



Highlands-Cashiers LAND TRUST

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BACKYARD NATURE DISCOVERY

Animal Track Detectives

Wild animals can be very good at hiding and hard to find. You can detect animals have been nearby by searching for tracks, scat, and other animal signs. Learn how to be an "animal detective" in your own backyard by learning how to identify animal tracks and observe your surroundings to find other clues animals leave behind.

Background:

- Wildlife biologists, hunters, and naturalists use animal tracks, scat, and other signs to help them find animals and learn about their behavior.
- A "track" is a footprint left by an animal. A series of tracks can create a "trail."
- "Scat" is a term used for animal droppings.
- Other "signs" include animal homes, body parts, chew marks, sounds, and smells.



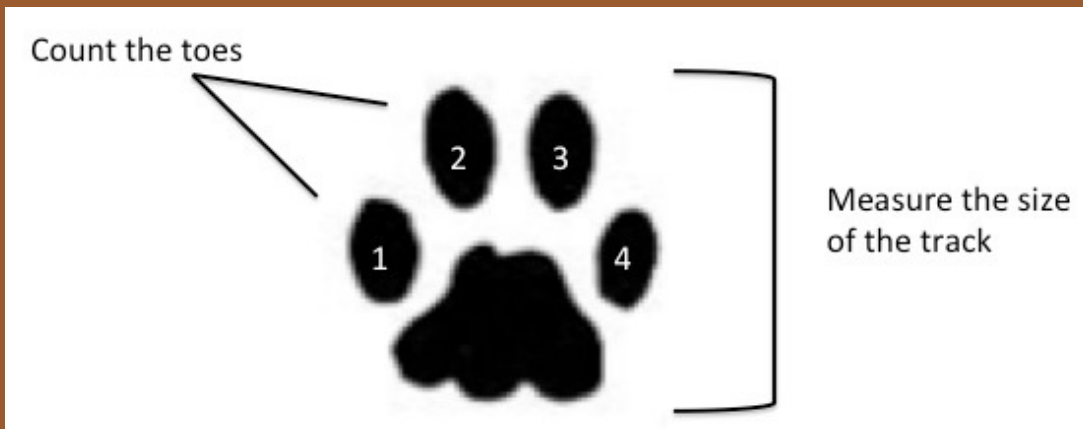
Who left that track?



Tracks:

You can identify animals based on the footprints they leave behind because different animals have different feet.

When examining tracks, look at the size, shape, and how many toes it has. Consider the direction the tracks are headed and whether there was more than one animal present. Look at how far apart the tracks are to determine its stride - was it walking or running?



Track Casting

Animal tracks are often found in mud or wet sand, which means they can easily get trampled and destroyed. If you find a track, you can make a plaster cast of it, which allows you to keep a record of the track you saw and study it long after the track has been destroyed.

WHERE TO LOOK?

The best place to look for animal tracks is in mud, wet sand, or soft ground.



Try making your own animal track cast!



Who's scat is that?

Scat:

Different animals eat different things, therefore their droppings are different too. You can actually identify an animal and learn more about what it was eating based on its droppings. Another word for droppings is scat. Note the size, shape, consistency, and contents of the scat, but do not touch - scat can contain harmful bacteria!

Herbivores (plant eaters):

Herbivores have pelleted scat.

ex) rabbits, deer, squirrel

Rabbit



Omnivores (mixed diet):

Omnivore scat has a variety of contents (seeds, grass, hair, bones, shells, berries, wood, etc.).

ex) bears, raccoons, opossums

Raccoon



Carnivores (meat eaters):

Carnivores have tubular scat with hair and bones inside.

ex) cats (bobcat), dogs (fox, coyote)

Coyote

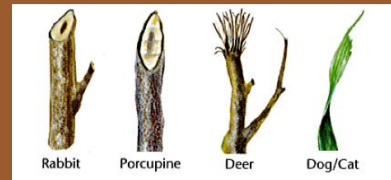


Other Animal Signs

Take the time to look closely in an area and you will find that animals leave many clues. Search for food animals have been munching on, places they might live, parts they might have left behind, sounds and smells they make. Don't just look for mammals. Birds, insects, reptiles and many other animals also leave clues!

Chew marks

- Twigs or plants with teeth/bite marks
- Shell of nut or seed chewed on by chipmunk, squirrel or mouse
- Tree trunks with holes where woodpeckers have been feeding
- Insect eat marks on wood or plants



Homes

- Holes in the ground (burrow)
- Tree hollow
- Nests
- Cocoons
- Rotten log
- Under a rock
- Spider web-



Body Parts

- Hair/fur
- Feathers
- Snake skin
- Bones, teeth, claws



Sounds and smells

- Birds singing
- Insects calling (katydids, crickets, cicadas)
- Snake musk odor
- Skunk musk odor



Try the Animal Signs Scavenger Hunt!