



# Michigan Nature Association

*Protecting Michigan's Natural Heritage Since 1952*

www.michigannature.org 517-655-5655

## **Wildlife Signs: Who Goes There?**

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### **Learning Objectives**

*At the end of the lesson participants will be able to:*

1. Identify signs of wildlife in nature (scat, tracks, rubs, scrapes, browse, etc.)
2. Explain what scientists learn from looking at tracks: animal's habitat, travel corridor, size, speed of movement, etc.
3. Make a cast of a track, like scientists do.

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**Using the questions below discuss how we can track animals in their habitat, and how they adapt to their living environment.**

What kinds of animals might live here?

- Depending on the habitat this answer may change; frogs, birds, deer, squirrels, worms, insects etc

What are some different people (professions) that study wildlife?

- Wildlife Biologists, DNR staff, hunters, conservationists etc

What are different kinds of animals doing during the fall to prepare for winter?

- Review some of the possibilities (many mammals hibernate, many birds migrate, and many animals remain active during the winter)

Ask the participants if they think we will be able to see any animals today? Which ones?

- Stress the significance of careful listening and looking for wildlife- and that loud noises and big movements will easily scare away animals

What evidence might we find that may indicate the presence of different kinds of animals, even if we don't actually see any animals?

- Usually the students will suggest animal tracks, scat, signs of eating and other indications (scrapes, rubs, nests, dens, beds, etc.)

What might wildlife biologists learn from studying scat (dung)?

- What kinds of animals live in an area, how many there are, what the animals are eating, and if the animals are healthy or sick etc.
- An example would be that scientists might find certain parasites or diseases in animal scat

What is an adaptation? What does that word mean?

- An adaptation is a characteristic that helps an animal survive in its environment
- Adaptations can be physical or behavioral
- Examples of physical adaptations include flat teeth for grinding, large eyes for seeing in dim light, long legs for running fast etc.

Why do mammals have fur? How does the fur change from summer to winter?

- To Stay Warm! In the winter, the fur grows in thicker, with crinkly hairs and some hollow hairs. The hollow hairs help trap air and help to insulate the animal from the cold.

### ***Activity: Wildlife Scavenger Hunt***

After you have discussed the animal's habitat using the questions above give each person one of the scavenger hunt cards below.

Go on a hike through out the habitat and try to locate some sign of life.

Use the card to keep track of what you see and share the interesting things you find with the people around you!

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### **Test What You Learned!**

1. List 5 common signs of wildlife in nature.
2. Explain a few of the things you can learn by studying an animal's tracks and scat.
3. Explain what an adaptation is.
4. Explain how you can increase your chance of encountering wildlife.
5. Identify at least one track and the animal who made it.

## **Be A Nature Detective**

### **1. Wildlife Scat (droppings!)**

(Can you tell what they eat?)

- ◆ Deer (1 cm. oval)
- ◆ Coyote (like a dog, with fur and bones)
- ◆ Rabbit (1/2 cm. Round; light brown)
- ◆ Bear (Pile of dark material with seeds)
- ◆ Other \_\_\_\_\_

### **2. Wildlife Tracks**

- ◆ Dog family - paw print with claw marks
- ◆ Cat family – no claw marks
- ◆ Deer – hoof print
- ◆ Other (describe):

### **3. Wildlife Signs**

- ◆ Woodpecker holes on tree trunk
- ◆ Squirrel (pine cone pieces in a pile)
- ◆ Gnawed or rubbed branches
- ◆ Animal tunnels in ground
- ◆ Insect-chewed leaf
- ◆ Insect track on tree trunk
- ◆ Other \_\_\_\_\_

### **4. Wildlife Sounds**

- ◆ Grouse drumming
- ◆ Frogs calling
- ◆ Woodpecker tapping
- ◆ Bird singing
- ◆ Squirrel chattering
- ◆ Other \_\_\_\_\_

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## Scat Identification Chart



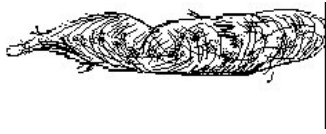
**Rat.** Dark brown or black, even consistency.



**Fox** -- Note tapered end and hair. Scat may also have seeds, feathers, berries, small bones. Likely to find on prominent location as territory marker.



**Raccoon** -- note blunt ends and uniform thickness, like a tootsie roll. Scat will have berries, seeds, corn and perhaps crayfish parts. May find anywhere --- in thickets, stream banks, on rocks, outside of dens,



**Fox** -- Again, note tapered end and hair protruding. Color may be variable depending on food being eaten.



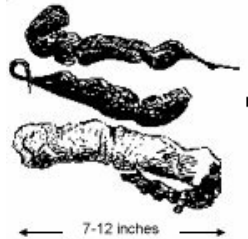
**Goose.** Tubular, like raccoons, but longer and thinner. Likely to be near water or perhaps in cut over corn field. Scat is entirely plant material.



**Deer.** Note size and slight taper. There will generally be a small pile. Entirely vegetative and quite uniform in consistency



**Rabbit.** Round, slightly squashed pellets of finely chewed plant material. Dark brown, tan or black depending on food.



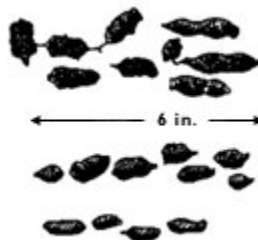
**Coyote.** Very similar to fox, but larger. A large fox and a small coyote may have identical scat.



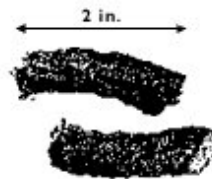
**Opossum.** Uneven and variable due to changing food sources. May have hair or berries. Smaller in general than fox, and smaller sections too. Different shape than raccoon



**Groundhog.** Round to oval pellets, generally found near dens or in toilet chambers of dens. Entirely plant material.



**Chipmunk.** Like rat scat, but less even in shape.



**Raccoon.** Again, note blunt ends and lack of taper. May include hair, egg shells, berries, seeds, and aquatic animal or insect parts.