect your entries to be hand-written at or near the time of the observation. Record your observations while you are in the field. Along with your observations,

record initial interpretations and reflections. After you have thought about your data and the field experience, you can later add to the Interpretations and Reflection sections. Write as much as possible while in the field, although you may find it helpful to add to the Interpretations and Reflections sections after you've thought about the exercise.

Interpretations and reflections might include the following:

- a. the meaning these observations hold for you;
- b. what you are learning;
- c. how you could apply this learning to your field of study;
- d. your hypotheses about how observed ecological principles apply to specific observations;
- e. issues you might explore further; and,
- h. questions and comments this exercise might have generated in your mind.

### **GRADING CRITERIA**

The grades you earn on your field notebook will be based equally upon your *observations* (50%) and *interpretations and reflections* (50%).

### **TO TURN YOUR NOTEBOOK IN**

Clearly mark the first page of the notebook with your name and the words, *229 Lab and Field Notebook*. Also write your name, address, and phone number.

**Use dividers** to organize your notebook. You can add pages to sections as projects develop. For example, the section for the population growth and competition lab will include activities over several weeks. With the loose-leaf binder you can organize project notes together. You should have the following sections, in order:

1. *TABLE OF CONTENTS* with the titles of observations/reflections, their dates and page numbers.

2. – *N. OBSERVATIONS/REFLECTIONS* for our different projects, ***each with its own section***. You can record entries sequentially as they are made within each project. Note the project title on the divider tab.

*N+1. SPECIES LISTS*. Make one species list for all plants (trees, shrubs, grasses, and forbs) and one for all animals (including birds, mammals, and invertebrates). Include scientific name, if at all possible, and the date and place of observation. For scientific name, list genus and species (or family if that's all you know). These are part of your observations.