

Make Your Own Field Guide

What lives near you? You be the guide!

Summary:

Scientists use field guides to identify animals and plants in an area. You can create your own field guide with drawings or photographs of your local wildlife. You can share your field guide with friends, family, and neighbors.

Guiding Questions:

What plants and animals do you see?

What unique features do those creatures have?

How can we identify what they are?

Experience Goals:

- Look for animals or plants that live near you.
- Record what these organisms look like with photography or drawing.
- Identify animal or plant species.

Supplies:

- Paper, or print page 5
- Pencils, pens, markers, or crayons
- Outdoors, or window views
- Field guides, internet access, or other animal identification resources
- Optional: magnifying lens, binoculars, camera

Steps:

1. What is a Field Guide?

- a. At the Field Museum, our scientists go into nature all over the world and look for what lives there. They make Field Guides, and share them with others who help in the research. Field Guides are designed to be easy to use. They are simple pages with labeled pictures of plants and animals.
- b. Field guides help people identify wildlife. Some guides are more general, like [this](#) guide to common animals and plants in Chicago. Some are more specific, like this [guide to Illinois bees](#)

2. Explore and record

- a. Go outside, or look out a window. *What plants and animals do you see?* Take time to explore what lives in the area around you.
- b. Decide what type of guide you want to make. There are two main ways to do this:
 - Base your guide on a specific location: in a stream, under the dirt, at the bird feeder.
 - Base your guide on the type of organism: insects, pinecones, leaves, mammals.
- c. List the animals you want to include in your guide as you see them. Not sure what something is? Make notes, a drawing, or take a picture to help you identify it later.
- d. Can you collect specimens? Some items like seeds, leaves, or pinecones that have fallen off a tree or plant are ok to take home. You could take these items indoors for further examination and identification. Make sure what you take is not still rooted to the ground.

3. Identify species

- a. Look over your list and identify the species. Compare your description, drawing, or photo, to existing guides.
- b. Explore the Museum's [Field Guides](#) to see if there is a guide for your needs. For example: [Chicago sparrows](#), [Common Dragon and Damselflies of Illinois](#)

- c. If your species isn't in a Field Guide, try doing a web search targeted to your specimens (for example, "Texas Leaf identification").
- d. If you were able to take photos, you can upload them to [iNaturalist](https://www.inaturalist.org/). This online platform has many knowledgeable people that will help identify your species.
- e. Having a hard time identifying something? Email us about it at askthefield@fieldmuseum.org. Include a picture and description if you can. A Field Museum scientist will get back to you!

4. Build your Field Guide

- a. After you've identified your collection, you are ready to build your Field Guide! Print page 5 or use it to draw your own.
- b. Label your Field Guide. What is it all about? For example, Backyard Worms, Birds at the Birdfeeder, My Favorite Creatures. Include your name, city, state, and country.
- c. If using your own paper, mark equal sized sections for each of the species you want to highlight. Add pages if needed.
- d. For each species, make a drawing. Be sure to include any unique features of your animal that would help others to identify it. For example: the red breast of a robin.
- e. Write down the name of each species underneath the drawing and, if desired, any notes about it.

5. Share your Field Guide

- a. Your finished Field Guide can now help others identify wildlife near you! Keep your field guide near a window or the door so it is handy for future explorations.
- b. *Who could use your field guide in their explorations?* Share your Field Guide with family or email pictures of it to neighbors!

Variations:

Take pictures of the plants or animals! Print them and paste them into your Field Guide.

Extensions:

Challenge family members to use your Field Guide like a scavenger hunt! Can they find everything?

Field Guide to

Author

City

State

Country

Species:

Notes:

Species:

Notes:

Species:

Notes:

Species:

Notes:

Species:

Notes:

Species:

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