

Articles for Country-Side: Notes for Contributors

Country-Side welcomes your articles! Our contributors come from a wide range of backgrounds and some may be less familiar than others with the conventions of academic writing. Even if the article you're writing isn't particularly academic in nature, there are some relevant conventions that Country-Side hopes you will follow.

Names - the basic rules

The first time an animal or plant is mentioned, it should be given both its scientific (or taxonomic) name and its common name (if it has one). As in this example - Grey Wolf (*Canis lupus*), scientific names should be written in *italics* with the first word capitalised (*Canis lupus*). Common names should be capitalised each time they are mentioned, as in Grey Wolf. Note that the name given second is usually put into brackets, as it has been in all the examples above.

After the first mention, you can use either name but you don't need to use both. Which you use is up to you but stick to one or the other.

References

In essence, 'referencing' simply means acknowledging someone else's work or ideas when you use them in your article. There are various ways of doing this, but Country-Side favours the so called 'Harvard system'. Some Country-Side articles won't be the kind that require references, but if yours does, don't be put off if you aren't used to referencing – it's simple, and while it used to be a tedious chore, these days AI computer programs such as Chat GPT make the whole process much quicker and easier than it used to be.

Here are the basic rules of the Harvard system:

1. In-text Citations:

When you use someone else's ideas, paraphrase their work, or directly quote them, include the author's last name and the publication year in brackets within your text.

Example: It has been claimed that pigs can fly (Smith, 2019). *Or* Smith (2019) claimed that pigs can fly.

Include page numbers if you are directly quoting from an author's text.

Example: Smith (2019, p. 45) states: "Pigs can fly. Honest. I've seen them do it".

For works with multiple authors, list all the authors the first time and then if there are three or more authors use "et al." for subsequent citations.

Example: Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young (2019) becomes Crosby et al. (2019), but Simon and Garfunkel (2019) stay as Simon and Garfunkel (2019).

When citing a source you found within another source (a 'secondary source'), cite both sources. Include the original source and "as cited in" the secondary source.

Example: Smith (2019), as cited in Jones (2020), claims that pigs can fly.

2. Reference List:

This is where things have got a lot easier since the advent of AI programs. Once you have all your sources gathered together (you *have* been doing this as you went along, haven't you?) the next task is to compile them into a properly formatted reference list to go at the end of your article. Until recently, this could involve hours of drudgery. Now, an AI such as Chat GPT will do this chore for you in seconds, and at the same time check the list for errors and correct them too. No matter how rough and ready your original list is (within reason!) all you need to do is ask your chosen AI to check your list of references and compile it in Harvard format. Seconds later, out it will pop, properly formatted and error free.

The AI will follow something like the rules below, and if you choose not to use an AI and compile the reference list yourself, they are the rules you should follow too.

List the sources alphabetically by the author's last name.

Italicize or underline the titles of books, journals, and other longer works. Use quotation marks for titles of articles, chapters, and shorter pieces.

Format for citing books: Author's last name, Initials. (Year). Title of the book. Publisher.

Example: Whiston, K.R. and Walton, I. (1934). *Fly Fishing*. Routledge.

Format for citing articles: Author's last name, Initials. (Year). Title of the article. Title of the Journal, volume number (issue or part number if there is one), page range.

Example: Whiston, K.R. (1953). "The biggest old trout I ever caught." *Fishing Times*, 15(3), 121-125.

Format for citing web sources: Author's last name, Initials. (Year). Title of the web page or document. Retrieved (date retrieved) from URL.

Example: Tomm, J., Dicke, K. and Harrie, L.M. (2020). 'How to Cite Websites'. Retrieved 30 Feb 2021 from <https://www.example.com/cite>.

The points above cover the basics of naming and referencing in a Country-Side article. Should you have a query or need information about something not covered here, answers can be found in many places on the internet. For example, many universities publish freely-available guides to referencing and the use of scientific and common names, and Wikipedia's "Manual of Style/Organisms" is also a comprehensive and useful source of guidance.

Alternatively, if you are unsure, please feel free to contact the Editor at country-side@bna-naturalists.org

Tips on writing an article for CS

There are some simple tricks that anyone can use to improve their writing. Even very experienced authors sometimes forget these, so I make no excuse for spelling them out here.

All good stories need a beginning, a middle and an end. If you're writing an article for CS, we can turn that thought into:

The beginning – *What are you going to tell me?*

That's your first paragraph. Summarise the main points of the article.

The middle – *So tell me all about it!*

That's the main body of the article.

The end – *What have you just told me? And what of it?*

That's your last paragraph.

This way of structuring things is cleverer than it seems. Take the beginning. It doesn't only come first, *it's what you should write first*. You only have ONE paragraph to play with here, and you need to summarise the whole article. Deciding what absolutely CANNOT be left out of that limited space forces you to focus on what's really important.

Once you've worked that out, you've also given the body of the article its shape. You've decided that *this* and *this* and *this* are the main points: the things that are vital to give the reader a clear grasp of the tale you're telling. Equally, you also know what's less important, which means you're far less likely to confuse the reader by going off on a tangent. Or two. Which is the mistake that many authors make. Keep focused!

A good tip when writing the body of the article is to look at things from the reader's point of view. Look at each sentence or paragraph, and ask yourself the question 'Why is the author telling me this?' If you can't answer that question, there's something wrong! Often, the problem is that the current idea doesn't seem to flow naturally from the ideas that went before. If so, it's time for you, as author, to make a better job of tying things together.

Sometimes, though, the problem can be that the current idea genuinely doesn't have much to do with what went before. It's a new idea. Does that mean it's time for a new sub-heading, or is the article just wandering off on an irrelevant tangent? Keep focused!

What about the final paragraph? Well, here's where you sum things up and if there's any conclusion to be drawn from what you've written, here's where you spell it out. If nothing else, you can at least use the last paragraph to make sure the reader understands what are the key take-aways from your article.

Simple tips, yes, but very effective. And here's one final one. Before submitting your article do two more things. Put it away for a few days and then read it through again with fresh eyes. You may be surprised at how many tweaks to it you want to make. In the same vein, give it to someone else to read, and ask them if there's anything they don't understand or that they'd change. In other words, ask them to be a critical friend. Finally, after all that, submit it to CS where another critical friend on the Editorial Team will look over it and perhaps be able to make a suggestion or two to further improve it. Or, if you've already done all the hard work, perhaps not!