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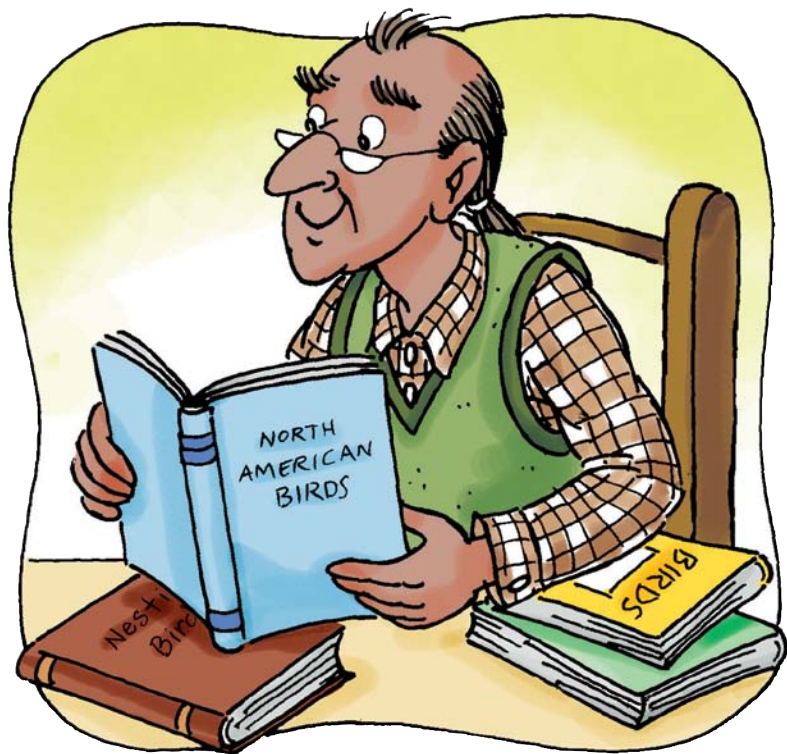
# The Footprint



Written by Lynn Fulton  
Illustrated by Marilee Harrahd-Pilz

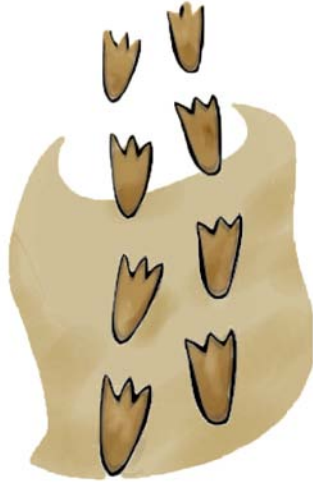
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## A Dull Day

It was Saturday morning, and Angie and Jared were already bored. Their mother had gone to work, their father was busy cleaning the house, and their older sister, Sara, was getting ready for a **diving** trip to Mexico.





“Where’s my **snorkel**?” Sara shouted.  
“Where’s my mask?”

Jared shrugged and Angie sighed. “Sara gets all the fun,” Jared said. “We never get to go anywhere.”



Then their little brother, Benjamin, came stomping in from the kitchen, trailing his blanket behind him. "YARGH!!" he yelled. "I'm a MONSTER! Act scared!"

But Angie and Jared were tired of acting scared for Benjamin. He was always playing monster.

"Come on, Jared," said Angie. "Let's get out of here before Dad makes us babysit."





## The Footprint

They decided to go exploring by the creek that ran behind their apartment building. As they walked along the **bank**, Jared saw a strange **imprint** in the mud. "Hey, Angie, look at this!"

They both stared at the print, shaped somewhat like a narrow fan.

"Something with **webbed** toes made this," Angie said. "That must mean it lives in the water."

"It's way too big to be a duck," said Jared. "And look, here's a mark that looks like its tail is dragging in the mud."

"Maybe it's a completely new kind of animal," Angie said.

"Or maybe it's a **fossil**—a dinosaur print!" Jared exclaimed.







Jared picked up a stick and poked at the dried mud. The stick broke. “See, this mud is hard. It’s **petrified!**”

Angie looked doubtful. “It’s just dry because it hasn’t rained for weeks.”

“You think some living **creature** made this?” Jared asked. “That’s pretty scary. Suppose it comes after us?”

“Well,” said Angie, “we’d better **investigate!**”



### Is It a Dinosaur?

Angie and Jared ran home and came back with a notebook, pencil, and tape measure. Jared measured the length and width of the footprint, while Angie drew a sketch of it and the tail marks behind it.

“We should also make a map of where the creek is and where we found the print,” she said. “Then we’ll go to the library.”

But when they stepped into the city library with their map and drawing, they felt overwhelmed. So many shelves of books, all the way to the ceiling—they did not know where to begin.

“Can I help you?” asked a librarian.

Jared nudged Angie, and she stepped forward to explain what they were looking for. “My brother thinks this is a dinosaur print,” she ended by saying, “but I think it might be some kind of water bird.”

“I believe some dinosaur footprints were recently **discovered** in Utah,” said the librarian. “We’ll see if they’re anything like your print.”



The librarian led them to a computer and typed in a website address. "Here's the site," she said. "See if this helps; then come to me if you have any more questions."

Jared and Angie crowded up to the computer screen. They read about dinosaur prints that were found when a top layer of earth was turned over.

"But our print was right there on the surface," said Jared. "That means it can't be a fossil, after all. Maybe it's a bird, like you thought."

"Maybe," Angie agreed.



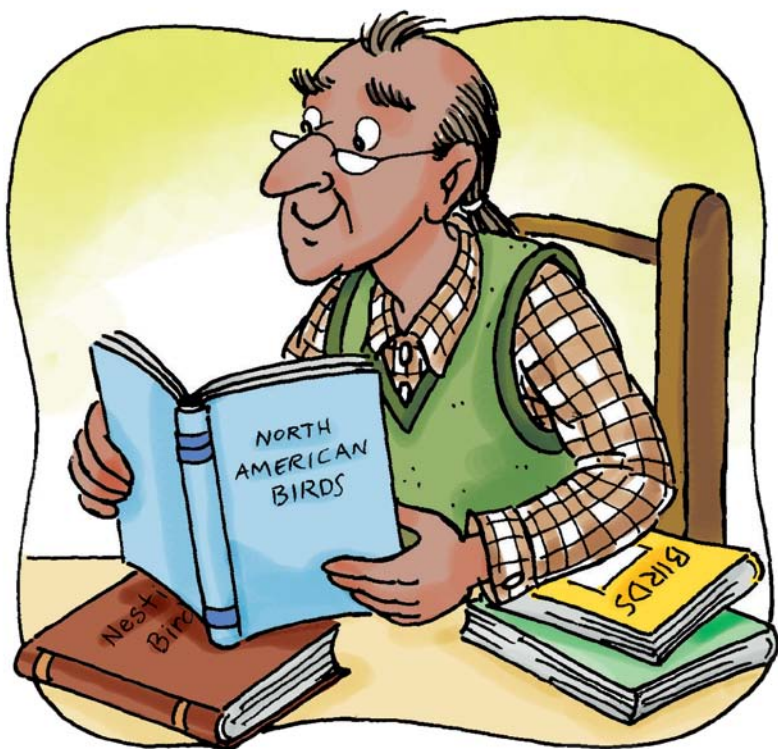
These dinosaur tracks were found in Utah.

## Is It a Bird?

They went back to the librarian.

“Where can we find out about birds?” Angie asked. The librarian pointed to an old man sitting at a table, surrounded by books.

“You’re in luck,” she whispered. “That’s Professor Featherwhite; he’s an **expert** on water birds. I’m sure he’ll be interested in your footprint. I’ll introduce you.”







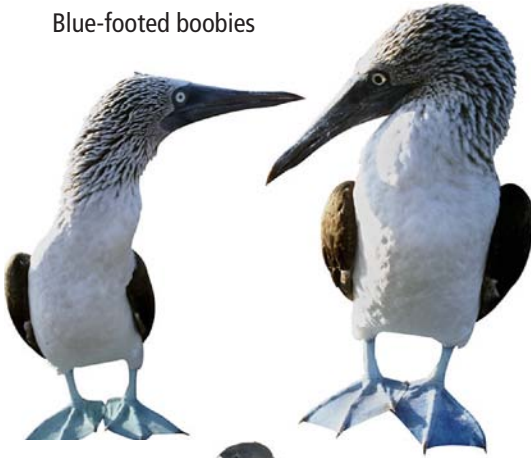
The professor looked closely at Angie's drawing and made a clucking noise.

"Hmm, hmm. Very unusual. I don't know of any birds in this area that could have made that print. It's quite large, but perhaps a migratory bird from some faraway place . . ."

"Got blown off course?" asked Jared, finishing the professor's sentence.

"Well, yes, possibly," said the professor. "Here's a book that might help you. Good luck!"

Blue-footed boobies



Chinstrap penguin



Canada goose



Red-bellied tree duck

It was a large book, full of pictures, and so heavy that Angie and Jared had to take turns carrying it home. They took the book straight to Angie's room and **pored** over page after page of birds with webbed feet. But nothing looked right.

"I don't think we'll find any bird big enough to leave a print like that," said Jared.  
"And besides, what about the tail marks?"

"It could be a bird with a long tail, like a peacock," said Angie.

"Peacocks aren't water birds!" cried Jared.

"Oh, well, maybe we've discovered the new water-peacock," Angie said.



Suddenly there was a banging on the door.

"Let me in! Let me in!"

It was Benjamin.

## Jared Solves the Mystery

Angie opened the door, and Benjamin tumbled in, clutching something under his shirt. They could hear Sara running down the hallway outside. “Come back here!” she yelled. “Give me my fin!”

“Benjamin,” Angie said sternly, “are you stealing Sara’s **swim fins** again?”

Jared closed the door. “Angie—that’s it!”

“What?”

“Sara’s fin made our footprint! Give it to me, Ben!”



“Oh, no—of course!” Angie said, slapping her forehead, while Benjamin pulled the fin out from under his shirt.

“Ben, were you down by the creek awhile ago?” Jared asked.

“Nooooo.” Ben said innocently. “Well, a long time ago.”

Meanwhile Angie measured the fin and compared it to their drawing and notes. “You’re right, Jared—it’s an almost perfect fit.” Then she noticed the blanket tucked into Benjamin’s shorts. “The tail marks must have been his blanket!”







Benjamin grinned up at them. "You mean you found my monster print?"

Angie and Jared looked at each other and laughed.

"First we thought it was a dinosaur," said Jared.

"Then we thought it was a bird," said Angie. "But now we know it was the scariest monster in the whole world!"

And she gave Benjamin a hug.

## **Glossary**

<b>bank</b>	a steep, sloping area, often on the side of a river (p. 7)
<b>creature</b>	any living animal, such as a mammal, bird, or insect (p. 9)
<b>discovered</b>	found out (p. 11)
<b>diving</b>	swimming beneath the water (p. 4)
<b>expert</b>	person with special knowledge of a subject (p. 13)
<b>fossil</b>	the remains of plants or animals that were quickly sealed off from air and moisture after death (p. 8)
<b>imprint</b>	a mark made on the ground by pressure (p. 7)
<b>investigate</b>	to study a situation in order to learn the truth (p. 9)
<b>petrified</b>	plant or animal matter changed into stone, or something like stone (p. 9)
<b>pored</b>	read with great attention (p. 15)
<b>snorkel</b>	a short tube held in the mouth that is used to breathe underwater (p. 5 )
<b>swim fins</b>	flipper-like shoes worn on the feet to imitate fish fins (p. 17 )
<b>webbed</b>	joined by very thin skin (p. 8)

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