Scouts Bushcraft

Animal Tracking and Wildlife Signs

A Scouts Bushcraft Guide



Tracks & Footprints

Droppings (Scat)

Feathers & Signs

Feeding Evidence

Nests & Shelters

Other Wildlife Signs

Scouts Bushcraft

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Contents

A practical guide for Scouts to help you identify and understand the signs left by wildlife. Learn how to spot tracks, droppings, feeding signs and other clues, and use these skills to discover more about the animals that live in our woods, fields and countryside.











1. Introduction to Animal Tracking 2
2. Understanding Animal Footprints 3
3. Identifying Mammal Tracks 4
4. British Mammal Track Identification 5
5. Bird Tracks and Footprints 6
6. Droppings (Scat) Identification 7
7. Feeding Signs and Browse Marks 8
8. Feathers, Fur and Other Evidence 9
9. Nests, Dens and Shelters 10
10. Trails, Runs and Pathways 11
11. Reading the Ground and Mud 12
12. Tracking in Different Seasons 13
13. Wildlife Tracking Techniques 14
14. Recording and Making Track Casts 15
15. Wildlife Observation and Fieldcraft 16
16. Tracking Challenge and Field Worksheet 17

Remember

Observe wildlife quietly and with respect. Do not disturb animals, nests or habitats, and always follow the Scout Outdoor Code.

Scouts Bushcraft

Animal Tracking and Wildlife Signs

A Scouts Bushcraft Guide

Introduction to Animal Tracking

Animal tracking is the skill of finding, identifying and understanding the signs left by wildlife. Animals rarely show themselves, but they leave clues in the ground, on plants and in their surroundings. By learning to spot and read these signs, you can discover which animals live in an area, what they are doing, and how they use their habitat.



Why Learn Tracking?

- Helps you notice and understand wildlife in your local area.
- Builds observation and fieldcraft skills.
- Connects you with nature and the outdoors.
- Supports other bushcraft skills such as navigation, stalking and conservation.

What Can You Find?

Animals leave many different signs. Look for:



Footprints (Tracks)



Droppings (Scat)



Feeding Signs



Feathers and Fur



Nests and Shelters



Trails and Runs



Diggings and Scrapes



Other Wildlife Signs

Be a Wildlife Detective

Use your observation skills, look for clues and piece them together like a detective.

1 Look



Scan the ground, vegetation and surroundings carefully.

2 Notice



Look for signs such as tracks, droppings, feathers or chewed plants.

3 Identify



Use a guide or your knowledge to work out which animal left the sign.

4 Record



Make simple notes or sketches to build your tracking skills.

Respect Wildlife

- Observe wildlife quietly and from a distance.
- Do not disturb animals, nests or dens.
- Leave what you find as you found it.
- Always follow the Scout Outdoor Code and local access rules.

Scouts Bushcraft

Animal Tracking and Wildlife Signs

A Scouts Bushcraft Guide

Understanding Animal Footprints

Animal footprints, or tracks, can tell us a lot about the wildlife in an area. By looking at the shape, size, number of toes, claws and track patterns, you can often identify which animal made the print, the direction it was travelling, and even what it was doing.



Parts of a Track



Key Things to Look For

- Number of toes (e.g. 4, 5 or 3).
- Claw marks (present or absent).
- Shape of the main pad (round, triangular, heart-shaped, etc.).
- Size of the print (measure the length and width).
- Track pattern (how the prints are laid out).

Track Patterns

The pattern or arrangement of prints can help you work out how the animal moves, such as walking, trotting or bounding.



Walking (prints close together)

Trotting (regular spacing)

Bounding (pairs of prints, often from rabbits or hares)

Direction and Stride



- **Direction** – the toes usually point the way the animal was travelling.
- **Stride length** – the distance between prints from the same foot.
- **Straddle** – the width between left and right prints.

Measuring a Track



Use a ruler or tape measure to record the length and width of the print. This helps when comparing with identification guides.

Key to Symbols in This Book

Look out for these helpful symbols on the identification pages:

- Track (Footprint)
- Droppings (Scat)
- Feeding Sign
- Feather or Fur
- Nest or Shelter
- Field Clue

Scouts Bushcraft

Animal Tracking and Wildlife Signs

A Scouts Bushcraft Guide

Identifying Mammal Tracks

Many British mammals leave distinctive tracks in soft ground such as mud, sand or snow. By looking at the shape, size, number of toes and the presence of claws or hooves, you can identify which animal made the print.

Types of Mammal Tracks

Paw Prints
(e.g. fox, badger, otter)



Hoof Prints
(e.g. deer)



Other Prints
(e.g. hedgehog, squirrel)



Common British Mammal Tracks

Fox





- 4 toes, claws often visible.
- Narrow, oval-shaped pad.
- Straight, tidy track.

Badger





- 5 toes with long claws.
- Broad, rounded print.
- Often in a line near setts.

Otter

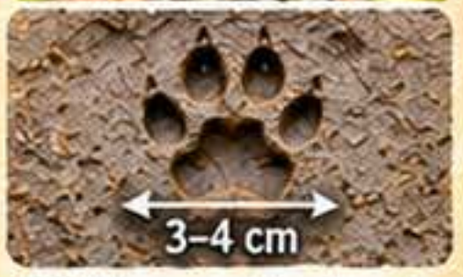




- 5 toes, often webbed.
- Broad, with claw marks.
- Found near rivers, lakes and streams.

Pine Marten





- 5 toes, small and neat.
- Claws usually visible.
- Often seen in woodland areas.

Hedgehog





- 5 toes, narrow print.
- Small claws visible.
- Often found in gardens and woodland.

Deer



- Cloven hoof (two toes).
- Tapered, heart shape.
- Common in woods and fields.

Rabbit



- 4 toes on front, longer hind prints.
- Often in pairs (hopping).
- Common in fields, hedgerows and gardens.

Squirrel



- 4 toes on front, 5 on back.
- Small and delicate prints.
- Often on soft ground or in snow.

Mole



- Broad, spade-like front prints with long claws.
- Often seen near molehills.
- Shows digging activity rather than travel.

Rat



- 4 toes on front, 5 on back.
- Narrow, with visible claws.
- Often found near water, buildings and food sources.

Top Tracking Tips

- Look for clear prints in mud, sand or snow.
- Check the size, shape and number of toes.
- Look for other signs such as droppings, feeding marks and trails.

Scouts Bushcraft

Animal Tracking and Wildlife Signs

A Scouts Bushcraft Guide

British Mammal Track Identification

A closer look at common British mammals, their tracks and key identification features. Tracks can vary with ground conditions, so always look for a combination of signs such as size, shape, toe marks and the behaviour of the tracks (e.g. walking, trotting or bounding).



Fox





- 4 toes, claws often visible.
- Narrow, oval-shaped pad.
- Straight, tidy track, often in a line.

Badger





- 5 toes with long claws.
- Broad, rounded print.
- Often found on paths, near setts and feeding areas.

Otter





- 5 toes, often webbed.
- Broad print with claw marks.
- Usually found near rivers, lakes and streams.

Pine Marten





- 5 toes, small and neat.
- Claws usually visible.
- Often in woodland, on logs and forest paths.

Hedgehog

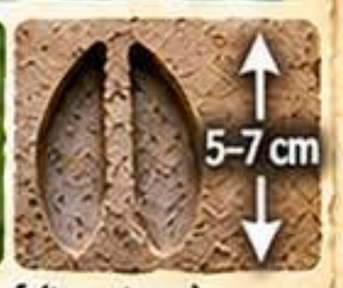




- 5 toes, narrow print.
- Small claws visible.
- Often found in gardens, hedgerows and woodland edges.

Deer (Roe/Fallow)





- Cloven hoof (two toes).
- Tapered, heart-shaped print.
- Common in woods, fields and along tracks.

Rabbit

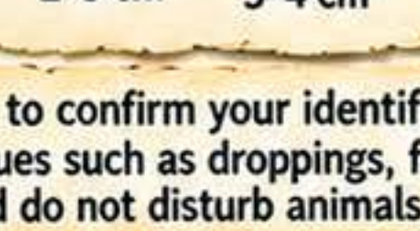




- 4 toes on front feet, longer hind prints.
- Often in pairs (hopping pattern).
- Common in fields, woodland edges and open areas.

Squirrel





- 4 toes on front, 5 on back.
- Small and delicate prints.
- Often on soft ground, in woods and around trees.

Mole





- Broad, spade-like front print with long claws.
- Often seen near molehills.
- Shows digging activity rather than regular tracks.

Rat

- 4 toes on front, 5 on back.
- Narrow, with visible claws.
- Often found near water, buildings and food sources.

Track Comparison (Front Print) – Relative Size

Hedgehog	Squirrel	Rat	Pine Marten	Rabbit	Fox	Badger	Otter
2–3 cm	2–3 cm	2–3 cm	3–4 cm	3–4 cm	4–5 cm	5–6 cm	5–7 cm

Remember

- Use a field guide to confirm your identification.
- Look for other clues such as droppings, feeding signs and runs.
- Be respectful and do not disturb animals, setts, or nests.

Scouts Bushcraft

Animal Tracking and Wildlife Signs

A Scouts Bushcraft Guide

Bird Tracks and Footprints

Birds leave clear and distinctive footprints in soft ground such as mud, sand or snow. By looking at the shape, size and toe arrangement, you can identify which birds have been in the area.



Key Features to Look For

- Number and arrangement of toes (most have three forward toes).
- Size and overall shape of the print.
- Length and spread of the toes.
- Claw marks (often visible at the tips).
- The habitat and other signs, such as feathers.

Common British Bird Tracks

Pheasant





- Large, three-toed print.
- Long, strong toes with claws.
- Often found in fields and woodland edges.

Wood Pigeon





- Three forward toes with a smaller back toe.
- Rounded, sturdy print.
- Common in woods, parks and gardens.

Crow





- Three long, spread toes.
- Strong, clear claw marks.
- Often seen on paths, fields and open ground.

Magpie





- Three forward toes with clear claws.
- Narrow, pointed print.
- Common in gardens, fields and woodlands.

Blackbird





- Three forward toes, slender and pointed.
- A neat, narrow print.
- Common in gardens, hedgerows and woods.

Robin





- Small, delicate track.
- Three forward toes with fine claw marks.
- Often found on soft ground in gardens and woodland.

Heron





- Large, long-toed print.
- Three forward toes, widely spread.
- Found near rivers, lakes, ponds and wetlands.

Mallard (Duck)





- Webbed footprint.
- Three forward toes joined by webbing.
- Common near ponds, lakes, rivers and marshes.

Other Bird Track Examples



Gull
5–7 cm
(webbed)



Wader
(e.g. Lapwing)
4–6 cm
(long, slender toes)



Owl
3–5 cm
(with talons)



Swan
8–12 cm
(large, webbed)

Top Tracking Tips

- Look for tracks in mud, sand, snow or soft soil.
- Compare the size and shape with a field guide.
- Check the habitat (e.g. water, woodland or fields).
- Look for other signs such as feathers, droppings or feeding evidence.

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Animal Tracking and Wildlife Signs

A Scouts Bushcraft Guide

Droppings (Scat) Identification

Droppings, also known as scat, can tell us which animals are in the area, what they have been eating, and how recently they have been there. Look at the size, shape, texture, colour and contents (such as fur, seeds or berries) to help identify the animal.



What Can Scat Tell Us?

- Which animal has been there.
- What it has been eating (e.g. berries, seeds, fur or insects).
- How fresh it is (wet and shiny is newer, dry and pale is older).
- How often the animal uses the area (e.g. latrine sites like badgers and foxes).

Common British Wildlife Droppings

Fox





- Long, twisted with a pointed end.
- 2–10 cm long, about 1–2 cm wide.
- Often contains fur, bones and berries.
- Usually left on paths, logs or raised spots.

Badger





- Soft, often in a small pit (latrine).
- 4–8 cm long, 1–2 cm wide.
- Often contains insects, fruit and plant matter.
- Common at sett entrances and regular sites.

Otter





- Dark, sticky and fishy smelling.
- 2–6 cm long, often with fish scales and bones.
- Usually left on rocks, riverbanks or logs.

Deer (Roe/Fallow)





- Small, round pellets.
- 1–2 cm across.
- Usually in groups (a 'pellet pile').
- Common in woodland, fields and rides.

Rabbit





- Small, round, dry pellets.
- About 0.5–1 cm across.
- Often in clusters.
- Common in fields, woodland edges and grassy areas.

Hedgehog





- Small, dark and crumbly.
- 2–4 cm long, about 0.5–1 cm wide.
- Often contains insect remains (e.g. beetles) and small plant material.
- Found in gardens, woodland and hedgerows.

Squirrel (Grey/Red)





- Small, cylindrical pellets.
- About 0.5–1.5 cm long.
- Often contains nut and seed remains.
- Common under trees and near feeding areas.

Mole





- Small, smooth, dark droppings.
- Around 0.5–1 cm long.
- Often found in or near molehills.
- Mainly made of earth and invertebrates (e.g. worms and grubs).

Rat





- Elongated and usually with pointed ends.
- 1–2 cm long, about 0.5 cm wide.
- Dark and often in small groups.
- Common near buildings, along hedges and in woodland.

Tracking Tips

- Look at size, shape, colour and contents.
- Compare with a field guide or reference photos.
- Check for other signs nearby, such as tracks, feeding marks or runs.
- Wash your hands after handling or close inspection.

Scouts Bushcraft

Animal Tracking and Wildlife Signs

A Scouts Bushcraft Guide

Feeding Signs and Browse Marks

Feeding signs show where animals have been looking for food. By examining chewed leaves, bark, nuts, cones and other remains, we can work out which animals have been in the area and what they have been eating.



Key Feeding Clues to Look For

- **Chewed leaves** – torn, ragged or cleanly cut.
- **Bark damage** – stripped or gnawed bark.
- **Nibbled nuts and seeds** – opened, broken or with tell-tale bite marks.
- **Gnawed wood** – tooth marks or smooth areas.
- **Feeding remains** – shells, cones, feathers, fur or partially eaten food.

Common Feeding Signs and What They Mean

Chewed Leaves



- Ragged, uneven edges.
- Commonly from deer, rabbit or caterpillars.

Stripped Bark



- Bark torn or peeled away.
- Often caused by deer (especially in winter) or rabbits on young trees.

Gnawed Wood



- Clean, angled bite marks.
- Commonly from rodents such as squirrel, vole or beaver.

Nibbled Nuts



- Shells opened with neat bite marks.
- Often done by squirrels (neat halves) or mice (rougher edges).

Eaten Cones



- Cone scales pulled apart.
- Usually from squirrels or woodland birds (e.g. woodpeckers).

Digging or Rooting



- Freshly turned soil or small holes.
- Commonly from badgers, foxes or wild boar.

Grazing Signs



- Grass or young shoots eaten.
- A clean, cropped look suggests deer, while a ragged cut is often from rabbits.

Feeding Remains



- Feathers, fur, bones or partly eaten food.
- Can show where a predator (e.g. fox or owl) has fed.

Examples by Animal

Deer	Rabbit	Squirrel	Badger	Fox
Browsed leaves, stripped bark, grazed plants.	Nibbled shoots, cleanly cut stems, bark damage on young trees.	Gnawed nuts, eaten cones, bite marks on branches.	Digging for food, upturned soil, and insect remains.	Feeding remains, bones, feathers and concentrated food sites.

Top Tips for Scouts

- Look closely and quietly to spot feeding signs.
- Compare marks with a field guide or photo.
- Check around trees, paths, dig sites and feeding areas.
- Look for a combination of clues (e.g. tracks, droppings and feeding signs).
- Take photos or notes in a wildlife log.

Scouts Bushcraft

Animal Tracking and Wildlife Signs

A Scouts Bushcraft Guide

Feathers, Fur and Other Evidence

Animals leave many clues behind, even when we don't see them. Feathers, fur, hairs and signs such as rubbing or scratch marks can tell us which animals are in the area, what they have been doing, and sometimes how recently they were there.



What Can We Learn?

- Which animal has been in the area.
- What type of animal it is (bird, mammal or other).
- What it has been doing (feeding, resting, marking territory).
- How recently it was there (fresh signs look clean and bright).

Feathers – Identification Clues

Jay



- Bright blue and black bars.
- Common in woodland and parks.

Woodpecker



- Black with bold white spots.
- Often found near trees with drill marks.

Pheasant



- Large, brown and barred.
- Common in fields, woodland edges and hedgerows.

Owl



- Soft and downy with muted bars.
- Often found near roosting or nesting sites.

Crow



- Large, black and strong.
- Common in a wide range of habitats, including woodland, fields and towns.

Fur and Hairs



- Hairs can show which mammal has been in the area (e.g. deer, fox, badger, rabbit).
- Look for fur on fences, branches, barbed wire or bedding sites.
- Compare the colour, length and texture with a field guide.

Rubbing and Marking



- Animals such as deer (especially roe and fallow) rub their antlers on trees.
- This can leave smooth, polished bark or stripped areas.
- Rubbing marks are often found along animal trails and at territory boundaries.

Scratch Marks



- Claw marks can be from mammals such as badgers, foxes or otters.
- Look for digs in soft soil, upturned leaves or near logs and tree roots.
- The size and spacing of the marks can help identify the animal.

Other Useful Evidence



Shed Antler



Old Nest



Moulted Fur



Slime Trail

Top Tips for Scouts

- Look closely and quietly for clues.
- Handle feathers and fur with care and wash your hands afterwards.
- Don't disturb nests, dens or resting places.
- Take photos or make notes in a wildlife log.
- Use a field guide to confirm what you have found.

Scouts Bushcraft

Animal Tracking and Wildlife Signs

A Scouts Bushcraft Guide

Nests, Dens and Shelters

Many animals build nests, dens or shelters to rest, raise their young and keep safe from predators and the weather. By looking at the size, shape, materials and location, you can work out which animals have been in the area.



Key Clues to Look For

- The type of structure (nest, burrow, sett, drey, lodge or resting spot).
- The materials used (twigs, leaves, grass, fur, feathers or soil).
- The size and location (in a tree, on the ground, under a hedge or in a bank).
- Other signs nearby, such as tracks, droppings or feeding remains.

Common Nests, Dens and Shelters

Bird Nest



- Built from twigs, grass, moss and leaves.
- Usually in trees, shrubs or hedges.
- Look for feathers and eggshell remains nearby.

Squirrel Drey



- Large, round nest of twigs and leaves.
- Found high in trees, often in the fork of branches.
- Used by grey and red squirrels to rest and raise young.

Badger Sett



- Several large entrance holes (often 20–30 cm wide).
- Hills of dug-out soil nearby (spoil heaps).
- Often a well-used, long-term home with many tunnels.

Fox Den



- A single, larger den entrance (about 20–30 cm wide).
- Often in a bank, hedge or woodland edge.
- May have old bedding, fur and food remains nearby.

Rabbit Warren



- Several small entrances (about 10–15 cm wide).
- A network of shallow tunnels close together.
- Often in grassy banks, fields or woodland edges.

Otter Holt



- A hidden den, often in a riverbank, under tree roots or in a log pile.
- Usually close to water with wet tracks and spraints nearby.
- Lined with grass, leaves and sometimes fish remains.

Hedgehog Nest



- A dome-shaped nest made from leaves, grass and twigs.
- Usually on the ground, under hedges, in log piles or sheds.
- Used for resting, hibernation and raising young.

Deer Resting Place



- A simple, shallow bed (a "form") where deer rest.
- A clear, oval patch in grass, leaves or bracken.
- Often found in quiet areas with good cover.

Other Wildlife Shelters



Hare Form



Roe Deer Form



Log or Rock Shelter

Top Tips for Scouts

- Look carefully at the size, shape and location.
- Check for extra clues like tracks, droppings or feeding signs.
- Be quiet and respectful — do not disturb nests or dens.
- Keep a safe distance and never go inside a sett, den or burrow.
- Record what you find in a wildlife log with notes or photos.

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Animal Tracking and Wildlife Signs

A Scouts Bushcraft Guide

Trails, Runs and Pathways

Animals use trails, runs and pathways to move around their territory. By learning to spot these signs, you can find out what animals are in the area, where they are going and what they are doing. Look for worn paths, flattened vegetation, tracks and other signs of movement.



Key Clues to Look For

- **Worn paths** – grass, leaves and plants flattened by regular use.
- **Animal runs** – narrow, well-used routes. through fields, woods and hedgerows.
- **Tunnel entrances** – holes or gaps under fences, fallen trees or banks.
- **Movement patterns** – repeated use shows regular routes, often between food, water and shelter.

Common Trails and Pathways

Deer Runs



- Wide, well-worn paths through woodland.
- Often used to access feeding areas.
- May show droppings and rubbed trees.

Fox Runs



- Narrow and well defined.
- Often along hedgerows, field edges and woodland margins.
- May have a strong musky smell.

Badger Paths



- Wide, well-used paths to and from setts.
- Often near fields and woodland edges.
- May show claw marks and fresh soil.

Rabbit Runs



- Narrow, winding paths through grass and bushes.
- Often linked to burrows and feeding areas.
- May be found in gardens, fields and hedges.

Wild Boar Tracks



- Wide, muddy paths and wallows.
- Often in woodland and wet areas.
- Look for rooting and upturned soil.

Otter Trails



- Narrow paths along rivers, streams and lakes.
- Often near water's edge.
- Look for spraints (droppings) and slide marks.

Hedgehog Paths



- Small, well-used paths through gardens and hedges.
- Often under fences or between shrubs.
- Look for feeding signs nearby.

Squirrel Runs



- Paths along tree branches and through shrubs.
- Often found in woodland and parks.
- Look for chewed cones and nut shells.

Muntjac Runs



- Narrow paths through undergrowth.
- Often in dense woodland and scrub.
- Look for droppings and browsed vegetation.

Foxhole / Den Approaches



- Slightly worn paths leading to dens.
- Often found in banks, hedges or woodland.
- Look for disturbed soil and footprints.

Other Signs to Look For



Flattened grass and vegetation



Broken twigs and branches



Hair and fur on fences or bushes



Footprints in mud or soft ground

Top Tips for Scouts

- Look for signs early in the morning or after rain.
- Follow trails and see where they lead.
- Check for feeding signs, droppings and tracks nearby.
- Use binoculars to scan for movement in the distance.
- Be quiet and patient – wildlife often avoids noise.

Scouts Bushcraft

Animal Tracking and Wildlife Signs

A Scouts Bushcraft Guide

Reading the Ground and Mud

The ground can tell us a lot about wildlife. By looking closely at the soil, mud and the details of a footprint, we can work out which animal made it, how long ago it passed, which way it was going and even how fast it was moving.



What Can We Learn?

- Which animal has been there.
- How fresh the track is.
- Which direction it was travelling.
- How big and heavy the animal might be.
- How the ground and weather affect the tracks.

Different Ground Types

Tracks look different depending on the surface. Each type of ground gives a different level of detail.

Mud



- Shows clear detail.
- Good for tracking.

Soft Soil



- Often clear and easy to read.
- Holds shape well.

Sand



- Can show good detail.
- May be affected by wind.

Grass



- Tracks are less clear.
- Look for flattened or bent grass.

Snow



- Shows very clear tracks.
- Can tell how fresh the track is.

Weather and Track Preservation

Weather changes **how long tracks** last and how easy they are to spot.



Dry Weather

- Tracks can last for days.
- Detail may slowly fade.



Rain

- Can quickly wash tracks away.
- Softens edges and fills prints.



Snow

- Preserves tracks well.
- Shows clear detail and direction.



Frost

- Can keep tracks for a long time.
- Often gives sharp, clear edges.

Fresh or Old Tracks?

Look for changes in the detail and edges to estimate how recent a track is.

Fresh Track



- Sharp, clear edges.
- Damp and detailed.
- Often still moist.

A Few Hours Old



- Edges starting to crumble.
- Losing fine detail.
- Drier surface.

Older Track



- Edges smooth and rounded.
- Less detail visible.
- Often partly filled with debris.

Direction, Depth and Movement

Direction



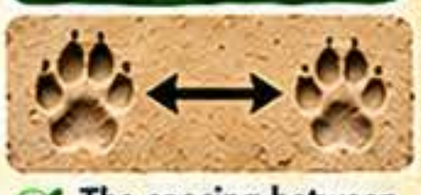
- Look at the shape of the toes and heel.
- Most prints are slightly longer at the front.
- The point of the print usually shows the direction of travel.

Depth



- A deeper print can mean a heavier animal (e.g. badger or deer).
- A light, shallow print may be a smaller animal (e.g. fox or rabbit).
- Compare prints of the same type together.

Movement



- The spacing between prints (the stride) can show how fast the animal was moving.
- Longer gaps usually mean a faster pace (e.g. running or trotting).

Tracking Tips for Scouts

- Look in damp areas such as mud, riversides and tracks.
- Check early in the morning when signs are freshest.
- Compare tracks with a field guide or print chart.
- Look for other clues nearby (droppings, fur, feeding signs).
- Take photos or make a sketch in your wildlife log.

Key Takeaways



- Different ground types give different clues.
- Weather can preserve or destroy tracks.
- Check the detail, edges and depth to judge age.
- Use the shape and spacing to find direction and speed.
- Combine tracks with other signs for a better identification.

Scouts Bushcraft

Animal Tracking and Wildlife Signs

A Scouts Bushcraft Guide

Tracking in Different Seasons

Wildlife leaves different signs throughout the year. By understanding how the seasons affect animal behaviour, tracks, feeding and shelters, you can improve your chances of finding and identifying wildlife signs.



Why Seasons Matter

- Animals behave differently at different times of year.
- Tracks and signs can be easier or harder to find.
- Feeding, breeding and sheltering change with the seasons.
- Knowing these changes helps you track wildlife more effectively.

Seasonal Wildlife Signs – What to Look For

Spring (Mar–May)



- Breeding and nesting activity increases (nests, borrows, dreys).
- More fresh tracks as animals look for food and territory.
- Signs of young (smaller tracks, feeding remains).
- Look for feathers, fur and nest-building materials.

Summer (Jun–Aug)



- Animals are active early morning and late evening.
- Feeding signs are common (chewed leaves, nibbled nuts, fruit remains).
- Well-used trails and runs are easy to spot.
- More signs near water (rivers, ponds and damp areas).

Autumn (Sep–Nov)



- Feeding signs increase (gnawed nuts, cones, fruit).
- Animals build up food stores and prepare for winter.
- More obvious trails to food sources.
- Look for fallen leaves with bite marks and scratch signs (digging for food).

Winter (Dec–Feb)



- Tracks are often easiest to find in snow or frost.
- Less plant cover makes trails and shelters clearer.
- Look for feeding signs (bark stripping, buds and shoots).
- Many animals rest in dens, setts or under cover.

Best Conditions for Tracking



After Rain (soft, clear tracks)	Frost (crisp detail)	Snow (easy to see)	Damp Soil (good detail)

- Look after rain, frost or in fresh snow for the clearest tracks.
- Early morning often gives the best chance of fresh signs.
- Damp, soft ground holds more detail than dry, hard ground.
- Avoid very windy or heavy rain conditions, which can erase signs.

Top Tips for Scouts

- Visit the same area in different seasons to see how signs change.
- Keep a simple wildlife log with notes, photos or sketches.
- Be patient and look closely at the ground, plants and trees.
- Combine tracks with other signs (droppings, feeding marks, nests) for a clearer picture.
- Always respect wildlife and their homes, and leave no trace.

Scouts Bushcraft

Animal Tracking and Wildlife Signs

A Scouts Bushcraft Guide

Wildlife Tracking Techniques

Tracking is the skill of following and interpreting signs left by wildlife. By working carefully and quietly, you can learn which animal has been there, where it went, what it was doing and how recently it passed.



The Tracking Process

1. **Find a sign** – look for tracks, droppings, feeding marks or other clues.
2. **Identify** – work out which animal made it.
3. **Follow** – look for more signs and a clear path.
4. **Interpret** – use the clues to understand what the animal was doing.
5. **Record** – make notes, a sketch or a photo (without disturbing the area).

Step-by-Step Tracking

1 Search the Area



- Move slowly and quietly.
- Scan the ground, edges and soft areas (mud, sand or leaf litter).
- Look for a clear starting point, such as a fresh track.

2 Study the Track



- Look at the size, shape and number of toes.
- Check the depth for weight and speed.
- Note any details, such as claw marks or a distinctive shape.

3 Follow the Trail



- Look for a pattern of tracks heading in a direction.
- Check for other signs such as droppings, feeding or disturbed vegetation.

4 Read the Clues



- Look for signs of behaviour (rubbing, scratching, feeding, resting).
- Notice changes, such as where the animal stopped, changed direction or sped up.

5 Record & Reflect



- Make a quick sketch, notes or take a photo.
- Record the location, time and any other useful signs.
- Leave the area as you found it.

Interpreting What You Find

Direction	The shape of the track can show which way the animal was travelling (the toes usually point forward).
Speed	Deeper, stretched tracks often mean the animal was moving faster (e.g. running).
Group Size	More than one set of tracks suggests a group, such as a family or a pair.
Behaviour	Other signs (feeding, scratching, resting) can show what the animal was doing, such as foraging or marking territory.
How Recent?	Sharp, clear edges are recent. Softer, rounded or rain-filled tracks are older.

Tracking Skills for Scouts

- **Be observant** – look for all types of signs, not just tracks.
- **Be patient** – take your time and move quietly.
- **Be respectful** – do not disturb wildlife or their homes.
- **Work with a buddy** – it's safer and you can share ideas.
- **Use a field notebook** – record tracks, signs and what you think they mean.
- **Practise often** – the more you look, the better you get at spotting and understanding signs.

Key Takeaways

- Look carefully, think about the clues and build a bigger picture.
- Use tracks, droppings, feeding signs and other evidence together.
- Tracking is about learning, not chasing – always leave wildlife in peace.
- Keep a simple record, such as a wildlife log, to build your skills over time.

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Recording and Making Track Casts

Keeping a record of the tracks and signs you find helps you learn more about wildlife and your local area. You can also make a plaster cast of a track to keep as a permanent record.



Why Record and Cast?

- Helps you identify wildlife more accurately.
- Builds a record of what is in the area.
- A plaster cast keeps the track permanently.
- You can compare tracks and learn differences.
- A great way to share your findings with others.

Keeping a Wildlife Record

Use a notebook or field journal to record your findings. Keep it simple and clear.



What to Record

- Date and time.
- Location (e.g. wood, field, stream).
- Type of sign (track, scat, feeding mark, etc.).
- Measurements (length and width).
- A sketch or photograph.
- Any other useful notes (e.g. direction, number of tracks, behaviour).

Photographing Tracks



- Take a clear, close-up photo.
- Place a ruler next to the track for size.
- Keep the camera above the track (not at an angle).
- Include the surroundings to show the habitat.

How to Make a Track Cast

1 Prepare



- Find a clear, well-defined track in damp soil (not too wet or dry). Carefully clear loose leaves and debris.

2 Make a Wall



- Build a wall around the track using modelling clay or damp soil to hold the plaster in place (about 1–2 cm high).

3 Mix Plaster



- Mix plaster of Paris with clean water following the instructions on the packet (a smooth, thick cream).

4 Pour and Set



- Gently pour the plaster into the mould, covering the track fully.
- Leave it to set (usually 20–30 minutes, depending on type).

5 Remove and Label



- Carefully remove the cast and brush off any loose soil.
- Label it with the date, location and animal (if known).

Safety and Good Practice

- Always have adult supervision.
- Use plaster of Paris safely – avoid breathing in dust and wash hands after use.
- Do not damage the environment or animal homes.
- Take only one cast from a site.
- Replace disturbed soil and leave the area as you found it.

Key Takeaways

- Record what you find – date, place, size and notes.
- Use photos and sketches to help with identification.
- Make plaster casts to keep a permanent record.
- Be respectful of wildlife and their habitat.
- Build your own wildlife log to track what you see over time.

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Animal Tracking and Wildlife Signs

A Scouts Bushcraft Guide

Wildlife Observation and Fieldcraft

Good fieldcraft helps you see more wildlife and learn about their behaviour without disturbing them. By being quiet, patient and respectful, you can safely observe wildlife in their natural habitat.



What is Fieldcraft?

- The skills and attitude needed to observe wildlife without being seen.
- Moving quietly and carefully.
- Using cover and natural camouflage.
- Being patient and taking your time.
- Understanding and respecting wildlife and their habitat.

Camouflage and Blending In



- Wear colours that match your surroundings (greens, browns, and greys).
- Avoid bright colours that can be easily seen.
- Use natural cover such as trees, bushes and fallen logs.
- Keep a low profile and break up your outline.

Using Binoculars



- Help you see animals clearly from a distance without disturbing them.
- Choose a suitable size (e.g. 8×42 or 10×42) for general wildlife use.
- Keep them clean and dry.
- Use them to watch behaviour, feeding and movement safely.

Quiet Observation – The Right Approach

1 Stop and Listen



- Be still and quiet. Listen for sounds such as calls, movement or rustling.

2 Look for Movement



- Scan slowly and carefully. Look for movement, shapes or changes in the surroundings.

3 Watch and Learn



- Observe the animal's behaviour, such as feeding, resting or travelling. Keep your distance.

4 Record Your Sighting



- Make simple notes or a sketch in a wildlife log. Include the date, place and what you saw the animal doing.

Responsible Fieldcraft

- Keep to established paths where possible.
- Do not approach, feed or disturb wildlife.
- Avoid damaging plants or animal homes.
- Leave no trace – take your litter home.
- Be aware of the season (e.g. nesting birds in spring) and give extra space.



Key Takeaways

- Be quiet, patient and observant.
- Use natural cover and suitable clothing.
- Binoculars help you see more without disturbing.
- Record what you see to build your knowledge.
- Always be respectful and leave the area as you found it.

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Animal Tracking and Wildlife Signs

A Scouts Bushcraft Guide

Tracking Challenge and Field Worksheet

Put your tracking skills into practice!

Use what you have learned in this guide to find, identify and record wildlife signs in the field. Work individually or in a small team and complete the challenges below.



The Tracking Challenge

- **Challenge 1** – Find and identify at least three different animal tracks.
- **Challenge 2** – Look for other signs, such as feeding marks, droppings or feathers.
- **Challenge 3** – Discover a nest, den, run or shelter and record what you find.
- **Challenge 4** – Work out a short story: what animal was here, what was it doing, and where might it have gone next?

Wildlife Detective Activity

You are a wildlife detective! Follow the clues, look for signs and piece together what happened in your area.

- What animal do you think was here?
- What was it doing (feeding, resting, travelling)?
- What clues helped you decide?

Field Observation Worksheet

Date / Time:	
Location:	
Habitat (e.g. woodland, field, stream):	
Weather:	
Signs Found (e.g. tracks, droppings, feeding marks, nests):	

Track Identification Challenge

Can you identify these tracks? Write the animal name in the box.



Track Sketch and Notes

Sketch a track you find in the field.

Animal (if known): _____

Track size: _____

Direction of travel: _____

How fresh? (e.g. fresh / older):

_____

Other notes:

_____

_____

_____

Useful Reminders

- Be quiet and move slowly.
- Look carefully at the ground, plants and trees.
- Check for other clues as well as tracks.
- Take photos or make sketches.
- Be respectful – do not disturb wildlife or their homes.

What Did You Learn?

- Which signs were easiest to find?
- Which were the most difficult?
- What surprised you?
- How will you use these skills on future Scouting trips or activities?

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Bushcraft Skills, Resources and Practical Guides for Scouts

The **Scouts Bushcraft** book series provides practical, easy-to-follow guides to help Scouts, Explorer Scouts, Scout Leaders and other youth groups learn outdoor skills, develop confidence, work as a team and build a greater understanding and respect for the natural world.

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- Expert, practical guidance
- Step-by-step activities
- Useful tips and techniques
- Printable worksheets and resources
- Ideas for meetings, activity days and camps
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