

Snow Sleuths

Winter is the perfect season to get outside and explore a local park, field, ravine or shoreline. Snow – especially freshly fallen snow – makes it easier to spot the signs that wildlife is nearby.

Rabbits, hares and deer poop roundish pellets. Hare droppings tend to be slightly bigger and flatter than rabbit droppings. Deer scat is more oval-shaped. If you find the pellets in a large pile, the animals were probably stopped to feed.



Hmm... based on the tracks we just saw, this is either deer poop or rabbit poop.

I'm looking it up now, Kat. Small and round? It's probably from a rabbit.

We're going to take this trail, Mom. Let's meet back up at the big rock.

I bet this fresh snow will help us track down some wildlife!

Make some observations about the track. How many toes do you see? Are there any claw marks? How big is each footprint? Is there much space between the footprints?

That's definitely not candy, Fin! It's poop.

Who left this? It almost looks like a snow angel!

Good question, Fin! I'm stumped. Let me take a photo for later.

Here's a deer track, Fin!

How can you tell? All I see are two lines in the snow.

That's because deer leave drag marks.

Looks like someone dropped some M+Ms.

Another sign you might spot is poop. Wildlife poop, called scat, can give you clues about what kind of animal it came from, and even what that animal was eating.



Identifying tracks and scat takes practise – and patience. Bringing along a field guide or using your phone can help. Photos are also a great way to record what you saw to look up later. You can even post your photos on Instagram, and tag your local park to get a parks official to help you with identification. Happy tracking!

Look at the size, shape and colour of the scat (no touching!). Check for bits of undigested items. Can you see things like fur, bones, feathers, fish scales, seeds, leaves or wood fibres?

Where you find the scat can also tell you something about the animal.

There were signs of wildlife everywhere, Mom!

Can you help us figure out this print?

This one looks backwards, Kat. How can the hind feet come before the front feet?

It must be from a rabbit or a hare. That's how they hop.

Let's ask someone who works at the park. I bet they'd know.

One sign you might spot are tracks. Wildlife tracks can tell you what animals have passed by, and even how quickly they were moving. Tracks are best seen after a snowfall. They show up especially well when there is a thin layer of fresh snow over older, hard-packed snow.

ILLUSTRATION: SCOT RITCHIE



Deer have distinctive heart-shaped hoof prints. When walking in deeper snow, though, they barely lift their feet off the ground. So they leave behind parallel drag marks.

Fast-hopping rabbits and hares land with their long hind feet in front and their smaller front feet behind, one after the other. Squirrels bound along in a similar way, only their front feet land side by side. If the tracks end at a tree, chances are you are looking at squirrel prints (because squirrels can climb!).

