

Tracking Tracks

Objective:

Search out and identify the various animal tracks you find in your yard, neighborhood, a local park, or nearby beach. Make your own animal track identification guide to share with friends and family. Many animals leave evidence of their presence in the Mission-Aransas Estuary by leaving foot, paw, or body prints in the soil or sand. Do you know who *your* wildlife neighbors are?

Materials:

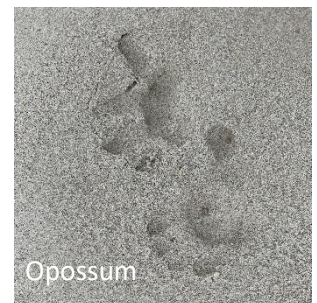
- Paper or a notebook
- Pen, pencil, or marker
- Ruler or way to measure the tracks (a pre-measured piece of string is an easy tool to carry with you during a tracking trip)
- Animal track ID guide (print or computer-based)
- Hand lens (optional)
- Camera (optional)



Instructions:

Look for animal tracks in places where there are patches or wide open areas of sand, dirt, or mud. The best tracks are found (and made) in places where the ground is a little damp and soft. You won't find tracks in areas covered with grass, mulch, leaf litter, or other dense ground cover.

Early morning is a great time to look for tracks. Animals that come out at night, or just before dawn, to feed and explore will have left evidence of their activity. The morning is also a good time to look for tracks because no one else has disturbed the tracks yet! Tracks are often found near sources of water and food, such as ponds, creeks, or even puddles. Nature trails and vacant, open lots are another good place to



HOME LEARNING ACTIVITY

check for animal tracks. Remember to track tracks in places that are safe and where access is permitted.

When you find a track, draw a picture of it or take a picture. Look closely at its shape and size, and how the tracks are spaced out. Asking questions as you make observations can help you think about what you are seeing. Using “I Notice, I Wonder and It Reminds Me Of” statements is a great way to capture your observations and questions. Here are a few things to look for and think about,

- Can you see evidence of claws or nails?
- How many toes do you see?
- Are all the footprints the same size and shape?
- Can you tell if the animal had two feet or four feet, or no feet at all (e.g., snakes)?
- Which direction are the tracks going in?
- Can you tell if the animal was walking, hopping, running, or slithering?
- Do you know what kind of animal made the tracks? Why do you think that?
- Can you tell how big the animal might be?
- How does the animal's tracks compare to your own feet or hands?
- How long or wide is the track? Measure the track.
- Is there a pattern to the placement of the tracks (the gait of the animal)?



Use an animal track guide to help you identify the different tracks you find. As you find and observe more and more tracks, make your own guide to use during your investigations. Compile all your drawings or pictures into a notebook or photo album to refer back to when you go tracking. You can even share your guide with friends and family so they can learn to track too!

Additional Resources:

- Animal Tracks. TPWD.
https://tpwd.texas.gov/publications/nonpwdpubs/young_naturalist/animals/animal_tracks/
- Animal Tracks ID Guide (pdf). TPWD.
https://tpwd.texas.gov/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd_if_k0700_0001.pdf