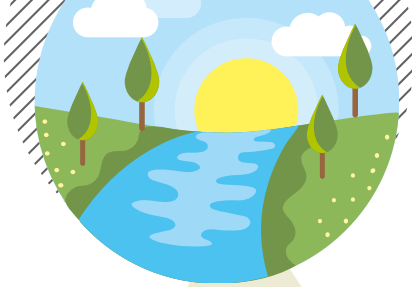
Follow Those Tracks!



Raccoon Creek Explorers Activity 2

Supplies:

- A nice pair of shoes that can get dirty
- A notebook
- Pencil or Pen
- Appropriate clothes for the weather
- A phone or camera for taking pictures
- A parent or guardian (never go in the woods alone!)
- Mammals of Ohio Field Guide from ODNR

Time: 30 minutes - 60 minutes

Vocabulary:

Locomotion: movement or the ability to move from one place to another.

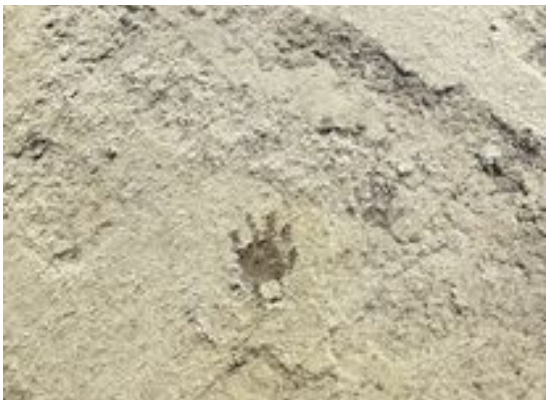
Mammals: a warm-blooded vertebrate animal of a class that is known by their hair or fur, and (typically) the birth of live young.

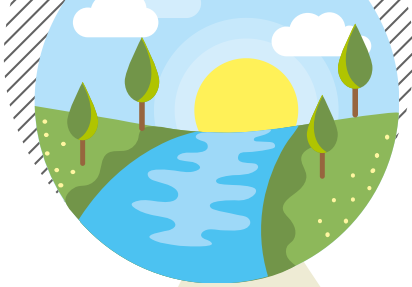
Terrestrial mammals: animals that inhabit the land.

Plantigrade: An animal that walks on the soles of the feet.

Digitigrade: An animal that walks on its toes and not touching the ground with its heels.

Unguligrade: An animal that walks on hooves





Background:

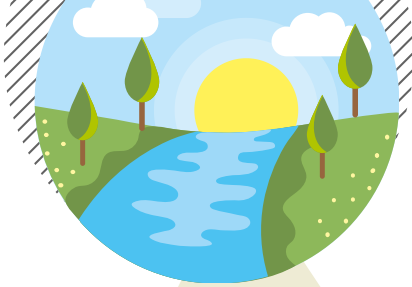
Even though we do not see animals all the time when we are outside, there are plenty of ways to know animals have been in the area. It is important to find evidence of animal activity because it teaches us about what animals live in the area. You can find signs of wildlife by looking for nests, burrows, droppings, and tracks. Animal tracks can be found all year round! You can find them in the snow or the mud. You can learn what an animal was doing by following their tracks. Tracks by the water might tell you that an animal was thirsty and walked to the water to get a drink. If the area is muddy you might see animal footprints where the animal ended up slipping in the mud. You can find pathways animals take in the woods to find food or shelter.

All mammals have basically the same foot structure but they use different parts of the foot in different ways. There are 3 forms of locomotion used by terrestrial mammals. These 3 forms of locomotion are Plantigrade, Digitigrade, and Unguligrade. Some animals, like raccoons, walk on their full paws and are called plantigrades. Other animals, like coyotes, walk on their toes and are called digitigrades. Animals, such as deer, walk on their toe nails, and are called unguligrades.

In this activity, we are going to go out in the woods and see what we can find! The goal of the activity is to find different animal tracks and understand how tracks help people understand an animal's behavior.

Let's Get Started:

1.) Dress for the weather! If it is snowing make sure you have boots and a warm coat. Make sure you are not going alone and a parent or guardian is coming with you. Make sure you are not trespassing on someone's land and be aware if it is hunting season.



2.) Bring a camera or phone to take pictures of the animal tracks you find. Bring a notebook and pencil to write down what you think the animal tracks belong to.

3.) Pick a place you want to go and head out! You can pick a spot in the woods, near a creek, or even your own backyard!Just start walking and keep your eyes in the snow or on the ground.

4.) Find some animal tracks! Take a photo of them with your camera. Draw the tracks you find, write down a guess of what animal you think made the tracks. Write down what was near the tracks. Were they near the water? Were they near trees? What do you think the animal was doing?

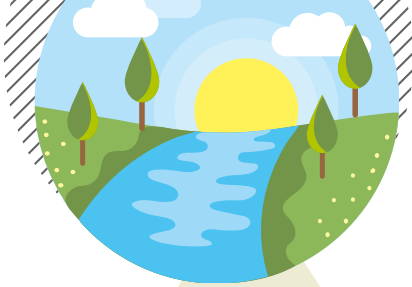
5.) Continue looking for tracks and drawing them in your notebook! When you are done for the day, head back to your house and see what animal tracks you found. Compare your guess with pictures of animal tracks in the Mammals of Ohio Field Guide, created by ODNR: (http://ohiodnr.gov/static/documents/wildlife/backyard-wildlife/Mammals%20of%20Ohio%20Field%20Guide%20pub344.pdf).

Reflect:

What are other ways to track animals other than footprints?

What animal tracks did you see the most? Why?

Where did you see the most animal tracks? Why?



Apply:

What type of locomotion do humans use?

What type of locomotion do our pet dogs and cats use?

What do animal tracks tell you about an animal's behavior?

What are some animal tracks you can find in the city? What are reasons animals might leave the woods and come into the city?

Wrap Up:

You can use what you have learned about animal tracks and apply it to learn more about an animal. You will find lots of deer tracks together because they prefer to stay in packs. Predators prefer to be alone and you will usually only find one set of tracks. Some animals, like raccoons, will stay near water because they like to eat fish. Some animals like to climb trees, so you can find their tracks near trees. Some animals will come into the city because there is plenty of food for them. Next time you go outside for a walk, take a moment to look around you. What evidence do you see that animals were in the area? What do you hear?

Thanks everyone for exploring with us! We would love to see photos of tracks you found or drawings you made while doing this activity. You can send them to us at raccooncreekpartnership@gmail.com. Keep on exploring!