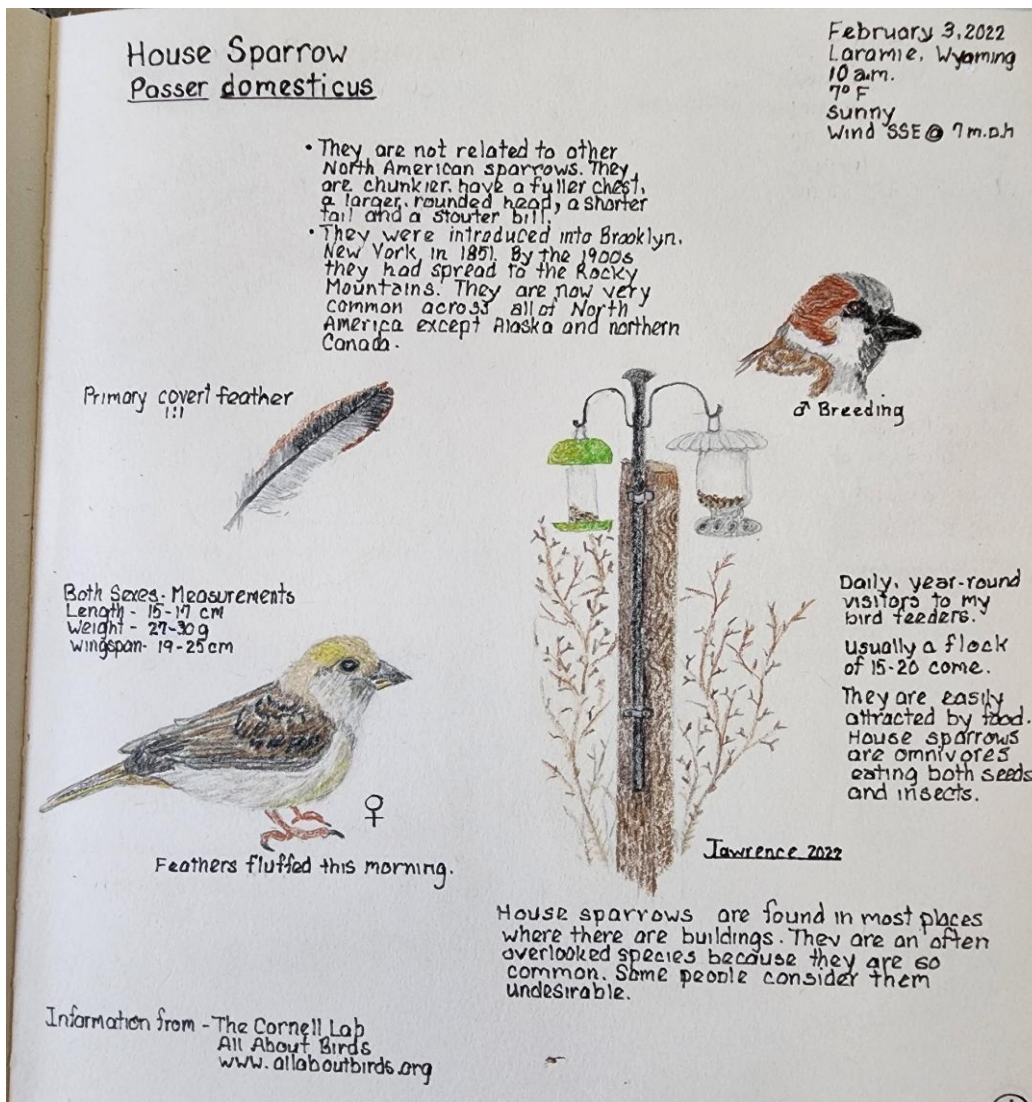
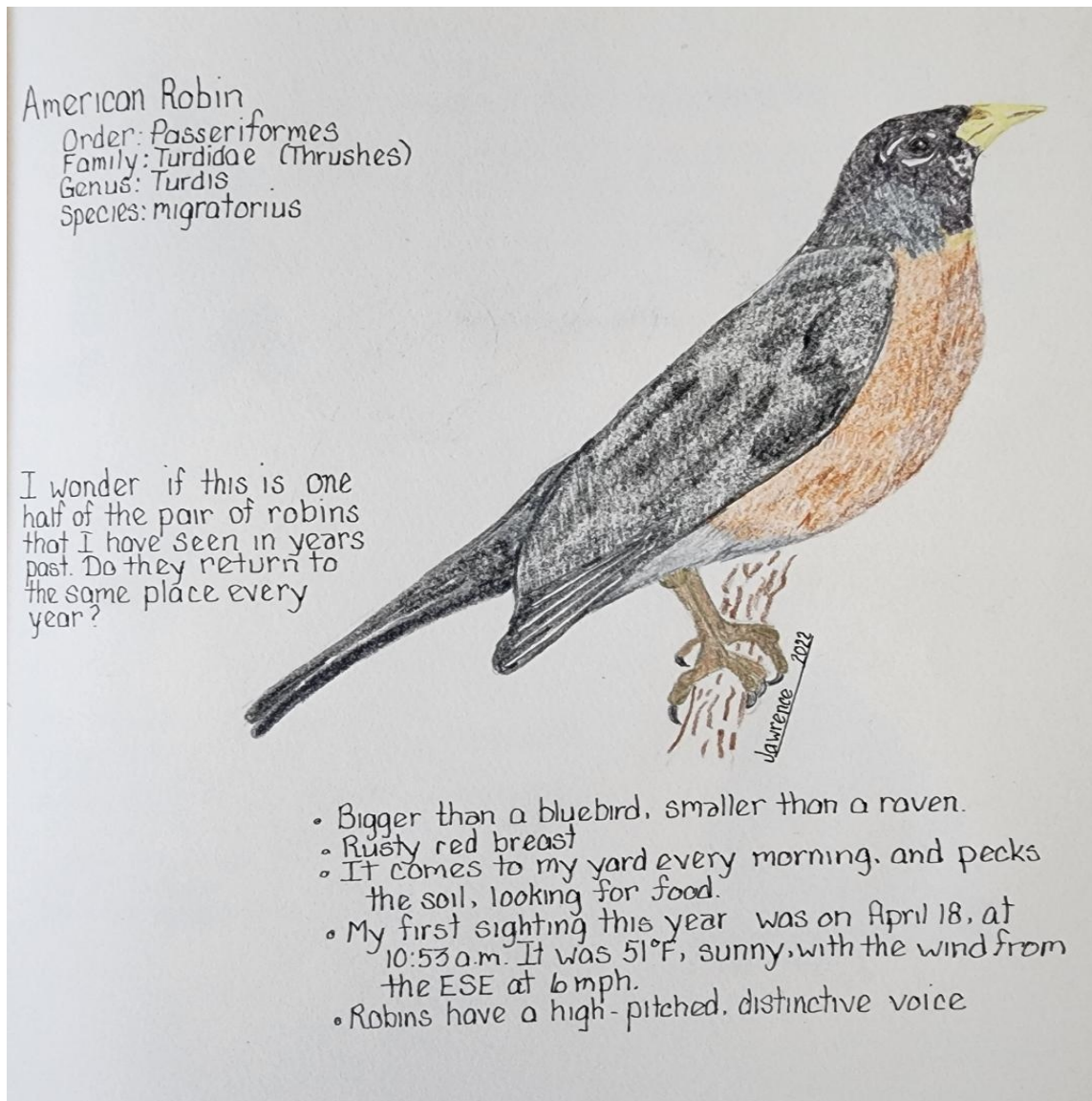


The Art and Science of Nature Journaling

Nature journaling is not a new endeavor. Some of the great scientists throughout history have picked up a notebook and drawn and written about what they observed around them, from the ancient Greeks to Charles Darwin, John James Audubon, and John Muir. Joseph Grinnell, an American biologist, and zoologist made extensive studies of the fauna in California, USA. He created an extensive method of recording precise field observations. Many, many other naturalists have done some sort of nature journaling in a tradition that continues to this day.

I have done nature journaling on and off for a number of years. Before I retired from teaching, I had my students keep nature journals with varying degrees of success. Some students really enjoyed it, while others did as little as possible with the assignment. My greatest successes were during summer school when we could usually venture outdoors, and to nearby mountains and ponds without the worry of getting snowed on. If we went in the morning, we were generally able to avoid the notorious Wyoming wind.





I got more serious about nature journaling when I took a class in 2022 to become a Certified Wyoming Naturalist. Weekly journal entries were a requirement of that course, with a specific assignment. The above drawings are pages from that class journal.

House Sparrows are my favorite bird. They are not flashy or majestic. They are little and tough. If I had a Spirit animal, it would probably be the House Sparrow. This was our first assignment. We had to draw something we observed in nature, the environment where it is found, and a close-up feature of what we drew. The American Robin was done for the ornithology portion of the course.

You do not need any fancy art supplies to successfully nature journal. A notebook and a pencil are quite satisfactory. That's not to say one can't invest in all the fancy supplies, but it is not necessary.

As with any scientific investigation, nature journaling starts with a question. My favorite question is, "I wonder..." And that leads to the art of nature journaling.

To answer the question, “I wonder,” we must follow a few steps. The first is to sit quietly and observe. Our eyes tell us a great deal, and the longer we observe something, the more we can learn. It is easy enough to jot observations down in a notebook. Add to that the other senses, touch, smell, and hearing. (Taste can be used with caution. I do not know most plants and mushrooms well enough to engage this sense.) As I journal, the I wonder questions come to mind.

I also believe nature journaling can be done in words. I wrote this about Alcova Reservoir, which is west of Casper, Wyoming. This was in the fall.

Red, flat-topped canyon walls, layers of sandstone red and grey compressed by eons of time, dark grey scrub oak intermingled with grey-green sage. A light breeze blows, lines clanking against the masts of the tethered boats, diamonds dancing across the water, and wispy clouds floating in a baby blue sky.

Bright green algae float on the surface of the water, the boats gently rocking, grassy weeds tangled around their mooring lines, while a crow caws in the distance, interrupting the stunning silence. Fine, gossamer webs of silk, unnoticed but for the sun kissing the strands running across right angles of the wooden dock.

A carp weaves lazily through the water, emboldened by the warmth in a patch of sun, Only to notice a shadow, seeking refuge under the dock again. The wind's breath is Becoming stronger, pushing at the peacefulness of the day, the coming cold being Pushed before it, a hint of what is to come.

The piece goes on, but you get the idea, and hopefully, a picture in your mind.

Nature journaling can be applied to the smallest organisms and the largest. It can be applied to the world around us. I plan to draw at least a few of the lovely slides I was gifted, and wrote about in the February 2023 issue of this publication.

This year, I am also using a few pages in my journal to keep track of the weather here in Laramie, Wyoming. One of my obsessions is the weather. I have no less than three apps on my phone. The following is one of those pages. The weather was observed at 12 noon, Mountain time daily. I noted the actual temperature, the wind chill or feels like temperature and the conditions.

March 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			T 27° WC 8° Wind SSE 32-44 mph Laramie, WY 1	T 32° WC 21° Wind WSW 19-25 mph Laramie, WY 2	T 31° WC 21° Wind W 9-10 mph Laramie, WY 3	T 37° WC 24° Wind WSW 21-28 mph Laramie, WY 4
T 32° WC 19° Wind W 22-34 mph Laramie, WY 5	T 30° WC 14° Wind SSE 28-35 mph Laramie, WY 6	T 32° WC 26° Wind SSW 5 mph Laramie, WY 7	T 29° WC 14° Wind SSE 30 mph Laramie, WY 8	T 34° WC 23° Wind W 24-33 mph Laramie, WY 9	T 48° WC 40° Wind SSW 26-32 mph Laramie, WY 10	T 45° WC 37° Wind SE 17 mph Laramie, WY 11
DST T 29° WC 21° Wind NW 16-18 mph Laramie, WY 12	T 33° WC 22° Wind W 20 mph Laramie, WY 13	T 47° WC 39° Wind SW 26-34 mph Laramie, WY 14	T 52° WC 45° Wind WSW 29-45 mph Laramie, WY 15	T 24° WC 7° Wind NW 18-28 mph Laramie, WY 16	T 24° WC 9° Wind NW 21-32 mph Laramie, WY 17	T 32° WC 21° Wind NNW 18-24 mph Laramie, WY 18
T 39° WC 28° Wind WSW 27-35 mph Laramie, WY 19	T 21° WC 12° Wind N 7 mph Laramie, WY 20	T 37° WC 25° Wind W 24-33 mph Laramie, WY 21	T 32° WC 24° Wind SSE 9 mph Laramie, WY 22	T 36° WC 26° Wind WSW 17 mph Laramie, WY 23	T 35° WC 25° Wind WSW 19 mph Laramie, WY 24	T 24° WC 7° Wind WSW 26-32 mph Laramie, WY 25
T 25° WC 12° Wind WSW 16-24 mph Laramie, WY 26	T 21° WC 7° Wind NW 17-25 mph Laramie, WY 27	T 37° WC 24° Wind SW 23-32 mph Laramie, WY 28	T 44° WC 35° Wind SSE 16 mph Laramie, WY 29	T 51° WC 43° Wind SW 28-40 mph Laramie, WY 30	T 33° WC 19° Wind NNW 33-46 mph Laramie, WY 31	

Note: There is an error for the data on 3/13/2023. The correct temperature was 55° F. Windchill was not available. The wind was from the west at 14-26 mph.

There is no end to the many ways a nature journal can be used. I have seen beautiful daily or monthly observations, and illustrations of the same place or organism over a period of time.

A nature journal is a very personal document. These days having a camera and computer in our pocket cause us to be in a bigger rush about our lives than ever. Keeping a nature journal requires us to slow down and relax, and ultimately, get in touch with the world around us. (Although I do sometimes take photos of something interesting to refer to later.)

To see some absolutely stunning nature journal pages, and find resources, check out the Facebook page, *The Nature Journal Club*, or just Google nature journaling.

By Jennie Lawrence. Comments welcomed, email – missjennae AT yahoo DOT com

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