Keeping a Field Journal 2

<http://www.amnh.org/explore/curriculum-collections/biodiversity-counts/what-is-biodiversity>

If you sit in Brian Boom’s office at the New York Botanical Garden, you will see a shelf of field journals, their spines labeled with the year and the specimen numbers each includes. When he pulls out a dried and mounted specimen from his collection, it is an easy matter to find the exact page of the specific field journal with the notes he made when he originally found the specimen. The specimen number is written in the left-hand margin, and it is the same number as can be found on the mounted specimen’s label. In fact, all of the information on the label can be found in the journal entry.

“That’s where the label data come from,” Brian explained. “Everything on the label is in the journal, but everything in the journal does not necessarily make it to the label.” The field journal is a continuous record of everything collected, arranged in numerical order.

Brian recommends recording everything you observe, both the standard things--such as date, elevation, location, and so on--and the fleeting things--such as the color and smell of the plant along with any plant-animal or plant-insect interactions you observe. Although he advises students to take only specimens from whole, living plants for study, he says that notes about any fragments you find--acorns, pinecones, seeds, and other plant parts--should be included in the journal.

Brian makes rough sketches of such things as his site in his field journal, and he takes photographs of living specimens. “I don't have the skills to draw specimens--that’s why I use a camera--but there are botanists who do beautiful drawings, and all the rest of us are jealous of them,” he admitted.

“The field journals are permanent records,” he said. “They are one of the great resources of museums and institutions like the New York Botanical Garden.” Brian keeps his in his office, but they will eventually end up in the NYBG archives, where other botanists will be able to consult them.