

Nature Journaling

By Chris Schnurbusch

Welcome to April! This month brings rain and shine, various sunny skies and cloudy weather. Now is an excellent time to dust off your outdoor shoes and make the most of the nice weather. New activities are popping up left and right—look at pickleball! Another amazing outdoor hobby that's starting to gain more traction is nature journaling. Nature journaling is drawing or writing what you experience in nature.

Whether you've heard of nature journaling before or this is your first time, now is the perfect time to start the hobby! Grab your favorite art supplies and explore the outdoors. You can modify the process any way you see fit and design your journal however you'd like.

You can sketch what you're seeing, document various interactions, ask yourself deep questions, or anything else you'd like to do in your journal. It can be a fun way to engage in the outdoors and embrace the wind, or you can sit down and seriously contemplate your thoughts and emotions. The most important 'rule' in this new hobby is to have fun with it. This is your journal, so try not to compare yourself to others or let your fear of drawing something 'bad,' stand in your way. Artistic ability has no bearing on the hobby.

You don't need to get fancy or go far to fill up your nature journal. A walk in your neighborhood is bound to yield interesting journaling topics. You can document the same location in all four seasons and note the changes between each time, journal about how a certain item inspired you that day, or delve deep into your emotions and discover what aspects of nature resonate with you.

Personally, I like to use watercolors to paint birds I've seen during my walks and use pen to write what those species were up to or why I like them. If you're still not sure about what to draw in your nature journal, online resources can provide prompts or examples to inspire you.

It's easy nowadays to become so absorbed in our technology that we lose our connection with nature. It can be difficult to truly reflect inwards on ourselves if we never take the time to disconnect from our screens. The American Psychological Association says that spending time outdoors can decrease stress and promote better mental health. Pair this with the benefits of creativity, and you'll see how beneficial nature journaling can be.

Feeling inspired yet? Great, grab your journal and get on out there! Discover what's important to you, and maybe you'll find yourself along the way. If you find yourself falling in love with the environment during this nature journal journey (which I hope you do), take the time to consider volunteering or getting involved in your local conservation communities. We here at the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory would be happy to have you!

Come celebrate Earth Day at GCBO with a family nature journaling event on Saturday, April 20th at 3pm. Kimberly Ridley, author of *Matagorda Magic: The Hidden Life of a Texas Bay*, will teach families to delve

into nature and make lasting memories in a nature journal. Materials will be provided, and we'd love to see you there! You can learn more about this and other events on our website, www.GCBO.org.

Photo credit: Gulf Coast Bird Observatory

Caption: Drawing or painting can be a fun part of nature journaling.