

Transcribing the Field Notes of William Brewster (Tutorial for Journals)

This version of the Australian Museum tutorial is specifically for transcription of the Ornithological Journals of William Brewster. The guidelines contained herein should be followed for those works only.

General guidelines:

Please transcribe exactly what is in the image, with line breaks exactly as they appear in the original document, and 2-space indentations for new paragraphs.

It is not necessary to create margins in your transcription. If the author has written in the margin of the page, put this transcribed text at the bottom of the page or at the end of the relevant section, and bracket the text with [margin] and [/margin]. For example: [margin]this text was written in the margin[/margin].

*****Please see sample transcription at the end of this tutorial.*****

- Transcribe entry dates verbatim, but if the month, day, or year was not written in the original date entry, please add the missing piece of information to the transcription if known.
- Transcribe any special characters or symbols such as °, ♂, or ♀ as normal text in square brackets, for example [degrees], [male], [female], etc. If there are Shorthand symbols, then use [shorthand symbols] within square brackets.
- If there is a diagram or photograph, then type [diagram] or [photo] at the place of the object.
- If unsure of a word, put a [?] in the transcribe box. If unsure of letters in a word, put a [?] for the letter. For example: lett[?]r. Also use a [?] for illegible handwriting or damaged handwritten pages.
- If a word or sentence has been crossed out or erased (but is still visible), bracket the deleted text with [delete] and [/delete]. For example: [delete]crossed out text[/delete].
- If the text has been underlined, just transcribe as normal, without any special bracket notation.
- No spaces are needed before punctuation, and only use one space after a full stop. Transcribe a dash as –, that is, a hyphen character with a space on each side.
- If there is text inserted ^ into a sentence, then simply incorporate into the transcription text without using the ^.

Summary of usage of square brackets

In general, parentheses () are used when they are part of the original document and square brackets [] are used for insertions by the transcriber.

More on next page →

Entering data in fields (boxes) below the main transcription text:

Dates

- Enter **YYYY-MM-DD** (using dashes) or for a range of dates, **YYYY-MM-DD/YYYY-MM-DD**. If only the month and year are given, enter **YYYY-MM**.

Species

- Put all species that appear in the text into the fields below the transcription box. Include organisms mentioned by species or genus name (please do not include vague descriptions such as fowl, wader, grass, reed, dog). Please enter all species mentioned, not only birds.
- In the original document, most common names are capitalized (Ex: Blue Jay, White-crowned Sparrow). They should be transcribed that way in the main body of text, but in the data fields below, they should be lower-case (blue jay, white-crowned sparrow)-- *unless the common name includes a proper noun (ex: Wilson's thrush, Carolina wren, Cooper's hawk, Pacific gull, Bonaparte's gull, Bicknell's thrush)*.
- If the species name was spelled incorrectly in the main text, put the corrected name in the species fields.

Localities

- When a species was actually seen or heard, give all the details of the locality in the Location field.
- Most of the entries are written in the USA, so typically this format is best:
City (or Town/Geographical landmark), State. More details if available.

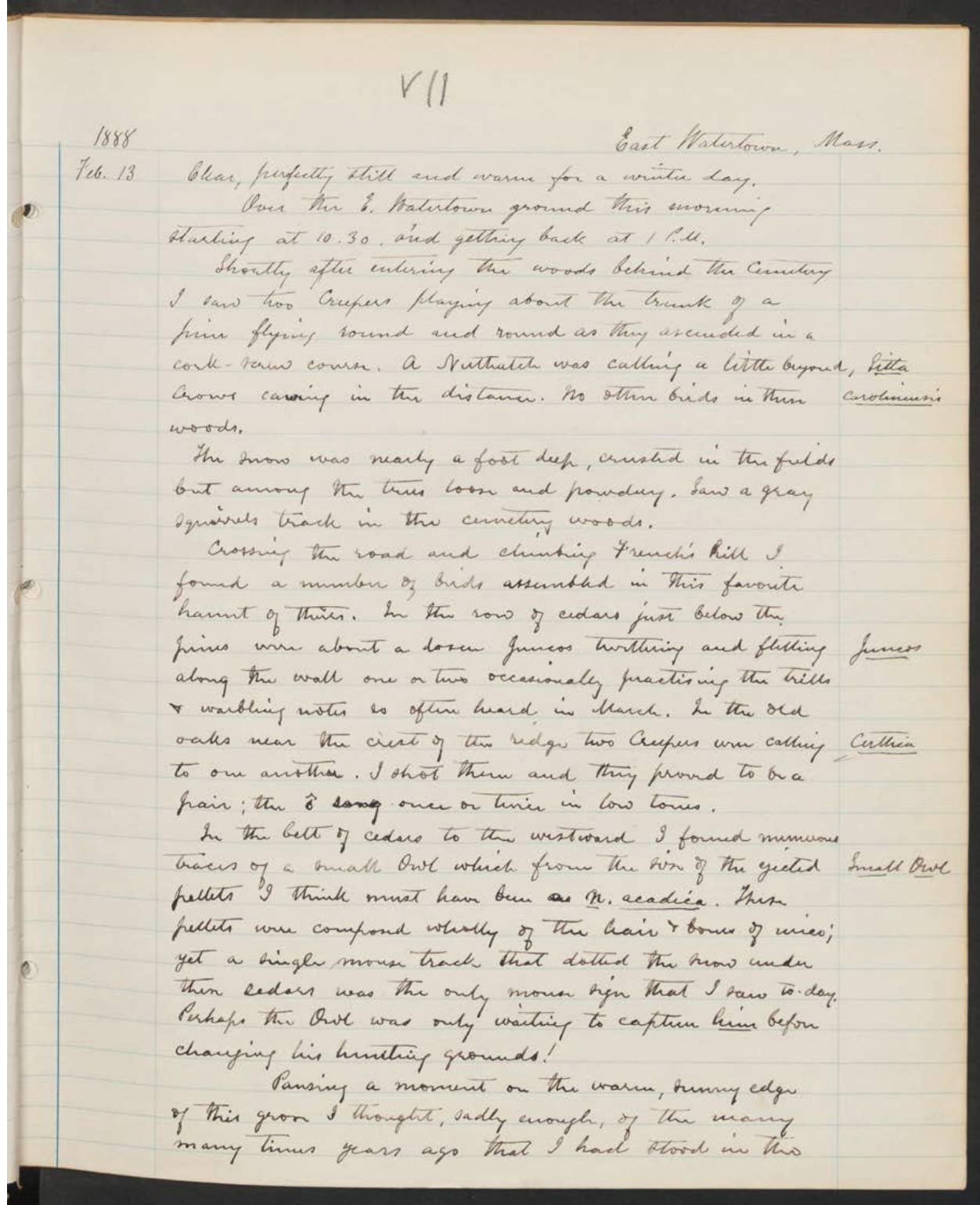
Ex: Concord, Mass. Ball's Hill, in pine trees near Brewster's cabin.

Ex: Cambridge, Mass. Seen feeding on cherries in Brewster's garden.

Ex: Lake Umbagog, Maine. Seen swimming in lake off Pine Point.

- If the species is mentioned but was not actually present, leave the location and date fields blank.

Below is sample page from Brewster's Ornithological Journals with a transcription showing proper formatting, and examples of some of the above conventions (highlighted in yellow).



V11

1888

East Watertown, Mass.

Feb. 13

Clear, perfectly still and warm for a winter day.
Over the E. Watertown ground this morning
Starting at 10.30. and getting back at 1 P.M.
Shortly after entering the woods behind the Cemetery
I saw two Creepers playing about the trunk of a
pine flying round and round as they ascended in a
cork-horn course. A Nuthatch was calling a little beyond, Pitta
Crows cawing in the distance. No other birds in these Carolinensis
woods.
The snow was nearly a foot deep, crusted in the fields
but among the trees loose and powdery. Saw a gray
squirrel's track in the cemetery woods.
Crossing the road and climbing French's Hill I
found a number of birds assembled in this favorite
haunt of theirs. In the row of cedars just below the
pines were about a dozen Jays twittering and flitting Jays
along the wall one or two occasionally practicing the trills
& warbling notes so often heard in March. In the old
oaks near the crest of the ridge two Creepers were calling Certhia
to one another. I shot them and they proved to be a
pair; the ♂ sang once or twice in low tones.
In the belt of cedars to the westward I found numerous
traces of a small Owl which from the size of the ejected Small Owl
pellets I think must have been N. acadica. These
pellets were composed wholly of the hair & bones of mice;
yet a single mouse track that dotted the snow under
them cedars was the only mouse sign that I saw to-day.
Perhaps the Owl was only waiting to capture him before
changing his hunting grounds!
Pausing a moment on the warm, sunny edge
of this grove I thought, sadly enough, of the many
many times years ago that I had stood in this

More on next page →

The transcription for this page should look like this:

East Watertown, Mass.

1888

Feb. 13

Clear, perfectly still and warm for a winter day.

Over the E. Watertown ground this morning starting at 10.30 and getting back at 1 P.M.

Shortly after entering the woods behind the cemetery I saw two Creepers playing about the trunk of a pine flying round and round as they ascended in a cork-screw course. A Nuthatch was calling a little beyond, Crows cawing in the distance. No other birds in these woods.

[margin]Sitta
Carolinensis[/margin]

The snow was nearly a foot deep, crusted in the fields but among the trees loose and powdery. Saw a gray squirrels track in the cemetery woods.

Crossing the road and climbing French's hill I found a number of birds assembled in this favorite haunt of theirs. In the row of cedars just below the pines were about a dozen Juncos twittering and flitting along the wall one or two occasionally practising the trill & warbling notes so often heard in March. In the old oaks near the crest of the ridge two Creepers were calling to one another. I shot them and they proved to be a pair; the [male] sang once or twice in low tones.

[margin]Certhia[/margin]

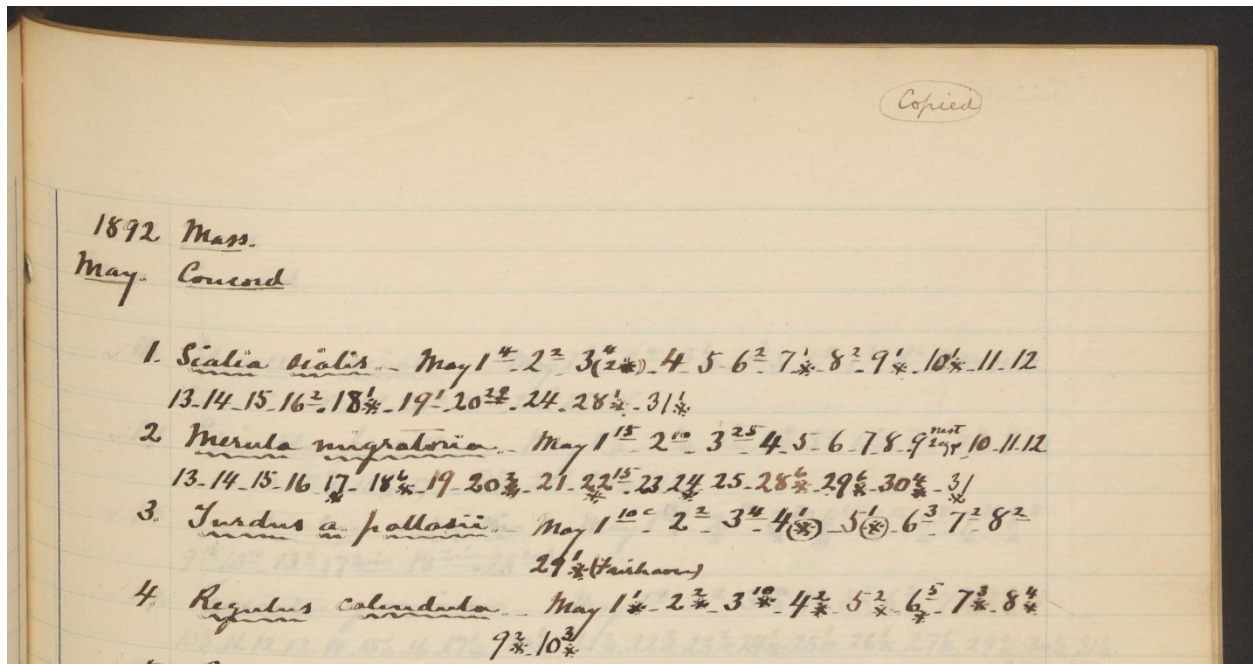
In the belt of cedars to the westward I found numerous traces of a small Owl which from the [?] of the ejected pellets I think must have been *N. acadica*. These pellets were composed wholly of the hair & bones of mice; yet a single mouse track that dotted the snow under these cedars was the only mouse sign that I saw to-day. Perhaps the Owl was only waiting to capture him before changing his hunting grounds!

[margin]Small Owl[/margin]

Pausing a moment on the warm, sunny edge of this grove I thought, sadly enough, of the many many times years ago that I had stood in this

On the next page is a sample transcription of a data list from Brewster's journals.

More on next page →



The transcription for this page can be transcribed using the following system:

Copied

1892.

May.

Mass.

Concord

1. *Sialia sialis* - May 1: 4; May 2: 2; May 3: 4, (2* [singing]); May 4; May 5; May 6: 2; May 7: 1* [singing]; May 8: 2; May 9: 1* [singing]; May 10: 1* [singing]; May 11; May 12; May 13; May 14; May 15; May 16: 2; May 18: 1*; May 20: 2 [female]; May 24; May 28: 1* [singing]; May 31: 1* [singing]

2. *Merula migratoria* - May 1: 15; May 2: 10; May 3: 25; May 4; May 5; May 6; May 7; May 8; May 9: nest 2 eggs; May 10; May 11; May 12; May 13; May 14; May 15; May 16; May 17* [singing]; May 18: 6* [singing]; May 19; May 20: 2* [singing]; May 21; May 22: 15* [singing]; May 23; May 24* [singing]; May 25; May 28: 6* [singing]; May 29: 6* [singing]; May 30: 4* [singing]; May 31* [singing]

3. *Turdus a. pallasii* - May 1: 10 c; May 2: 2; May 3: 4; May 4: 1* [circled]; May 5: 1* [circled]; May 6: 3; May 7: 2; May 8: 2; May 29: 1* [singing] (Fairhaven)

4. *Regulus calendula* - May 1: 1* [singing]; May 2: 2*; May 3: 10* [singing]; May 4: 2* [singing]; May 5: 2* [singing]; May 6: 5* [singing]; May 7: 3* [singing]; May 8: 4 [singing]; May 9: 2* [singing]; May 10: 3* [singing]

Please note that:

- In this case, the page has not been copied exactly.
- Please attempt to keep line breaks as in the original text, but it may not always be possible.
- We have interpreted star-like symbol to mean that the bird was heard singing.
- A circled star is also sometimes used, but its meaning is not certain. It can be transcribed as: * [circled]

More on next page →

Finally, if you have difficulty deciphering a species name and would like to try to look it up, some helpful resources include:

[Encyclopedia of Life](#)

[Birds of the Cambridge Region of Massachusetts](#)

[Avibase](#)

[List of North American Bird Species](#)