



LESSON 8

ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS

RAMPING UP YOUR OBSERVATION SKILLS



WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER WILDLIFE,
THE OPPORTUNITY FOR
OBSERVATION MAY BE BRIEF.



IN THIS LESSON, YOU WILL LEARN HOW
TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE
SITUATION BY USING DELIBERATE
OBSERVATION TECHNIQUES AND
GETTING YOUR OBSERVATIONS TO
PAPER AS FAST AS POSSIBLE.



HAVING A PLAN FOR ANIMAL
ENCOUNTERS ALLOWS YOU TO
BE FLEXIBLE AND RESPOND TO
THE ENVIRONMENT.



BE FLEXIBLE IN YOUR APPROACH

- When you see an animal, assume the animal will not be around for too long. Start working with that in mind.
- If you notice the animal is sticking around, you can change your approach and continue journaling.



NATURAL PHENOMENA

- You can use this procedure with any animal encounter you have. This approach works for mammals, birds, insects, reptiles, and amphibians.
- The longer, closer, and less obstructed the view the better, but go with what you get.
- Even a quick glimpse of a deer in passing is rich with information if you intentionally remember what you see.



PROCEDURE SUMMARY

1. Say observations out loud as long as you can see the animal.
2. Use words, pictures and numbers to describe the appearance and behavior of the animal, using words to capture what is difficult to draw quickly.
 1. The detail you put into your words will serve as a recipe for your drawings.
3. Because the animal will move, start several drawings and work on one whenever the animal assumes that pose.

STEP 1



- Start verbalizing your observations in a soft conversational voice.
- This helps you remember the details you see and to make sure you observe accurately.
 - Describe how the animal looks and what it is doing.
 - You **MUST** say this out loud, but quietly enough that you don't scare away the animal.

STEP 2



- Continue to make your observations.
- Start using words, pictures and numbers to describe the appearance and behavior of the animal and write them into your journal page.
- Think carefully about which note-taking approach is best for the information you are trying to capture.

STEP 3: QUICK STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH THE ANIMAL'S MOVEMENTS



- Start three drawings of different poses.
- Shift the drawing you're working on when the animal moves.
- Make two drawings that show different views or poses. These could be side and back views, or two different positions the animal returns to often, like head up and head down.
- The third view will be a close-up of some detail that is interesting to you.

HOW TO DRAW THREE THINGS AT ONCE



- Bounce around from one drawing to another as the animal moves.
- When you get a good look at the detailed pose you are interested in, work on that drawing.
- When you get your side view, work on that drawing.
- You do not need to finish all three drawings.
- One will probably get further developed than the others, and that's okay.

MODIFYING YOUR STRATEGY IF THE ANIMAL STAYS AROUND



- As time passes, you can begin to find the numbers hidden in your observations.
- Count, measure, and time things.
 - For example,
 - you might time the number of seconds the animal spends doing different behaviors,
 - estimate the distance between the animal and the forest,
 - count the number of stripes on the animal.

ASK QUESTIONS



- Take a moment to focus on asking and recording questions.
- Make a question mark icon and list as many questions as you can come up with below it.
- Then go back to observing and add in questions as they come to you.

WHEN THE ANIMAL LEAVES



- Complete field notes from memory, adding in details that haven't been recorded yet.
 - This will be easy if you described your observations aloud.
- In time we will forget the details we do not put down on paper. Think for a moment about details or behaviors you observed that are not recorded in your notes.
- Take another five minutes to fill out the rest of your notes.
 - This could be written descriptions or more details in your drawings.
- When you are finished with your journal page, look up information on your animal. Cite your source and write all about your animal. Become an expert!

TWO DRAWING TECHNIQUES

- **Contour Drawing:** Try lightly drawing the outline of the animal you're studying first. Then use your eraser to make adjustments. After you have all the proportions the way you want them, color your drawing.
- **Geometric shapes:** If the animal is too difficult to draw as a contour, break down the parts of the animal into general geometric shapes next to one another. Draw the geometric shapes very lightly with your pencil. Then use your eraser and pencil to adjust the shapes to the actual shape of your animal. After you have all the proportions the way you want them, color your drawing.
- **ALWAYS** begin with a light pencil sketch that you can erase easily. Finish with colors as your last step.



28 October 2020 Wednesday 2:33pm 85°
Frog Pond Tejon Ranch - grasslands ✨ winds - calm Omph

White bill



black head - dirty
smooth dark grey
body



white under tail
smooth slate
grey body feathers

beak comes up pretty
high up on the head

Several coots in
cattails. Can hear
them make a guttural
semi-hooping sound

Seem pretty relaxed
and happy - will it be its the
time of day?

Head + neck
are black



bobs under
water
sometimes submerges completely



Tail

Constantly moving, pecking
at the water

[?] Can you tell the difference between ♂ & ♀?
• When they peck at the water, are they eating insects? Could they
be preening their throats? Could they be eating plant matter?
• What do the different vocalizations mean? Could they be
communicating with each other
Top of beak looks black
or grey

HERE'S WHAT I GOT DONE BEFORE THE COOT DISAPPEARED INTO THE Cattails:

1. Lots of descriptions written down after I said them aloud.
2. Small landscape picture
3. Three drawings in different positions
4. Close up study of head and tail.
5. List of questions with "?" icon.

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I see 2 birds but hear at least 2 more in the cat tails. So at least 4 birds in this pond

White bill

black head - dirty smooth dark gray body



white under tail smooth white body to the

Seem pretty relaxed and lazy - will it be the time of day?

Head + neck are back

I love the reflection in the calm water

Neck comes up pretty high up on the head

Several coots in cat tails. Can hear them make a guttural some hoarse sound - Rappy voice

Large feet - not webbed like a duck!

legs are green!!!



tips under water sometimes submerge completely



Tail

Constantly moving, pecking at the water

I hear 3 or 4 vocalizations one sounds a bit like a building low croaking sound

Can you tell the difference between ♂ & ♀?
 • When they peck at the water, are they eating insects? Could they be preening their feet? Could they be eating plant matter?
 • What do the different vocalizations mean? Could they be communicating with each other?

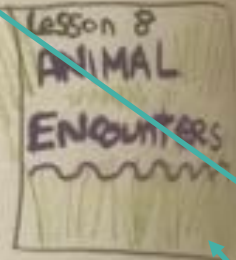
Tip of beak looks dark or grey

I CONTINUED TO WORK ON THE JOURNAL PAGE

1. I corrected shapes.
2. I added details (like the reflection of the coot in the water).
3. I added more ABC's and 123's.
4. I colored my drawings last.

Research: ALL ABOUT BIRDS - Cornell Lab of Ornithology
AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

- Typically feeds from the surface of the water but sometimes dives
- Long lobed toes to help propel it in water
- Length 15.5-16.9 in (39.4-42.9 cm)
- Weight 21.2-24.7 lbs (600-700 g)
- Wingspan 23.0-25.0 in (58.4-63.5 cm)
between a robin and a crow



Eat aquatic plants in any body of water - algae, duckweed, sedges, wild celery, cattails, insects, crustaceans, mollusks, snails

Requires long running takeoffs to get airborne because of their short wings

Found in ponds, reservoirs, edges of lakes, roadside ditches, sewage treatment ponds, saltwater inlets and saltmarshes

Highly vocal species - calls w/ a variety of grunting, croaking, + squawking noises.

Common sounds: prik, prik, prik
Krrp, krrp, Krrp

Nesting: built over the water on floating platforms
Clutch size 8-12 eggs; 1-2 broods
incubation period 23-25 days
eggs - buff, pinkish or buff-gray speckled
Hatchling - covered in down, alert and ready to leave the nest within 6 hours of hatching

MY RESEARCH:

1. I cite my source at the top of the page.
2. I identify my animal.
3. I include the title of this lesson.
4. Lots of ABC's and 123's.
5. Some of my questions have been answered by my research.

Research ALL ABOUT BIRDS - Cornell Lab of Ornithology
AMERICAN COOT (Fulica americana)

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ANIMAL
ENCOUNTERS**

Eat aquatic plants in any body of water - algae, duckweed, water celery, water hyacinth, water lettuce, water hyacinth, water hyacinth, water hyacinth

Requires long running take offs to get airborne because of their short wings

Found in ponds, reservoirs, edges of lakes, roadside ditches, sewage treatment ponds, saltwater flats and salt marshes

Highly vocal species - calls w/ a variety of grunts, croaking, + squeaking noises.

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Nesting: built over the water on floating platforms

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I see 2 birds but hear at least 2 more in the cat hole. So at least 4 birds in this pond

White bill

Dark head - shiny smooth dark grey body



white bill water but smooth white body

Dark patches around eye legs - could it be in the water? I love the reflection in the water



large feet - not spread like a duck! legs are gloom!!

Neck comes up pretty high up on the head

Several calls in 5-8 min. Can hear them make a guttural low sounding sound fluffy noise.



Tail

Unusually noisy, picking at the water

I have seen 4 individuals and sounds as if one is calling and calling sound

Can you tell the difference between a - ?
 as they ceph around? could they be calling?

REFLECTION

Question/Answer

Question/Answer form
(Put as many words
from the question into
your answer.)

Answer

Answer all questions,
then put them in an
order that makes sense
for a paragraph.

Topic Sentence

Begin with a topic
sentence ("I studied an
American Coot in a
pond.")

Closing Sentence

End with a closing
sentence ("It was
challenging to capture
my observations as
quickly as possible.")

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1. What were some interesting questions you produced? What are some hypotheses for your questions?
- Patterns: What patterns did you observe? What else have you seen with a similar pattern?
- Cause and Effect: How might the behaviors you observed be affected by the time of day, year, weather, or location? What kinds of things might cause this animal's behavior to change?
- Structure and Function: Study your notes and drawings of your subject. Do any body parts seem specialized to do specific things or functions? Describe them.



Tejon Ranch CONSERVANCY



Black Necked Stilt

*BYE FOR NOW
THANKS FOR JOINING ME*