SCOUTS BUSHCRAFT

Animal Tracking and Wildlife Signs

Activity Risk Assessment

Activity Animal tracking and wildlife-sign identification	**Duration** 60 minutes
Location Woodland, field or suitable outdoor area (insert exact site)	**Group** Scouts; numbers and ages to be confirmed
Assessment completed by _____	**Date / review date** _____
Responsible leader _____	**First aider / first-aid arrangements** _____

1. Activity description and safe system of work

Scouts will look for and interpret wildlife evidence such as footprints, trails, feeding marks and feathers. The activity uses observation, photographs, field guides, sketches and measuring tools. Participants must not handle wildlife, droppings, carcasses or unidentified natural material, and must not enter or disturb nests, dens, setts or burrows. The leader will inspect the site, set clear boundaries, explain stop signals and maintain appropriate supervision throughout.

2. Risk assessment

Risk ratings below are indicative only. The leader must review them against the actual site, weather, group, staffing and current organisational procedures before the session.

Hazard	Potential harm	Control measures	Residual risk
Uneven ground, roots, holes and loose surfaces	Trips, slips, falls; sprains or cuts.	Inspect route and activity area; avoid steep, unstable or heavily obstructed ground; mark hazards; walk rather than run; use suitable footwear; keep group together and adapt route to ability.	**Low**
Water, ditches, banks and soft or boggy ground	Fall into water, slipping, becoming stuck or exposure to cold.	Keep well back from water edges, steep banks and boggy ground; establish exclusion zones; do not cross streams or climb banks as part of the activity; maintain close supervision.	**Low**
Thorns, brambles, nettles and low branches	Scratches, stings, eye injuries or allergic reaction.	Choose a clear route; do not push through dense vegetation; wear long sleeves and suitable trousers; warn Scouts about eye-level branches; carry first-aid supplies.	**Low**
Wild animals and animal habitats	Bites, scratches, defensive behaviour, disturbance or injury to wildlife.	Observe from a distance; never approach, chase, feed or handle animals; do not reach into holes or shelters; do not disturb nests, setts, dens or burrows; withdraw calmly if wildlife is encountered.	**Low**
Droppings, carcasses, feathers, fur and contaminated material	Exposure to germs, parasites or other biological hazards.	Use photographs or visual observation only; do not touch, collect, smell or disturb material; keep hands away from face and mouth; wash hands before eating and after the activity; report dead animals to the leader and avoid the area.	**Low**
Insects, ticks and stinging plants	Bites, stings, irritation or allergic reaction; tick-borne illness risk.	Wear appropriate clothing; use insect repellent according to its label and individual needs; avoid long vegetation where practical; check clothing and skin after the activity; follow the individual's allergy/medical plan and seek help for reactions.	**Low**
Weather, cold, heat, rain and poor visibility	Cold stress, heat illness, dehydration or reduced visibility.	Check forecast and conditions; set suitable clothing requirements; provide drinking water; use shade and rest breaks; shorten, relocate or stop the activity if conditions deteriorate; maintain a headcount.	**Low**
Getting separated or leaving the activity area	Participant becomes lost or enters an unsafe area.	Set and explain boundaries; use a buddy system; agree a stop signal and meeting point; count participants at transitions; keep the group within sight and sound; follow the organisation's missing-person procedure.	**Low**
Tools and equipment (rulers, clipboards, cameras, binoculars)	Minor cuts, bumps, distraction or collision while moving.	Use equipment only as demonstrated; no running while using it; keep straps and cases secure; do not use sticks or sharp objects to probe holes; check equipment before use.	**Low**
Manual handling and kneeling / crouching	Strains, discomfort, contact with sharp or contaminated ground.	Avoid lifting heavy items; use suitable bags; change position regularly; kneel on a clean mat if needed; do not put hands into vegetation, holes or unknown material.	**Low**
Roads, paths shared with the public and access points	Collision, conflict with other users or unauthorised access.	Keep to permitted routes; stop at road crossings and use the leader's crossing procedure; remain considerate to the public; do not block paths; obey landowner and site rules.	**Low**
Group supervision and participant needs	Inadequate supervision, distress or an individual not coping with the activity.	Set staffing and group size in line with current organisational rules; brief all adults; consider individual needs, mobility, allergies and medical information; adapt tasks and provide an alternative observation point.	**Low**

3. Before the activity

- Visit and inspect the exact site; identify boundaries, access/exit points, water, slopes, hazards and suitable shelter.
- Check weather, daylight, ground conditions, land access permissions and any local wildlife restrictions.
- Confirm participant numbers, adult supervision, individual needs, emergency contacts and first-aid arrangements.
- Brief adults and Scouts on boundaries, buddy arrangements, stop signal, meeting point and what must not be touched or disturbed.
- Check first-aid kit, charged phone or agreed communication method, drinking water and suitable clothing.

4. Emergency arrangements

Scenario	Response
Injury or illness	Stop the activity, make the area safe, provide first aid within the responder's competence and contact emergency services when required. Arrange supervision for the rest of the group.
Missing participant	Stop the group, notify the responsible leader immediately, follow the organisation's missing-person procedure and contact emergency services when appropriate.
Severe weather or unsafe conditions	Stop or relocate the activity, move to the agreed safe area and account for all participants.
Unexpected wildlife encounter	Do not approach or attempt to handle the animal. Calmly increase distance, move the group away and inform the responsible leader.

5. Personal protective equipment and resources

Suitable outdoor footwear; weather-appropriate clothing; long trousers and sleeves where appropriate; drinking water; first-aid kit; charged phone or agreed communication equipment; handwashing supplies; field guides, notebooks, pencils, rulers and binoculars. Any insect repellent or sun protection should be used in accordance with its instructions and individual needs.

6. Site-specific notes and review

Exact site / activity area: _____
Specific hazards found during site check: _____
_____
Additional control measures / changes: _____
_____

7. Approval

Assessed by: _____	**Signature:** _____
Date: _____	**Reviewed / approved by:** _____

Important: This is a planning template, not a substitute for a site-specific assessment. The responsible leader must check the actual location, participants, weather, staffing and current Scout Association / organisation procedures, then amend and approve it before the activity.