

Observation of Animal Wildlife Signs

Often times biologists (like you guys!) cannot directly observe some animals, either because they are very shy, or are nocturnal.

So how do we know who is where? What are signs that an animal has visited a location?

- Tracks, runways
- Scratch posts
- Scent
- Burrows, houses
- Scat!

Learning to see: we are not the only ones moving around here. Many of our neighbors are also active. We can learn a lot about our neighbors by observing signs of their activity.

Tracks can tell you: How many? Where? How large?

Scents can tell you: What animal?

Scratch posts: Whose territory?

Burrow: Who lives where? How many?

Scat: What does the animal eat? Which trails do they use? What kind of animal?

Scats are especially informative/useful in learning about how an animal (carnivoran, bird of prey, herbivore, etc.) fits into its environment. (E.g. where in the food chain the animal is). A long-term scat study of diet across different seasons can reveal how the animal/plant community interact differently over time.

Documenting signs:

Just like journal entries for the insects and plants you collect, you can jot down journal entries for animal signs. It's good to draw out whatever you see, and often times noting the measurements of the signs is also useful. Look around as you are hiking on a trail, if you pay attention, you will start to see evidence of a lively biological community, even when you don't see the animals themselves.

Look for signs of:

- Deer
- Wild Boar
- Rabbits
- Coyotes
- Mountain Lion
- Bobcat
- Fox
- Wild Turkey
- Lizards
- Owls
- Ground squirrels
- Wood rats
- Voles