

TRACK & SIGN

Learning About Animals and Animal Life Through Tracks and Sign

A great way to learn more about animals is through their tracks and sign. While we may not always see animals around, they inevitably leave clues to their past presence. Being a wildlife tracker is a bit like being a detective exploring a crime scene to understand what happened there. It's an amazing way to develop your deductive reasoning while learning more about the lives of animals.

TERMS

Track - the actual footprint of an animal

Sign - any other evidence of animal activity, including but not limited to scat, feeding marks, animal homes

Substrate - the ground or other material that an animal stepped in

Gait - how an animal moves (e.g. walk, bound, gallop, etc.)

Common Animal Tracks

All Drawings by Kim A. Cabrera www.bear-tracker.com Tracks not to scale

<p>Toad</p> <p>Size varies</p>	<p>Domestic Dog</p> <p>Size varies</p>	<p>Opossum</p> <p>F: 1-2 5/16" L x 1 1/4-2 1/2" W H: 1 3/16-2 3/4" L x 1 1/2-3" W</p>	<p>Raccoon</p> <p>F: 1 3/4-3 1/8" L x 1 1/2-3 1/4" W H: 2 1/8-2 5/8" L x 1 1/2-2 5/8" W</p>	<p>Wild Turkey</p> <p>3 3/4-5" L Width varies</p>
<p>Spotted Skunk</p> <p>F: 1-1 5/8" L x 3/4-1 1/16" W H: 7/8-1 3/8" L x 3/4-1" W</p>	<p>Brush Rabbit</p> <p>F: 7/8-1 7/8" L x 5/8-1 3/8" W H: 1 1/4-3 1/4" L x 3/4-1 3/16" W</p>	<p>Gray Fox</p> <p>F: 1 3/8-1 3/4" L x 1 3/16-1 5/8" W H: 1 1/4-1 5/8" L x 15/16-1 3/8" W</p>	<p>Deer</p> <p>F: 2 1/4-4" L x 1 5/8-2 3/4" W H: 2-3 1/2" L x 1 1/2-2 3/8" W</p>	<p>Lizard</p> <p>Size varies</p>
<p>Mountain Lion</p> <p>F: 2 7/5-3 7/8" L x 2 7/8-4 7/8" W H: 3-4 1/8" L x 2 9/16-4 7/8" W</p>	<p>Striped Skunk</p> <p>F: 1 5/8-2 1/16" L x 1-1 3/16" W H: 1 5/16-2" L x 15/16-1 3/16" W</p>	<p>Chipmunk</p> <p>F: 3/8-1 1/16" L x 5/16-9/16" W H: 1/2-1 1/16" L x 1/2-1 1/16" W</p>	<p>Woodrat</p> <p>F: 3/8-1" L x 7/16-15/16" W H: 7/8-1 25" L x 7/16-1" W</p>	<p>Raven</p> <p>3.75 - 5" L Width varies</p>
<p>Ground Squirrel</p> <p>F: 15/16-1 3/8" L x 5/8-7/8" W H: 1-1 13/16" L x 5/8-1" W</p>	<p>Quail</p> <p>1 1/4-1 11/16" L Width varies</p>	<p>Bobcat</p> <p>F: 1 5/8-2 1/8" L x 1 3/8-2 1/2" W H: 1 9/16-2 3/8" L x 1 3/16-2 1/2" W</p>	<p>Coyote</p> <p>F: 2 1/4-3 1/4" L x 1 1/2-2 1/2" W H: 2 1/8-3" L x 1 1/8-2" W</p>	<p>River Otter</p> <p>F: 2 1/8-3 1/4" L x 1 7/8-3" W H: 2 1/8-4" L x 1 1/8-3 3/4" W</p>

TRACKING RESOURCES - CLICK ON THE LINKS BELOW FOR MORE INFORMATION

[Animal Track Activity Sheets](#)

[Guide to Animal Tracking](#)

[Beartracker's Animal Tracks Den](#)

[Identifying Animal Tracks](#)

[Animal Tracking Cards \(PDF format for printing\)](#)

[Nature Tracking](#)

[Virtual Dirt Time](#)

[Animals Don't Cover Their Tracks - Animal Track ID Help Group](#)

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DAY 2

Pick one animal's tracks and try drawing them - both front and back. Discuss what things you notice about the tracks as you draw them. Do any new features stand out?

Find an Anoka County Park near you where you would expect to find this animal. Can you find any evidence of this animal? Consider starting with easier and more common animals such as deer or squirrels.

If you find a track, see how it compares to your drawing or the guide included here. Animal tracks can vary a lot!

DAY 3

Find an area with different substrates (ground material). For example, one area with sand and one with mud.

Try making a boot or handprint in each substrate. How do these tracks compare to each other? How does the material feel as you push into it?

Come back a short time later and see how the tracks have aged. Are either clearer than the other?

While in those areas - do you see any other tracks? Try using the list of features from day 1 to help you identify what it might be. It's okay to not know! It can be very challenging to ID tracks; focus on describing what you see and noticing details rather than trying to ID the animal.

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DAY 4

Learning how animals move - their gait - can be helpful in identifying an animal and also gaining a deeper understanding of their lives. A useful tool for this is animal forms - where you try moving like different animals. A video showing some of these gaits can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtwjPXCvku>

Pick 1-3 gaits and try moving in that pattern. How does it feel to move like that animal? Do any of the gaits feel easier?

For your chosen animal from day 1 use the resources links to figure out what gait they use.

- Note that many different terms are used by different resources to describe the same gait.

DAY 5

Sometimes finding clear tracks is hard. Looking for sign can also be valuable for knowing what animals are around and what they are doing. On the following page there are verified photos from different mammals. You can select to just see sign and scat photos. Study them for your chosen animal or any other animals of choice. Do you see any regularly occurring signs for that animal? <http://www.naturetracking.com/mammal-tracks/>

Visit a nearby Anoka County Park where you might expect to find this animal. Can you find any animal sign for your chosen animal or another animal? Things to look for: bird nests, tree cavities, chewed or trampled vegetation, scat, and much more!
