

ANIMAL DETECTIVE: Winter Clues

Activity 1: Wildlife Clues

While we don't always get to see or hear all of the incredible creatures that live in our neighbourhood, our local wildlife leave behind all sorts of clues. Types of clues include:

Tracks, Scat, Signs, and Foraging

Match the type of clue to its description.

	An animal fecal dropping, or in other words, poop!
	Shows an animal is using a space. Includes burrows, nests, tunnels, and food storage (cache).
	Marks left from teeth or food left behind.
	Prints left behind from paws, feet, or hooves. These are easily found in the mud or snow.

Tracks and Animal Movement

When looking at tracks, different types of trails can tell us a story about how the animal is moving.

Walkers: Tracks from these animals often leave an alternating foot pattern. Walkers include coyotes, deer, foxes, opossums, raccoons, and humans! To save energy, some four-legged walkers will place their hind feet in the same track as their front feet, so it looks like they are only walking on two legs.

Tunnelers: These animals are trying to stay hidden, especially during the winter. You might see an entrance/exit hole or even the outline of a tunnel as the snow begins to melt. Tunnelers like voles and shrews will sometimes exit the tunnel—leaving small tracks—before diving down to create a new tunnel branch. Tunnels are easiest to make in soft snow, so it's important humans stay on designated trails to avoid compacting the snow with their feet.

Jumpers and Leapers: These animals propel their bodies to jump into their next spot. Jumpers like deer mice, squirrels, and rabbits will hop and land with all four paws, placing their back paws in the front and their front paws in the back. Leapers like weasels and minks will bound landing their front paws first and then their back paws in the same spot.

Fast movement: In most cases, when an animal needs to hurry they will change their trail pattern. This can change from trotting (a quick walk), to loping (a jog), to a gallop (a high speed run). This will change the pattern of an animal's trail and can tell us an important story about what was happening at the scene. Perhaps a predator was chasing its prey!

Activity 2: Match that Print

Cottontail Rabbit



Eastern Coyote



Domestic Dog



Eastern Grey Squirrel



Virginia Opossum



White-tailed Deer



Match each of the animals listed above with their tracks below.

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



ANSWERS: 1. Domestic Dog 2. Eastern Coyote 3. Cottontail Rabbit 4. Eastern Grey Squirrel 5. Virginia Opossum 6. White-tailed Deer

Activity 3: Tracking I-Spy

It looks like our wildlife friends were busy last night! Looking at the scene, try to uncover the story of what was happening.

Based on each set of tracks, take note of:

1. What animal was visiting?
2. What direction were they going?
3. Are they a walker, tunneler, leaper, or jumper?

