

Taking Field Notes Like a Scientist

Conservationists often do their fieldwork outside of a laboratory setting. Because they are out in the field, the notes that they take are very important. Those notes allow the scientist to record the details of everything that they see so that they don't have to try to remember later. To do this, scientists use all types of methods, including writing down what they see, collecting numbers for how many animals or behaviors occur, and sketching animals and plants so that they can identify them later. Scientists call these notes "field notes" because they are notes taken "in the field". Can you take field notes like a scientist? All you need is a notebook or journal, something to write or draw with, and lots of patience! Follow the steps below and see what you can learn!

Materials:

- Paper
- Journal or notebook
- Pen/Pencil
- Binoculars to observe details from far away
- Smartphone to take pictures, video, or audio

Process:

1. The first step in acting like a field scientist is to find a good location where you can make lots of observations. This can be your yard, neighborhood park, trees in your neighborhood, or simply looking outside of your window. If you want to observe some of the Wildlife Conservation Society animals, you can visit our live webcams on your computer: <https://bronxzoo.com/virtual-zoo/live-cams>
2. Once you know where you will be taking your field notes, spend a few minutes making observations. At this point, just use your eyes – don't take notes. What do you see? What do you have questions about? This is the first step in good science. If you want additional support on how to do this, use the "Asking Questions Like a Scientist"

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worksheet found on the Bronx Zoo's Digital Resources page:

<https://bronxzoo.com/learn/educators/digital-resources>

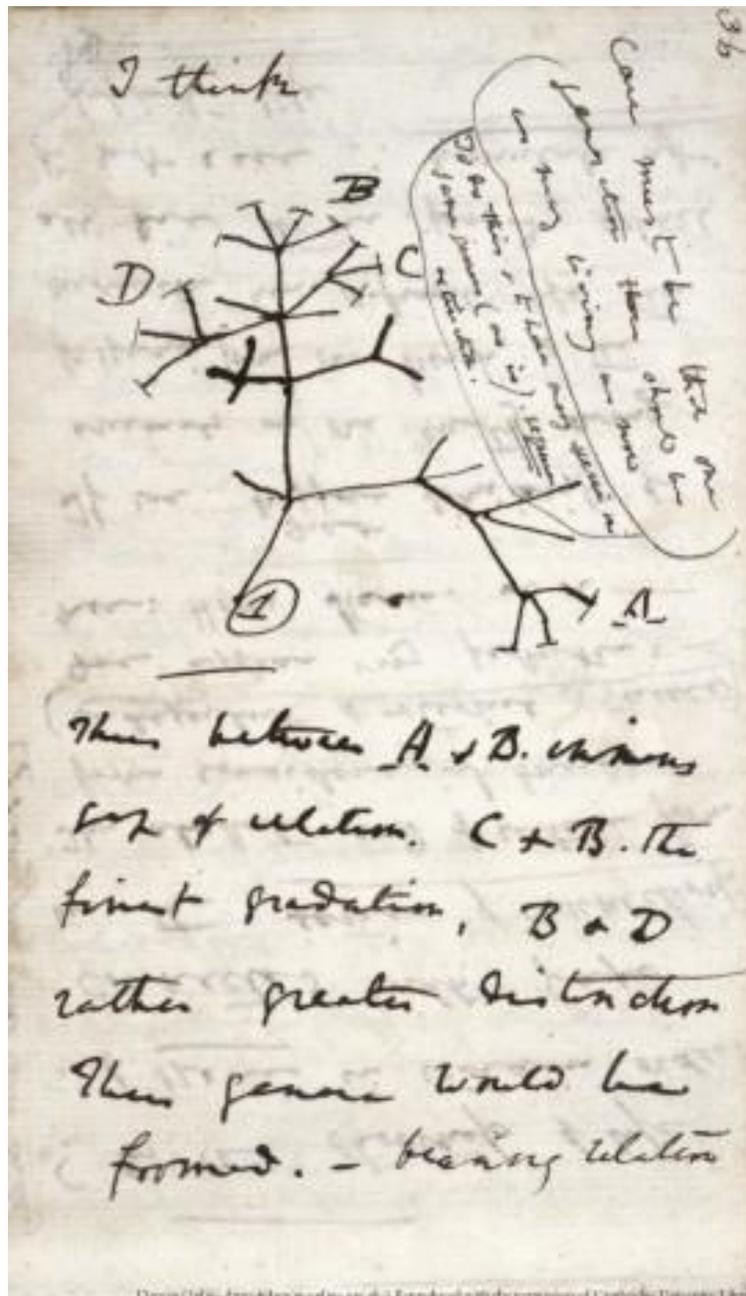
3. Review your observations – what questions do you have? Spend a few minutes thinking about what you'd like to know more about. What question do you think you can answer by watching the animal more? In your field journal, write down a research question that you'd like to try to answer.
4. Now find a comfortable place to sit down. When doing fieldwork, scientists often spend hours in the field. For this activity, you won't spend that much time taking notes, but you will want to be comfortable. When you are comfortable, you are able to focus more on taking notes instead of being distracted by discomfort.
5. Finally, it's time to take your field notes. Remember that your field notes should all be related to your research question. If your question is related to the types of flowers that bees visit, then your notes should all be related to bees and flowers. You can describe the ways that the bees fly. You can count how many times bees visit different types of flowers. You can draw or sketch what it looks like when a bee is sitting on a flower. All of these notes are to help you try to answer your question, so make sure to take lots of notes and collect different types of data. The more data you have, the easier it will be to answer your research question! Spend at least 10 minutes taking notes.
6. Once you've finished taking notes, review, or analyze, your notes to see if you can find any patterns that help you answer your research question. Share your findings with a friend, teacher, or caregiver and see if they agree with you. Science is most fun when you are sharing what you've learned with others!

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Examples of Field Notes:

Charles Darwin's field notes on relationships between finch species in the Galapagos from his journey on the HMS Beagle between 1831 and 1836

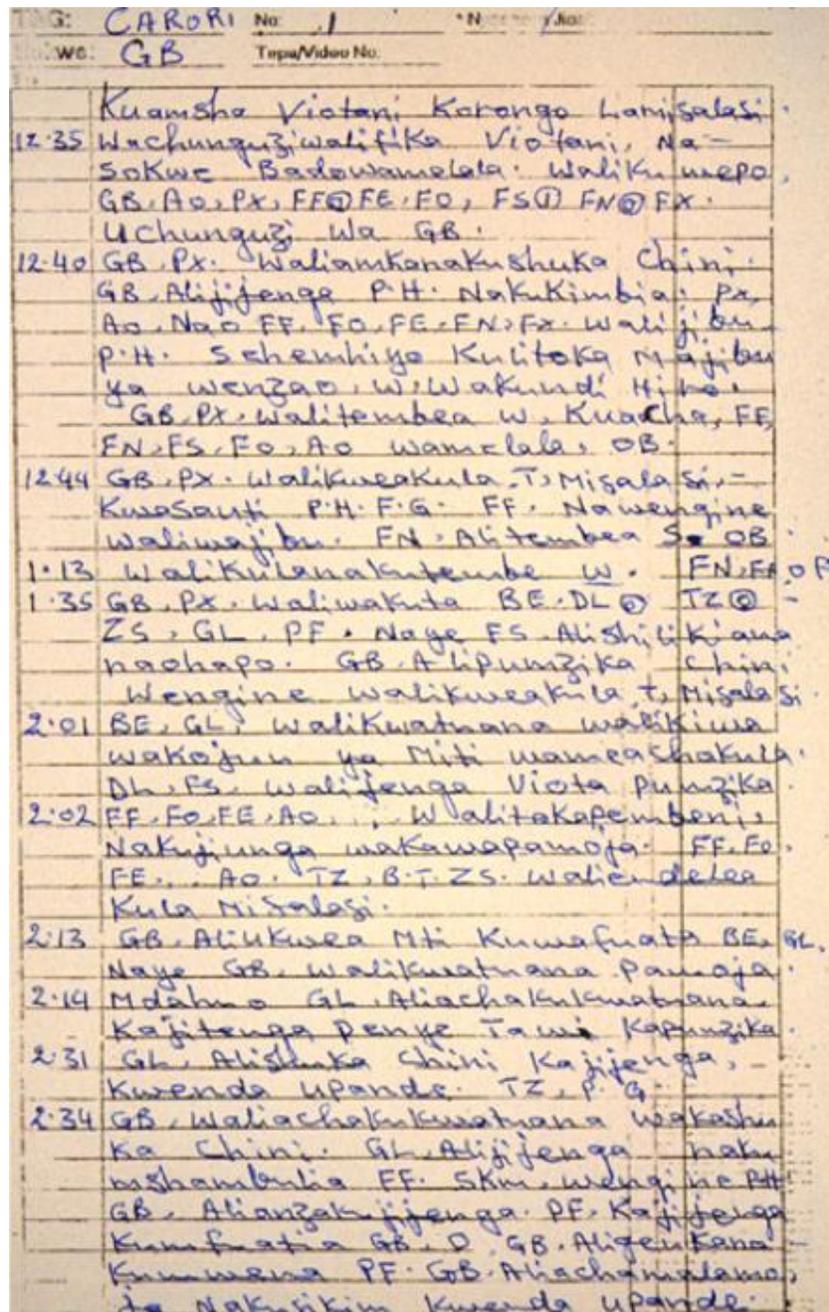
Collected from darwin-online.org.uk



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Field notes in Kiswahili on chimpanzee behavior at Gombe from the Jane Goodall Institute Research Center (year unknown)

Collected from leakeyfoundation.org



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Dian Fossey's typed field notes for identifying gorilla's based on characteristics, including nose prints (year unknown)

Collected from gorillafund.org

