



NATURE
CONSERVANCY
CANADA

Who
am I?

**Your guide to becoming
an animal tracking
detective!**



About the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC)

As Canada's largest environmental charity, we bring people together to protect nature, effectively preventing species loss, including those highlighted in this guide! We believe that nature itself has the power to solve two of the world's biggest crises: climate change and biodiversity loss.

Our aim is to protect nature, so nature can protect us.

Thanks to nature lovers like you, we have protected more than 15 million hectares of natural landscapes across Canada – that's more than twice the size of New Brunswick! This means that more than 200 species at-risk have a safe home, forever.

But with climate change and biodiversity loss accelerating, we need to do more. By working together, we can unlock nature's power, so life on Earth can not only continue to exist, but can thrive.



**Leave your mark!
Protect their homes.**

Make a gift at natureconservancy.ca/imprint
or scan the QR code with your phone.

This guide was developed
in consultation with animal
tracking expert Joseph Litke.



Tracking tips:

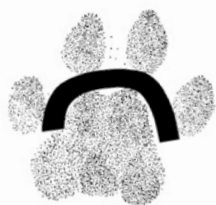
Here's what to look for:

Toes: Rodents, like squirrels, typically leave tracks showing four toes in the front and five in the hind. Wild canines, like coyotes and foxes, have four toes in both their front and hind tracks, with toes arranged out symmetrically in front of their palm pad. Felines, like Canada lynx, also have four toes in their front and hind paws, but their toes spread out asymmetrically in a tight arc that wraps around their palm pad.

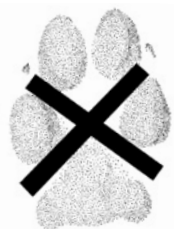
Claws: Claws aren't always present in tracks, so when spotted, they can be a useful clue. Domestic dogs often have thick, blunt claws, while the claws of coyotes are always sharp and thin. Felines have retractable claws that rarely ever show, but when they do, they often appear as tiny pinpricks in front of the toes.

Track pattern: Track patterns show how an animal was moving. Gaps between groups of prints are often from bounding animals, like squirrels and hares. Evenly spaced prints that alternate side to side are found in walking or trotting animals. Walkers, like deer and lynx, leave wider patterns, while trotters like coyotes and foxes leave narrower ones. Raccoons often leave side-by-side perfectly unbroken prints, whereas striped skunks switch their movement frequently, leaving mixed patterns.

Pads: To tell canine and feline tracks apart, count the lobes in the palm pad. In felines, the front of the palm pad has two and the back has three; in canines, there's one lobe at the top of the pad and two at the bottom. You can also look at the space between the toes and pads of the tracks. If the space makes an arch, you've found a feline track; if the space makes an X, it's a canine.



Feline Track



Canine Track

Who's roaming in your neighbourhood?

CUT OR FOLD

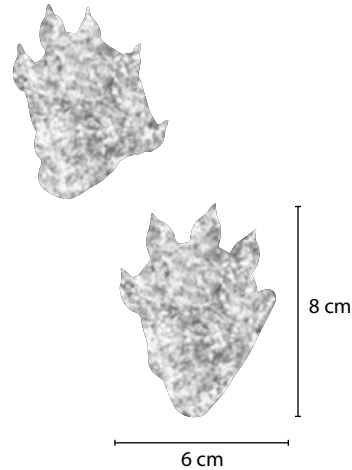
CUT OUT CARDS



River Otter



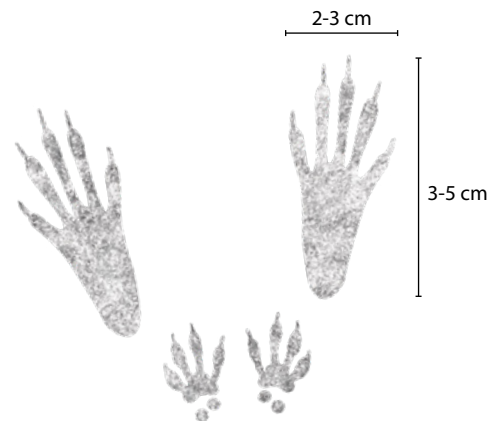
River otters have five toes, but you may only make out four of them in their prints, along with sharp claw marks above C-shaped pads. River otters love to play and slide in the snow, so you might even see some slide patterns!



Squirrel



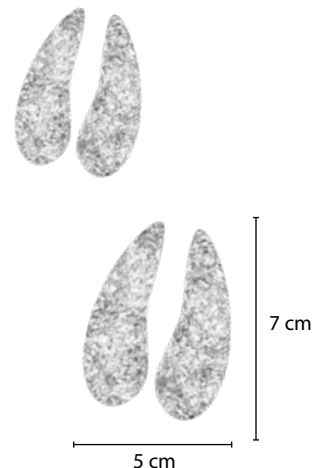
Canada's trails and neighbourhoods are alive with busy squirrel activity. Their small tracks feature front paws with narrow toes and tiny claws, and slightly bigger back paws than the front. If prints lead you to a tree, you might be tracking a squirrel!



White-tailed Deer



White-tailed deer have two-toed hooves shaped like an upside-down heart, with front prints bigger than rear ones. Look for more than one set of prints, since white-tailed deer usually travel in groups.



Take this tracking guide on your next outdoor adventure so you can easily identify the animal tracks you spot. You can also print these pages out, cut out the cards and turn them into flashcards or a fun memory matching game to hone your animal tracking skills!

CUT OR FOLD

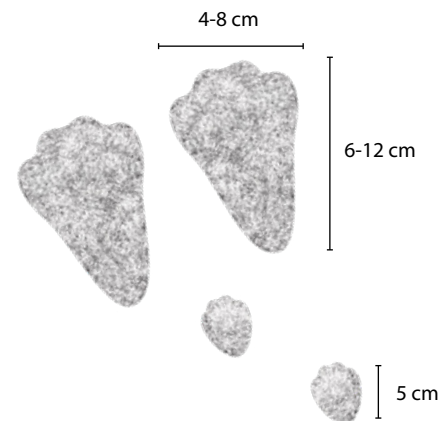
CUT OUT CARDS



Snowshoe Hare



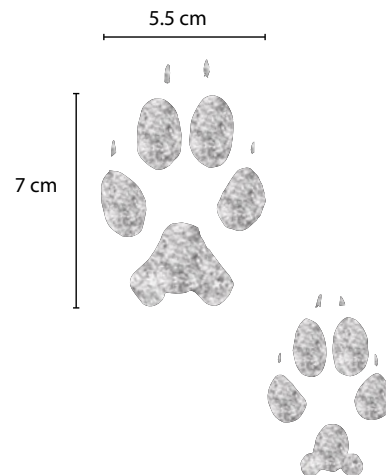
Snowshoe hares can leap as far as three metres and remain on top of the snow. Look out for smaller front feet tucked in close together behind hind prints, and a distinctive snowshoe pattern on each hind foot with four long toes spread wide.



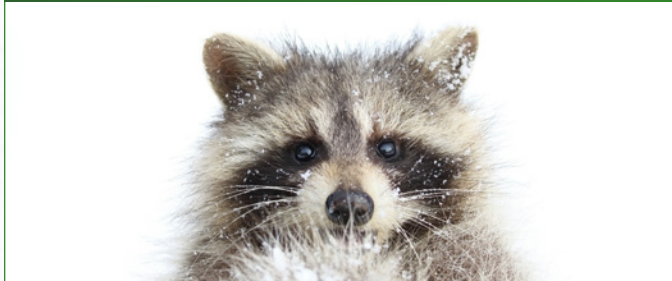
Coyote



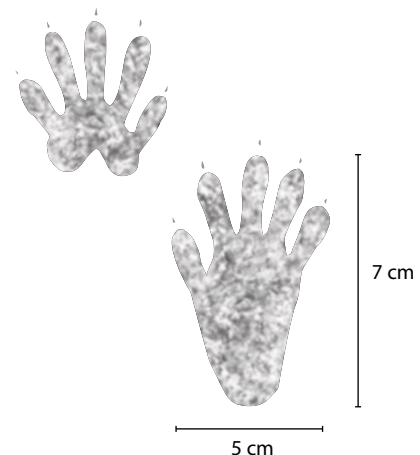
Coyotes are cousins of the domestic dog, and their tracks often get mixed up. To tell them apart, look for paws that are narrower than they are wide, space in between the toes and the pad, and thin forward pointing claw marks. If you spot a coyote, keep your distance. They may be related to your favourite dog, but they aren't nearly as friendly.



Raccoon



With the intelligence of a toddler and tiny hands to match, it's not uncommon to follow raccoon tracks to the scene of mischief. Raccoons have five finger-like toes extending from the palm, on both front and hind feet. The heel on the hind foot will often register, making them nearly twice as long as the fronts.





Striped Skunk



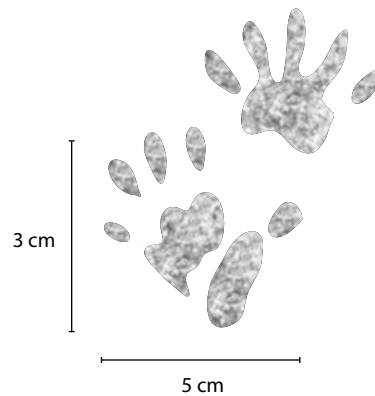
Known for their bold stripe, plummy tail and stink-spraying ability, skunks are commonly found across Canada. Skunk tracks have five toes on each foot, with claw marks farther ahead of the toe marks on the front paws and a longer heel on the hind paws.



Opossum



Did you know that opossums are Canada's only marsupial? Opossum tracks often resemble small five-toed stars, though only four toes may be seen on the front paws. Look closely and you may see a wavy line in between the tracks where the opossum's tail drags behind.



Black Bear



Found across most of Canada, black bears sometimes "stomp" repeatedly in the same footsteps as other bears, leaving scent from glands on their feet. Each foot has five toes that register forward of the palm pad in an arc-shape, though the small inner toe may not always show up. Claws are of similar length on both front and hind, and tend to point inwards.

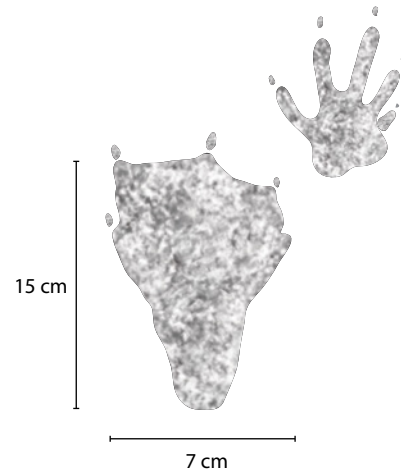




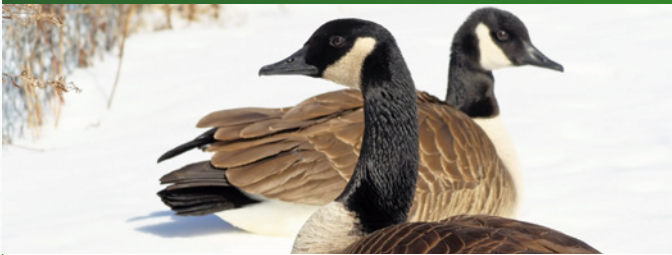
Beaver



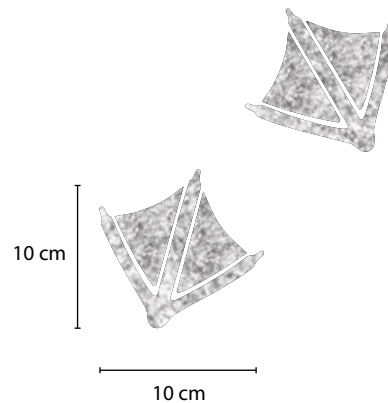
Canada's national icon was once endangered, but the species has made a remarkable comeback. You're more likely to see evidence of a beaver by the tree stumps it leaves behind, but its tracks are identifiable by the webbing on the long hind foot – if the tail hasn't wiped the trail clean!



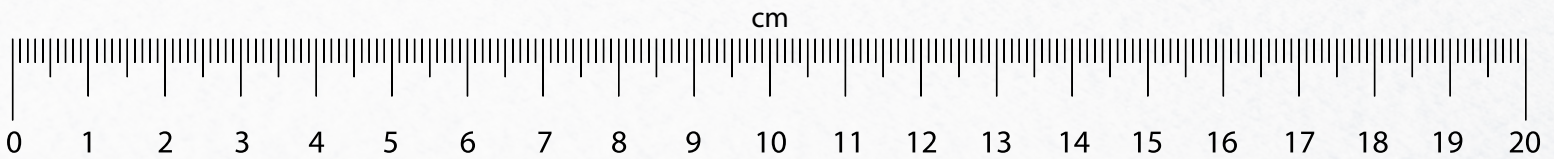
Canada Goose



Just like the birds themselves, Canada goose tracks are easy to identify, at least when webbing between the toes is evident. Without evidence of webbing, look for the outside toes to curve toward the longer middle toe, which is 10-12 cm long. Tracks are a common sight in spring and summer, but because climate change is affecting the birds' migration pattern, you might also spot them during winter months.



BEAVER; PHOTO BY KARLUMBRIACO. CANADA GEESE; PHOTO BY RENA-MARIE.



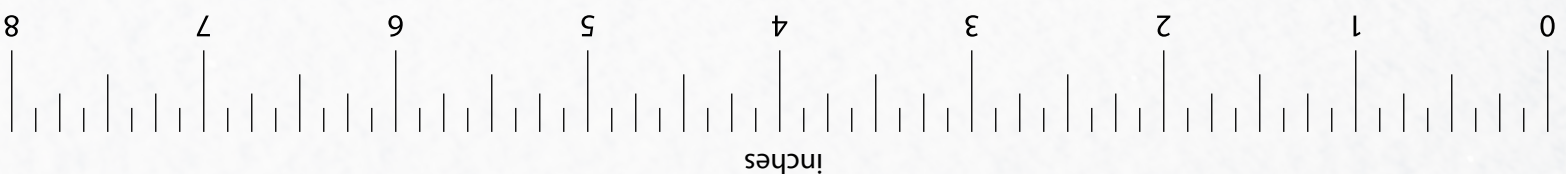
Quick Reference

How to measure!



Measure
track length
from top edge
to bottom edge.

Measure track width
from outer edge to outer edge.



Special sightings:

Did a species at risk leave its mark?

With the help of animal lovers like you, NCC has protected crucial habitat that the regionally endangered Canada lynx needs to survive, including the Restigouche watershed in northern New Brunswick and Quebec.



CUT OR FOLD

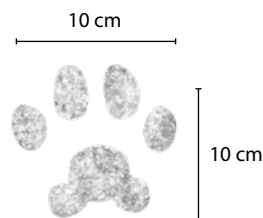
CUT OUT CARDS



Canada Lynx



You aren't likely to spot a Canada lynx, but if you do, give them space! These big felines are skilled hunters and can defend themselves if they feel threatened. They leave round prints that form a zigzag pattern. You probably won't spot any claw marks because lynxes retract their claws while walking.





Swift Fox



Swift foxes move fast: up to 60 kilometres an hour! On your hunt for their tracks, look for fuzzy, oval-shaped prints comprised of four toes with claws, and a heel pad. The space in the middle is from the thick hair that insulates their cat-sized paws in the snow. Once critically endangered, there are now over 500 swift foxes in Canada thanks in part to NCC's work in protecting Prairie grasslands.



Snowy Owl



Snowy owls' powerful talons often leave deep X-shaped imprints. You might even see a snow angel imprint left behind where the tips of their wings brushed the snow! Globally vulnerable, majestic snowy owls are an iconic symbol of Canada's North. NCC protects their habitat so they have safe homes.



Wolverine



Like their comic book namesake, wolverines have razor-sharp claws. Their padded paws provide insulation and allow them to tread lightly on snow. Front and hind tracks are similar in size and shape, with five widely spaced toe pads and a C-shaped palm pad. Classified as a species of special concern due to habitat loss, these fearless animals rely on the support of nature lovers like you to protect their homes.



Tracking Log

Print extra copies of this sheet if you need more, or keep a virtual tacking log at natureconservancy.ca/inaturalist

Species:

Location:

Date/Time:

Species:

Location:

Date/Time:

Species:

Location:

Date/Time:

Species:

Location:

Date/Time:

Species:

Location:

Date/Time:

Species:

Location:

Date/Time:

Species:

Location:

Date/Time:

Species:

Location:

Date/Time:

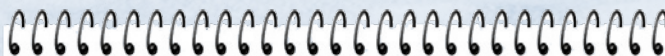
Share your favourite observations and tag us on social media for a chance to be featured!



/natureconservancy.ca



@ncc_cnc



Sketch the tracks or track pattern you saw!

Did you spot some animals tracks that you can't identify?

Share your observations on natureconservancy.ca/inaturalist to get help identifying any unfamiliar tracks.

Your findings can make a real difference by providing valuable data that helps scientists and conservationists monitor biodiversity, track species distribution, and shape effective conservation strategies.

Match the gait!

Pair the animal with its typical track pattern.

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.





Together, we unlock nature's power, so life can thrive.

