



Instructors Guide: Life-Size Tracks of Common North American Mammals Poster



The Nature-Watch track poster is a life-size, realistic depiction of what animal tracks look like in nature. It is also an interactive learning tool that helps teach track identification to beginning trackers of all ages.

This Instructor's Guide provides background concepts and questions to help supplement the educational value of this unique poster. Feel free to share the guide with other educators and to use all or part of the information below. We hope you find the poster and guide to be valuable – Happy Tracking!

Getting Started

Before displaying your poster for viewing, you can use post-it notes or paper to cover the “Animal Track Key” at the bottom left. This will hide the key, enabling you to ask questions which will require your participants to look at the tracks for clues.

Introduction

Since the time of pre-historic man, humans have depended upon finding and following animal tracks. It aided them in finding game animals as a food source and in avoiding dangerous species. In harsh climates, the ability to track was literally a matter of life and death where an unsuccessful hunt would mean starvation.

Even as agricultural societies developed, tracking skills were still needed to keep animals from raiding crops and killing livestock. While most people do not depend on these skills today, tracks still hold the key to discovering the hidden mysteries of animal behavior and habits.

Animal Tracks can tell us:

- *WHAT* kind of animal
- *WHERE* the animal was going
- *HOW FAST* the animal was traveling
- *WHEN* the animal made the tracks

Following an animal's tracks can also tell us: what the animal was eating, where its den or resting areas were, and sometimes even whether the animal was a male or female.

“Quiz” Questions – ask your participants to be detectives!

Cover the key, then ask participants if they can answer the following questions while they look at the poster for clues. Numbers below correspond to the number indicated next to each track on the poster.

- 1) Which track has the longest claws? (Answer: #15 Black Bear)
- 2) Which track is the largest? (Answer: #15 Black Bear)
- 3) One animal has webbing between its toes, can you find it? (Answer: #16 Beaver)



- 4) What purpose does the webbing between a Beaver's toes serve? (Answer: Swimming)
- 5) Which track is the MOST different from the others? (Answer: #12 Deer due to hooves instead of toes)
- 6) Can you name other animals that have hooves? (Answers: Goat, Moose, Antelope, Horse, Cow, Pig, Sheep)
- 7) Which tracks look most like a human hand? (Answers: #2 Opossum, #5 Raccoon & #7 Muskrat)
- 8) What advantages are there to having long toes or an opposing thumb? (Answers: Grasping for, climbing, or digging up foods such as roots, insects or mollusks. Long toes provide dexterity which is why raccoons are famous for opening garbage cans and raiding chicken coops)
- 9) The Opossum has a unique tail, what can it do? (Answer: it can hang by its tail like monkeys - called a "prehensile" tail)
- 10) Compare track # 9 to track #13 - what is the main difference between them? (Answer: #9 shows the claws while #13 does not)
- 11) Track #9 has 2 species that are closely related to it. Can you find them? (Answer: #3 Fox and #4 Coyote are also Canids or members of the dog family)
- 12) Track #13 has 1 species closely related to it. Can you find it? (Answer #8 Bobcat. Both belong to the family Felidae or cat family. Cats have claws that are retractable and rarely show in tracks)
- 13) Track #6 has very long, sharp claws for digging up insects. It also has a chemical weapon. Can you guess what animal this is? (Answer: #6 Skunk)
- 14) Tracks #10, #11 and #14 show 3 small animals with very different diets. One eats mostly grass, another eats lot of nuts, and the last is a predator that kills small animals like mice for food. What small animal runs fast and eats grass? (Answer: #11 Rabbit) What animal eats nuts? (Answer: #14 Squirrel) What small animal is a predator? (Answer: #10 Weasel).
- 15) Track #1 has strong toes and claws for digging because they live in dens underground. You often see them eating grass beside the road and even standing up for a clear view around. Can you guess what animal this is? (If they cannot guess give them one last clue - On February 2nd of every year Punxsutawney Phil comes out of his den to see his shadow? - Answer: Woodchuck)

Summary

You can see how important feet are to animals and how they are each perfectly adapted to their environment. Looking for tracks when you are outside is not just educational, it's also fun! If you can't identify a particular track while you are out on the trail, take a picture so you can compare it to others in books or online when you get home. Tracking is one the MOST challenging skills to learn and master so don't get discouraged if you can't figure out what animal made a track. You will begin to see and understand more every time you put in more "dirt time." The language of nature is written in animal tracks; learning to track is learning how to read the very book of nature itself!

Resources

There are many other great tracking resources available on our website at www.nature-watch.com

Nature-Watch would like to thank David Collins, a Naturalist & Tracking Expert in Lynchburg, VA for his invaluable contributions of time, energy and knowledge in the development of the poster and guide.

