

## The "CODA" of Field Sketching

If you go about it with a sense of adventure, you will realize that field sketching is:

- **great entertainment** – a quick fix for the blahs.
- **challenging** – especially in bad weather.
- **demanding** – accuracy can be difficult in the field.

You can characterize field sketching with the acronym "CODA":

**C**uriosity, **O**bservation, **D**iscovery, **A**ccuracy

Webster's dictionary says a *coda* is "something that serves to round out, conclude or summarize, yet has its own interest."

Well, hey, that sounds like a good field sketch page. Here's a thought:

**The purpose of a good education is to encourage:**

- acute observations
- making discoveries,
- asking questions,
- making connections between ideas,
- and forming educated deductions.

**A field sketch page is a combination of all those things made visual.**

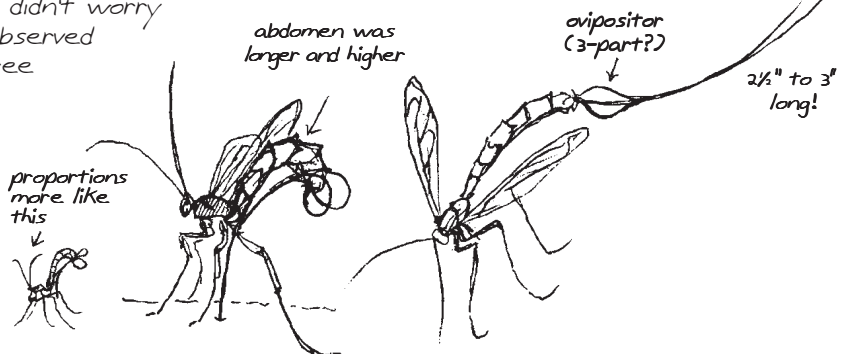
So where do you start? What follows is a narrative of what led up to my sketch below:

"I was walking down a trail next to a swamp in central South Carolina with only a small unlined journal and a ballpoint pen. I spotted this ichneumonid wasp and crept up as quickly and quietly as I could. It didn't seem to notice me, so I opened to an empty page in my little journal and started to draw.

I had to sketch fast, in ink, so I didn't worry about getting it right or wrong, I just observed and drew as fast as I could for about three minutes, then it flew away.

After it left, I kept drawing for nearly ten minutes: notes, labels, a correction to the drawing – that the abdomen should have been longer and higher. I made a tiny sketch with just a few lines to show what it should have looked like. If I'd been using pencil, THEN would have been the time to erase and correct, not during sketching (it might have flown and I'd have nothing sketched.)

This isn't a terrific drawing, but it illustrates an experience I personally had, and it nudged me to look up these fascinating wasps and learn more about them. Having sketched it, I'll always remember this amazing sight."



Wow! I just saw this huge wasp, a yellow, red + brown ichneumon, inserting its eggs into a rotten log! When it was done, it stood on its head with abdomen straight up and pulled until it freed its ovipositor (3-part), then pulsed until it had slicked down to a single 3-inch "tail", and flew away. I sketched it from 12 inches away for about three minutes total, but I don't know how long it had been laying eggs before I came along.

That narrative points up a number of important things. The situation could have proceeded VERY differently in MANY ways. For instance, I might have ✓left my sketchpad at home. I might have ✓failed to notice the wasp. I might have ✓been scared to get close enough to watch. I might have ✓been afraid to draw in ink. If using a pencil, I might have ✓stopped to erase and correct. I might have ✓tried to do a detailed drawing of just one part and got a single partial drawing that wouldn't show what transpired. I might have ✓quit when it flew and ✓failed to make notes while the visual memories were fresh. If I had made notes later, I might have ✓remembered inaccurately. I might have ✓been too proud to admit my drawing was inaccurate and make a correction, thus perpetuating a false impression of the wasp. Whew!

(The illustration below is a "computer-improved" field sketch.

### DOING IT RIGHT

- be observant, questioning, and open to wonder.
- write down thoughts, observations and questions.
- get close enough to see lots of detail
- sketch, then get closer and sketch again – then again.
- make a habit sketch (quick sketch of a more distant view)
- take enough notes to fill in the empty spaces.
- ponder what you are seeing (in addition to drawing)
- describe what you see (even if you're unsure what it is).
- assume you will never see this phenomenon again.

It might fly away, hatch, get eaten, go to seed, be stepped on, or carried off by a woodrat. Or you may just never go there again.

- *carpe diem!* Seize the day! Draw the day!  
The world is yours to illustrate!

Although clarified, the text remains much the same to retain the sense of excitement. Compare with the raw sketch on page 129.)