

Books and websites about field/nature journaling and sketching

Updated December 2025.

- Canfield, Michael R. (editor) *Field Notes on Science and Nature*. 2011. Harvard University Press (hup.harvard.edu). Foreword by E.O. Wilson. Twelve scientists and other field journal practitioners explain why and how they keep field journals as part of their professional practice. Several discuss the importance of field notes in comparing current conditions with the past; one describes in detail the value and variation of Joseph Grinnell's system. See also Herman, Keay, and Long, below.
- Cutright, Paul Russell *Lewis & Clark: Pioneering Naturalists*. First edition: 1989, Bison Books. Second edition: 2003, University of Nebraska Press. Focuses on the natural history observations of these explorers, includes excerpts from their journals.
- Herman, Steven G. *The Naturalist's Field Journal: A manual of instruction based on a system established by Joseph Grinnell*. 1986. Buteo Books. Out of print; paperback book available online for very high prices but it is also available on interlibrary loan via WorldCat. It's a treasure of techniques used by scientists to record field observations. See also Canfield, above, and Long, below.
- Hinchman, Hannah A *Trail Through Leaves: The Journal as a Path to Place*. 1997, Norton. Elegant writing and beautiful examples. Still available through online bookstores. She has written several other books, all excellent for journaling inspiration.
- Johnson, Cathy, *Sierra Club Guide to Sketching in Nature*. 1991, 1997. Revised edition available through online bookstores. All of Johnson's books are excellent inspiration and instruction in journaling, sketching, watercolor.
- Keay, Jeffrey "A Field Journal System for Natural History Observations," 1992. Denali National Park. npshistory.com/publications/eq/rmp/field-journal-sys.pdf. 26 pages. Excellent short version of the famous Grinnell system, which relies heavily on Herman's adaptation.
- Laws, John Muir www.johnmuirlaws.com. His books are widely available and his website is a rich resource for naturalists interested in keeping journals. He shares his talent, skills, and experience through many free online classes and videos. His page also has links to local nature journal clubs.
- Leslie, Clare Walker, www.clarewalkerleslie.com. Author of many excellent books about nature observation, nature journals, and field sketching; available through her website and online sources.
- Long, Donna donnalong.com *The Grinnell Scientific Nature Journal*. 2019. E-book, available as a pdf through her website. First section explains the Grinnell method using examples from Herman's book and her own work. Subsequent sections show how to use this method for your own journaling and for citizen science. She also blogs about natural history observation.
- O'Brien, Margaret and Ursula Shepherd *Nature Notes: A Notebook Companion to the Seasons*. 1990. Fulcrum. Out of print but available through online sources. Their unique approach combines their seasonal commentary and sketches on pages with plenty of space to add your own observations.
- Tan, Amy, *The Backyard Bird Chronicles*. 2025. Knopf. Well-known for her fiction, Tan takes us on her journey, undertaken at 64, of discovering the wonder of observing and drawing birds.
- Zwinger, Ann Haymond, *Shaped by Wind and Water: Reflections of a Naturalist*. 2000. Part of the Credo Series published by Milkweed Editions, Scott Slovic, editor; milkweed.org. An artist's and writer's statement about her goals and practices—including the value of field notes and field sketches. Zwinger wrote many books about the places she explored as an artist and naturalist.

Websites, in addition to those mentioned above

- academy.allaboutbirds.org Associated with Cornell Lab of Ornithology; excellent online journal & drawing courses.
- BareBooks.com Source of inexpensive blank books. I use the 6-1/4 x 8 size; 36 blank pages; hard bound; cover is also blank for drawing or writing. July 2025 price is \$3.15 each.
- Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, UC-Berkeley mvz.berkeley.edu Home of the Grinnell Resurvey Project and online archives of field notebooks.
- USA National Phenology Network (aka Nature's Notebook) www.usanpn.org Excellent resource for anyone curious about how field notes can be used in science and education.
- Wild Wonder Foundation, wildwonder.org: Founded by John Muir Laws, lots of info and classes for journaling.

For more information about field journals or to schedule a workshop,
contact Carolyn Duckworth: phone 406-223-0669,
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Basic Field Sketching Supplies

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Most are available in art, craft, and office supply stores and online.

#2 pencils. Check the eraser before relying on it in the field—some great pencils have awful erasers that smudge, tear paper, etc.

“Magic Rub” eraser, currently manufactured by Prismacolor. • Vinyl eraser cleanly erases pencil and some colored pencil without smudging or leaving grit. • Long-lasting; breaks apart easily to make smaller field erasers.

A pen of any kind. Better for writing because pencil can smudge so easily. Test to ensure ink is waterproof.

Black pens of various nib weights, both permanent and semi-permanent inks. I use:

Micron pens of different nib weights. Use 01, 03, 05 for writing and drawing; 2 for bold strokes; brush tip for gesture sketching.

Pilot V5 fine point for writing because its nib is sturdy, but the pen often leaks after an altitude change. • Ink can run when fresh. • refillable.

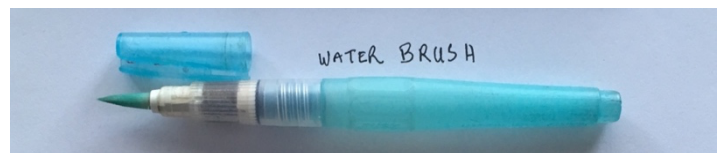
Dual brush pen; one end is a hard nib, one end is soft brush. Fun for gesture drawing. \$3 to \$8.

Colored pencils or watercolor pencils, whichever you prefer. Buy good quality pencils to ensure a good experience. Cheap pencils usually don’t mix well. • Derwent, Staedler, Faber-Castell, Prismacolor are good brands. You’ll likely have to buy a set. Choose one that at least has the primary colors, a few earth colors, and some pastels. • Some art supply stores sell individual pencils or check online and expect to pay \$2–5 per pencil. If you use a limited palette, like I do, they are worth it.

Water brush for quick work in the field with watercolor pencils. Pentel, Kuratake, Caran d’Ache. \$4–8 each each. Tombow is also easy to find, but it does not distribute water well.

Sketchbooks—I use pocket-sized, staple bound blank books for quick field work or when I need to travel especially lightly. • For more permanent field journal: spiral bound is cheaper; saddle stitch binding doubles your drawing surface but usually more expensive. Canson, Pentelic, and Swarthmore are trusted brands; binding holds up; paper is high quality. Look for paper that will hold up with water media but isn’t too thick or rough.

Always test your paper, pens, pencils, and other tools before using them in the field!



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