

THE BIRD BOOK:

An Ornithology Volunteer Preparation Guide

Framing

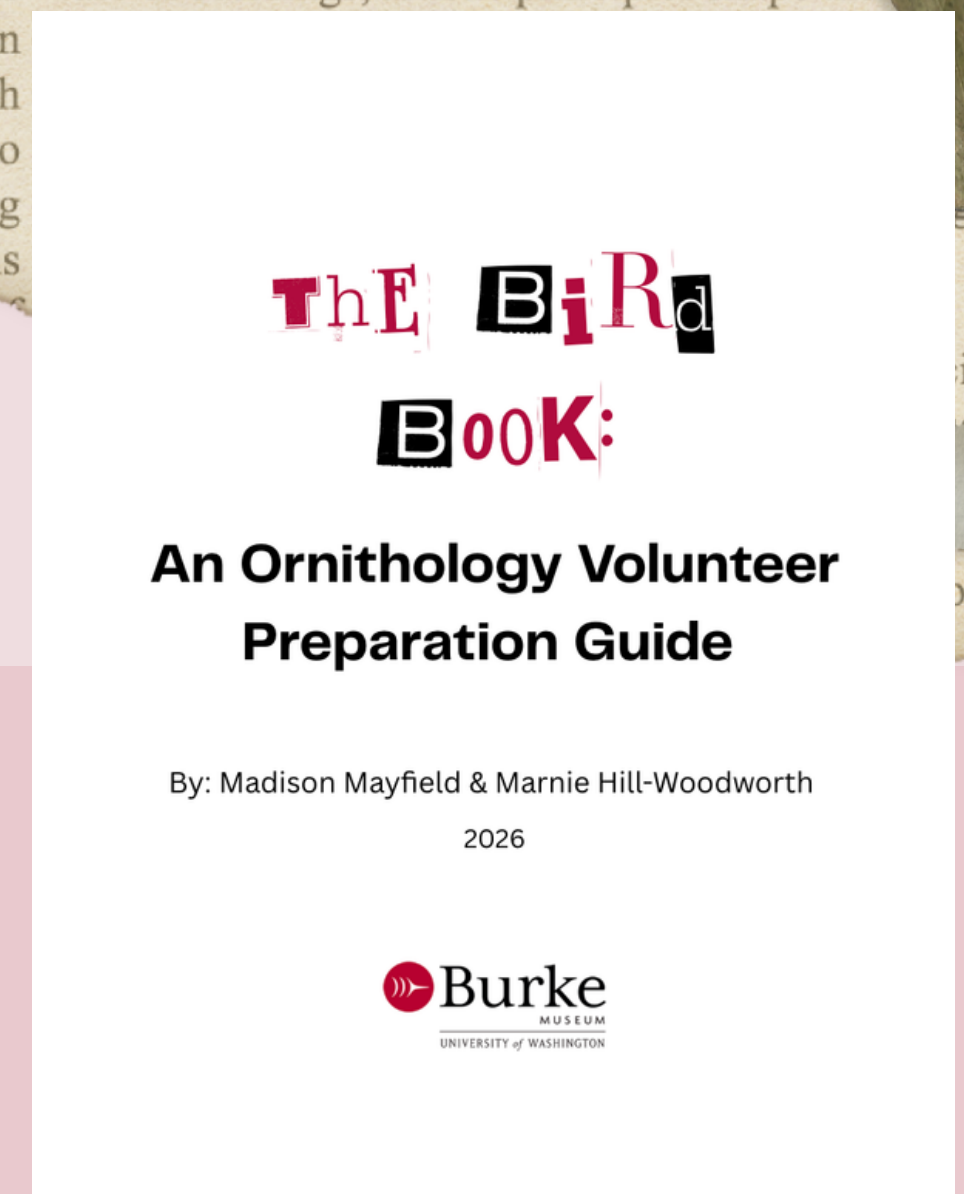
Since Covid at the Burke Museum, the Ornithology department has not had a solid group of volunteers to help them with specimen prep, cataloging, and digitizing. They are hoping to create a framework for their volunteer program that is sustainable and thorough so that onboarding and training individuals is efficient. Having a program that runs smoothly will help them work through their massive specimen backlog and provide museum experience to students and emerging professionals. There was also a need to update the existing preparation guidebook, which had not been revised since 2016.

Purpose & Impact

The purpose of this project is to solidify the Burke's Ornithology volunteer program to help work through their specimen backlog and help emerging science and museum professionals. It best solves the museum's problem by helping them to retain volunteers and provide a lasting framework for if/when there is ever a transfer of knowledge (or period where the program isn't happening) so that it is easily restartable. Volunteers who participate in the program will be more engaged in museum collections practices including specimen collection, specimen cataloging, label making, and digitizing. The target audience for this booklet includes the Ornithology department, current and future volunteers, and the Burke Museum as a whole.

Deliverable

The deliverable for this project is a new progressive tiered volunteer system that incorporates pre-existing onboarding materials from the ornithology department. The structure consists of four tiers, each increasing with the number of birds needed to be prepped in order to move on to the next tier. Once volunteers have prepared a sufficient amount of birds, they then have access to helping out with other collections and preparation based tasks or even coming on collections trips. The information is compiled in a physical and digital booklet for volunteers to have access to. The guidebook itself is also completely re-designed with the addition of the tiers and updated preparation steps and onboarding information.



Process

The process of making the guidebook began with an internship I underwent in the department and looking at what preparation materials already existed. I learned preparation operations and understood things from a volunteers perspective. Collections manager Madison Mayfield and I began drafting what the actual tiers would consist of and she solidified how many birds volunteers would prepare in order to progress to the next tier. I then surveyed the existing (and some past) pool of volunteers to determine if they would find the tiered system beneficial and if they would like to engage in more collections based activities and got 9 responses. 80% said they would like to do more collections work while 20% are interested and would like more information about what that entails. Then I re-formatted the existing preparation materials, adding new additions from Madison that updated the guidebook and made it more cohesive.

Me preparing a young crow & spreading a magpie wing in the Burke's prep lab!



Reflections

The next steps in this project consist of introducing the new tiered system to volunteers and implementing the guidebook in the department. Through this process, there may be more revisions once volunteers become acclimated to it, especially the collections interested volunteers who may need more support being integrated into daily tasks and larger projects. Volunteerism is something that you can find your way into at any point in your life and should be accessible for a wide variety of people. With these tiers, I hope to give folks an entry point to learning museum collections practices as well as specimen preparation that meets them at their level, but at the same time allows room for growth and challenges. Having been on both sides of the preparation process, I can see what is beneficial to volunteers and what helps collections managers. I hope to keep volunteering at the Burke and encourage anyone who is thinking about volunteering to do so as well.

Special Thanks

I would like to extend gratitude to my thesis committee Lane Eagles, Madison Mayfield, and Alejandro Rico-Guevara for guiding me through this process.

XOXO

References

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