



Animal Signs - Activity 3: Field Notebook

Having a reminder or a follow-up for a learning experience is a great way for students to remember what they have learned. This activity aims to help students process the information they are introduced to in a hands-on way that leaves them with something to take home and reflect on. It also encourages them to continue exploring the subject and to keep adding to their field notebook.

Goals

- Familiarize yourself with your local green space and its inhabitants
- Understand that there is a lot more wildlife around than it initially looks like
- Understand what a field notebook is
- Take observations and notes from the field
-

Material

- Paper
- Writing tool

Activity

One of the most invaluable skills for a scientist is to take proper notes for what they see! This helps them to communicate their findings to others, as well as look back on findings to interpret for themselves. Think about when we learn in a classroom! Hearing and learning about something is great for understanding it, but having notes to review for later is so important for remembering what we learned as well as better understanding deeper concepts. When scientists are outside working, notes like this are called *field notes*. This is an important and useful skill to develop. For this activity, which can be done in conjunction with Activity 2 or simply with normal exploration time of a green space, students will be asked to practice their hand at doing their own field notes.

A good place to start is to talk to students about what a field note is. Field notes are a written account of data that is collected from observations that are made. To be as useful as possible, field notes should be:

- Accurate
- Detailed enough to understand the observation but not cluttered with irrelevant information
- Clear and understandable for someone that wasn't there for the observation

There are lots of different ways to take field notes but usually, they include descriptions of the observation as well as a reflection/ thoughts and ideas of what was observed. The descriptive field notes happen in the field as the student makes the observation. Good things to include are:

- A title of what was observed
- The physical setting (the location, time, weather, was it dark or light outside?, etc.)

- Describe what you see. This can be done with words or pictures and labels! Sometimes drawing something out and labelling it can be more useful or easier for recording details than writing it out! It can also make it more objective (which is better for science) since others can interpret words in different ways.
- What is going on during the observation. Are there any actions happening that you observed? What is happening in the environment around the animal sign?
- Who was making the observation?
- Anything else that you notice related to your subject!

All this is important to paint an accurate word-picture for later. After the observation is made, students can go back into their observations and add their reflections or interpretive field notes. This part happens after you leave the field and helps scientists think about and understand what they observed. Good things to include are:

- Any ideas or hunches for why the observation was the way it was
- Any questions you might have about the observation
- Any feelings you might have about the observation. What surprised you? What interested you?
- Any assumptions or expectations you bring into the observation

How field notes are set up can be up to the student- they know how they learn the best and what organizational style makes the most sense to them- but an example format that can be used is included below.

Students should also be encouraged to always keep exploration and adding to their field notes in their own time! This is a great way to keep track of what they see!





Example Field Note Organization *with questions and prompts*

Title of Observation:	
Name(s) of Observer:	
Setting:	<i>Location, time, weather, etc.</i>

Observation:

This can be a description of what you see with words or a labelled picture.

Beside your description, add notes on what is happening in the environment around your observation. How does it connect and interact with the environment around it? Is anything happening with what you are observing or is it doing something? Is it doing nothing?

Reflection:

Hint: Do this afterwards. Take what time you have in front of your observation trying to get as many important details as possible!

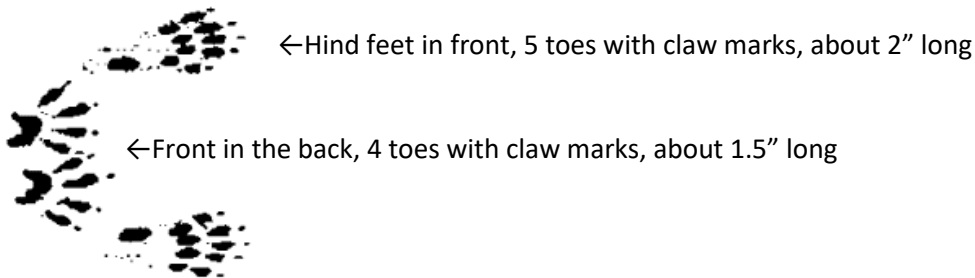
What do I think is happening with what I observed? How do I feel about it? Is there anything I don't know about it?



Example Field Note Organization with sample data

Title of Observation:	Squirrel Tracks
Name(s) of Observer:	Jenny Lin
Setting:	Arboretum Gosling Wildlife Gardens, Garden 2, by White Pine tree December 9, 2020 @ 3:00pm A clear sunny day with about 2cm of snow on the ground. About 2C outside.

Observation:



These tracks were seen in the snow, but details of each foot were pretty clear. There were groups of all four feet prints that were a small distance apart from each other. The tracks lead from underneath a bush, to around the bottom of a bird feeder, to in front of a White Pine tree, where the tracks stop. I didn't see any animals around that the tracks led to.

Reflection:

I am assuming that these tracks were made by a squirrel based off of the shape of the feet and the pattern of the tracks. Since the details were pretty clear in the snow, I think these tracks were made pretty recently but since I didn't see any animals around it, I assume that the squirrel has left. Based on where the tracks led to and end, I think the squirrel came out from under the bush, had a snack on the seed underneath the bird feeder, then went to and climbed up the tree. I am excited since these tracks are so clear, but I wonder what type of squirrel they could be? I know that red squirrels and gray squirrels can both be seen here so I wonder how I can tell them apart? I think that they are probably not chipmunk tracks since it's so cold and snowy right now that chipmunks probably aren't very active and around.