

COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
University of Missouri

Recording field narratives

--Kazic, T

This note describes a simple system for recording narrative data in the field.

To permit the eventual use of voice-recognition software to translate the recording into text, a system compatible with the software (MacSpeech 1.7) was needed. It consists of a fifth-generation video iPod (Apple; 80 GB model, MA450LL), connected to a Belkin TuneTalk stereo microphone (F8Z082-BLK) via the iPod's dock connector. A Plantronics VXi TalkPro headset/microphone is connected in turn to the TuneTalk using a standard microphone jack. The headset microphone's audio quality is higher than that of the TuneTalk itself, probably because extraneous noise from moving plants is sharply reduced. The microphone is placed approximately 2 inches away from, and slightly below, the narrator's mouth. The "audio quality" setting on the iPod's voice recorder menu is set to "high"; the "autogain" on the TuneTalk is set to "on". Both the iPod's and TuneTalk's batteries are recharged nightly via their USB connectors.

Commercial shields for the iPod tend to push the TuneTalk out of the dock connector, losing the audio signal. They also do not protect the iPod very well in field conditions. For these reasons, a simple enclosure was built from a 4X6 inch Plano fly box and Oasis rippled closed-cell adhesive foam used to hold trout flies (# 3583 and # 38-421-922-30, respectively; both available from Bass Pro Shops). The top layer of foam was trimmed to hold the iPod snugly when the box is closed while permitting inspection of the screen. Holes just large enough to accommodate the microphone and headset leads when the lid is closed were drilled through the base and lid and buffed with a Dremel. The enclosure is illustrated in Figure 1.

In use, the iPod is switched on and recording started, then placed in the enclosure and the latter closed and snapped shut. The enclosure is then placed in a pollinating apron. Surprisingly, even during extremely hot weather the ventilation is adequate; checking that the iPod is still recording every hour or so seems sufficient to ventilate it. The iPod also serves as a back-up disk for other field data.

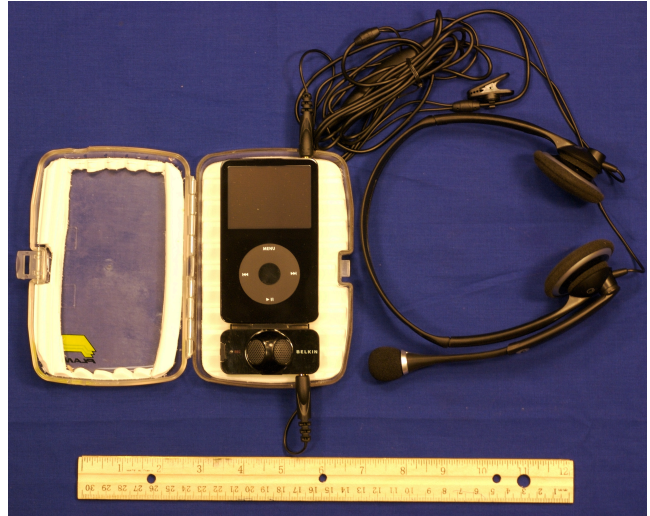


Figure 1. The fly box enclosure with iPod, TuneTalk, and VXi headset/microphone.

I am grateful to Karen Cone for suggesting that voice recognition software might be useful in transcribing field notes.