



Neighborhood Hunt for Signs of Wildlife

What evidence of wildlife can you find without actually seeing an animal?

Introduction

You can make observations of wildlife without actually seeing live animals. Many wildlife animals in nearby habitats avoid humans, and some are nocturnal. But you can often find evidence of them if you look carefully. You may find tracks, scat, pellets, rubs, skeletons, feathers, snakeskins, eggshells, browse lines, nests, or dens. In this activity you will search for signs of wildlife in places you would expect to find it or create an area that encourages wildlife to visit.

Activity 1 Supplies

- Animal field guide or internet
- Camera (optional)
- Binoculars (optional)

Activity 1 Steps

Wildlife Observation Hike

- 1) Take a one-hour hike looking for signs of wildlife. Possible places include home, a park, nature preserve, woods, or other location where you would expect wildlife to live.



- 2) Walk quietly. Try to observe all signs of wildlife
Wildlife: Birds are most commonly seen but if you watch carefully, you might also see squirrels, chipmunks, rabbits, or deer.

Signs of wildlife: animal tracks, scat, pellets, rubs, skeletons, feathers, snakeskins, eggshells, browse lines, nests, or holes for underground tunnels.

- Pay particular attention in mud near a stream or pond where you might see footprints.
- Watch for nests in trees or on the ground.
- Look for animal damage on trees and vegetation:
 - Deer rubs from antlers scraping trees
 - Trees that beavers have cut
 - Plants that deer or rabbits have eaten
- Watch for snakeskins, broken eggs, feathers, and skeletons.



- 3) Listen for wildlife sounds—noises or calls that wildlife might make.
- 4) Record what you see and hear in your journal. Include the date, time, and weather conditions. Sketch or take pictures of what you observe.
5. Use identification guides as needed. You can carry small printed guides in a backpack, or use apps on a mobile device during your hike. When you get home or to a library, you can use the internet to learn more about your sketches or pictures.



Activity 2 Supplies

- Play sand, 50 pounds
- Rake
- Lures to attract wildlife *Scent attractants*: oil of anise or vanilla *Food attractants*: corn, sunflower seeds, peanut butter, table scraps
- Plaster of Paris
- Gallon of water
- Spray bottle
- Milk jug or plastic cup
- Plastic mixing cup and mixing stick or spoon
- Animal field guide or internet for identification
- Camera (optional)

Activity 2 Steps

Cast a Track

- 1) Choose a location for your track trap where you expect animals to walk. You should have permission to use it and be able to check it daily.
- 2) Make your track trap by removing the turf and vegetation from an area about 4 feet by 4 feet. Rake the ground, and empty a 50-pound bag of sand on the area. Rake the sand smooth, and spray it with water.
- 3) Check the trap every morning for footprints.
- 4) Add a lure, if you don't see footprints after a day or two.

Food lures: Place food on a piece of wood, brick, or other flat surface in the center of the track trap.

Scent attractant: Use a rubber band or string to attach a cotton ball to a 12- to 18-inch stick. Push the stick into the ground in the center of the track trap. The cotton ball should be about a foot above the sand. Drip or spray several drops of a lure on the cotton.
- 5) Record your findings in your journal. Include the date, time, and weather conditions. Sketch or take a picture of what you see.
- 6) Make a plaster cast of a footprint in the sand.
 - Cut the bottom of the plastic cup or, if the print is too large for a cup, cut a strip of plastic from a milk jug to circle the print and hold the plaster.
 - Gently push the form into the ground around a footprint.
 - Mix enough Plaster of Paris and water to fill the print and form.

- Pour the plaster into the form to a depth of about 1 inch.
- Allow the plaster to set (become dry and hard).
- After the plaster is hard, remove the cast and brush off any excess dirt.

Activity 2 Discussion

Share What Happened: What signs of wildlife did you find?

Apply: Why is it useful to be able to find evidence of wildlife without seeing wildlife?

Generalize to Your Life: How might you tell that people have been on a hiking trail without actually seeing them?



Go Beyond

- Take the same hike at different times of day, and compare your observations.
- Take a hike in different seasons, and compare your observations.
- Make multiple track traps, and compare lures and locations.
- To go deeper, find the full 4-H curriculum at Shop4-H.org/Wild