

Field Notes on Science and Nature,
edited by Michael R. Canfield, foreword by E.O. Wilson.
Harvard University Press 2011.

The first point to make about Field Notes on Science and Nature is that it is one of the most beautifully produced and printed books that I have seen for many years, a joy to hold and behold.

In his Foreword, E.O. Wilson notes the importance of field records, especially in the light of the unavoidably limited nature of even the most exhaustive research, and in his introduction the editor defines the purpose of the book as being to allow readers the opportunity to look over the shoulder of the cited naturalists and scientists and into their notebooks.

Field Notes on Science and Nature contains twelve chapters: The Pleasure of Observing; Untangling the Bank; One and a Half Cheers for List-Keeping; A Reflection of the Truth; Linking Researchers across Generations; The Spoken and the Unspoken; In the Eye of the Beholder; Why Sketch?; The Evolution and Fate of Botanical Field Books; Note-Taking for Pencilphobes; Letters to the Future; Why Keep a Field Notebook? The authors of these chapters include George Schaller, Jenny Keller, Piotr Nasrecki and Jonathan Kingdon – indeed it is a stellar list of contributors.

What gives this book yet another dimension is that it is a fine vehicle for communicating not just the areas of interest of the cited contributors, but also their passion for their field of study or work. Anyone interested in the natural world will find delights in this book, and even those of a non-scientific bent should have no fear, for the language used is very approachable.

In short, a very fine book!

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh