



LAKEHEAD REGION
CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

ANIMAL TRACKS & SIGNS



CASCADES CONSERVATION AREA



Seeing wildlife in its natural habitat can be an amazing experience. But even if we aren't lucky enough to see the actual animal pass by we can learn about and appreciate the wildlife around us if we find the tracks they left behind.

When we find a sign that an animal has been there we can put on our detective hats and use the clues to find out who has passed by.

When it comes to **tracks** there are three main clues we want to start with:

- Size (get out your rulers and measure it)
- Toes (how many, and are there claw marks)
- Pads (what is the shape and are the front [fore print] and back [hind print] different?)



Some common tracks you may find include:

The **red squirrel's** track is 3-5 cm long with 4 long toes on the fore print, and 5 long toes on its hind print. You may find a squirrel's small pile of spruce cones, torn apart with the seeds removed on top of a log or stump.

The little **deer mouse** leaves small tracks behind that are 0.8-1.8 cm in length with the hind foot being longer and with 5 tiny toes whereas the fore foot has 4 toes and is rounder. You may also see a thin line where the tail dragged.



Snowshoe hares have a 9-15 cm long, hind print which is wide and resembles a snowshoe; the fore print is smaller and rounder. The **cottontail rabbit** has a similar track but has a more narrow hind print that is also only 8-10 cm long. Rabbits and hares love to chew on twigs and sticks with their tiny teeth.

Porcupines have a hind print that is 6-10 cm long, oval with 5 nail prints but may be brushed over by spiny tail dragging that waddles back and forth. Their fore print has 4 toes. A sure sign that a porcupine has been around is a tree trunk stripped of its bark where the porcupine has been eating the tender inner bark.

Whitetail deer have hoof prints that are 5-12 cm and resembles a narrow split heart. You may also find areas where the deer have bedded down, find deer scat which resemble chocolate covered raisins or sniped branches from shrubs such as dogwood.



Red fox are 5 cm long with an inverted v heal pad and because of their furry feet the track may be blurred.

Coyotes are 5-7 cm long with toes pads being wider than the fox with claw marks visible.

The **wolf track** is the largest of the dog tracks at 13-15 cm long, with large toe pads. For all dog species you can draw an x between the paw pads and can see claw marks. Domestic dog tracks will tend to meander back and forth whereas the wild dogs walk in straight lines. Their scat almost always has fur in it.

Both **bobcat** and **lynx** have rounded tracks, with no claw marks. The bobcats print is 5 cm and the lynx is 8-11 cm across. The cats' tracks also differ from the dogs as their heel pad is triple lobed, not double lobed and distinctly wider and shorter.

When we look at a track it can give us clues as to what the animal was doing, such as running, hopping, being chased, heading towards food.

What other **signs** can we look for that a mammal could have left behind? Scat, the excrement of the animal, bedding areas, browsed or chewed vegetation, fur, food remnants such as spruce cone piles on a log from a squirrel eating the seeds.

Bring a field guide with you to help identify the mammal you have found, or take a picture and use iNaturalist and be part of the citizen science community discovering and recording the species all around us.

Activity: Animal Track Field Guide

Create your own Animal Track field guide. Pick your favorite animals and draw their track shapes. A quick internet search of the animal with the word 'track' included will bring up images of your animal of interest. Be sure to include details such as size.

Now you are ready to head outside and find out who made those tracks!



Animals Tracks

www.exploringnature.org

