



Count the Toes

Counting toes will help set you on the right track. Some mammals have more toes on their hind feet than their front, and some toes are small or set high on the legs so don't always register in the track. Always confirm your numbers by closely examining several prints in a track using multiple foot prints.

TRACKS WITH 5 TOES FRONT AND BACK

Opossums, raccoons, bears, weasels, mink, (martens, otters, fishers), badgers, ferrets

TRACKS WITH 4 TOES FRONT AND BACK

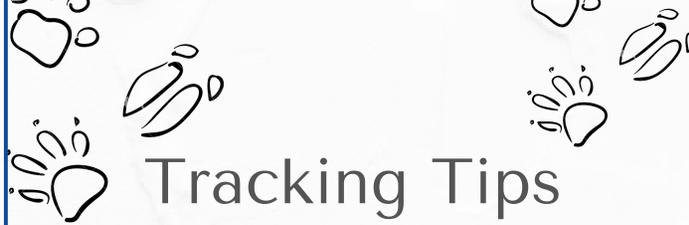
Members of the cat and dog family

TRACKS WITH 4 FRONT TOES AND 5 HIND TOES

Mice, rats, voles, squirrels, chipmunks, muskrats, beavers, nutria, porcupines

TRACKS WITH 2 TOES

Deer, moose, elk, goats, sheep



Tracking Tips

- Mammal tracking is best done early in the morning before they get covered
- Only 10% of tracks are clear in snow so it takes a keen eye
- Best tracking days are after a light snowfall
- Snowshoes are the best mode of travel to observe mammal tracks in snow
- Measurement should be taken when the track is first discovered measuring staddle, stride, and prints
- Follow the tracks for a good distance to get an idea of the size of the mammal and what it is doing (e.g. hunting, travelling or escaping for predators)
- Large mammals will jump over fallen trees and logs while smaller mammals will go under low trees and logs
- Learn, draw, record every gait for every species and interpret why or what the animal was doing
- A competent tracker is both scientist and storyteller. Use your skills, senses, collect data, measure.
- Don't be afraid to lie down or get in the dirt to get a better view of the tracks and their direction

Contact

Bob Bowles (Ontario Master Naturalist Program Coordinator)

masternaturalist@lakeheadu.ca

Dr. Linda Rodenburg (CELL Director)

lrodenu@lakeheadu.ca

Mikaela Mayhew (CELL Assistant)

mpmayhew@lakeheadu.ca



WINTER TRACKS

Mammal Movements

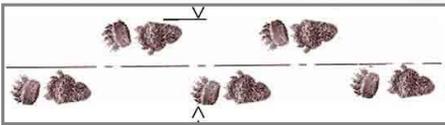
DIAGONAL WALKERS

E.g. Deer, cats, dogs, moose, caribou, foxes, wolves, bobcats, lynx, cougars, humans



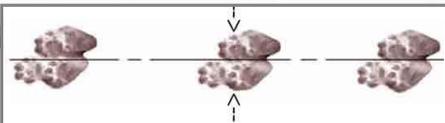
PACERS & WADDLERS

E.g. Opossums, beavers, muskrats, skunks, porcupines, raccoons, bears



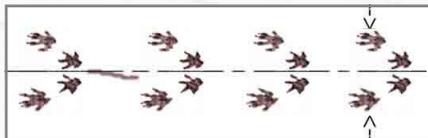
BOUNDERS

E.g. Weasels, ermines, stoats, minks, martens, fishers, otters



GALLOPERS

E.g. Mice, voles, rats, squirrels, rabbits, hares, groundhogs



The 5 S's

SIZE

Mouse or moose? Since size of mammals vary greatly. Follow the track to a short distance under branches and through openings to determine if your track maker is small, medium or large.

STRIDE

The distance between two front footprints. Long-legged and bodied mammals have longer strides.

STRADDLE

The distance between the inside of left and right foot prints. Wide bodied and short-legged mammals have wider straddles. Trail width is an even better measurement from outside left to outside right.

SPEED

Mammals move at different speeds with four methods of moving. Diagonal walkers, feet diagonal to each other move at the same time. Pacers are opposite to diagonal walkers moving both limbs on same side at the same time. Bounders hop in jumps with the front feet landing first then back feet right behind them. Gallopers move with a galloping motion with the hind legs landing in front of the front legs. Front prints are opposite for tree dwellers but diagonal for land dwellers.

STEP

does it have two, four or five toes on front and back feet. For instance, mice, voles, chipmunks, squirrels and porcupines have four front toes and five back toes.

Every day during winter, a manuscript is being written and a story being told for those who have the skill to read them. Reading mammal tracks is like learning to read. You start with basic words in simple sentences but with practice, you build to reading technical manuals with special terminology. A skilled tracker after several seasons becomes a storyteller, nature detective and expert interpreter

-Bob Bowles

