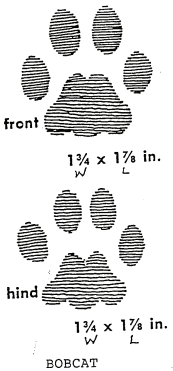
Dog Vs. Cat Tracks

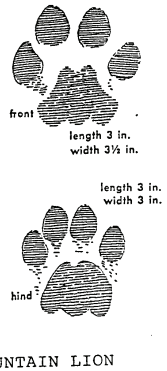
Coyote and fox tracks can look similar to bobcat and mountain lion tracks to the average person. The track of dog relatives have a single lobe on the top of the "heel" pad while those of animals in the cat family have two lobes on the top of the "heel" pad.

Bobcat and Mountain Lion

Bobcat tracks look just like domestic cat prints only larger. These animals "perfect step" when they walk putting the rear foot in the same place as the front foot so their track looks like a singe line of prints. Coyotes and fox use the same walk as an energy saving device. Bobcats are everywhere and survive on meat provided by all manner of insects, rodents, rabbits, or carrion. If you see a track that has the features of a bobcat track but is over three inches in size, you have found a mountain lion track. Bob cat and mountain lion scat is comprised of cords with constrictions and blunt ends and differ mainly in size. Hair and bones become more pronounced in the scat as it decomposes.



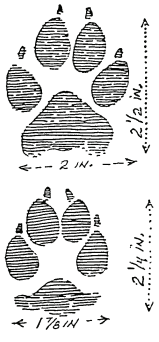
BOBCAT



MOUNTAIN LION

Coyote

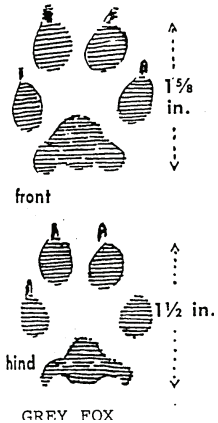
Coyotes are everywhere ranging from neighborhoods to remote canyons. Their diet include all manner of vegetation, insects, rodents, rabbits, and carrion. You can tell a coyote print from a dog print most easily by noting that most dog prints have larger nail marks. Coyote scat can contain anything from bone fragments , berries and grass, has a tip that has a long taper, and is often seen along trails.



COYOTE

Gray Fox

These small, cat-like creatures are found in all local habitats and have a wide ranging diet that includes insects, rodents, rabbits, nuts, and berries. The retractable claws on four toes usually do not show in the track of this animal but may appear as tiny marks in the trot. Their feet are about the same size as a bobcat. Fox scat is commonly found along human trails and on top of rocks, logs, and other elevated items. Fox scat looks like coyote scat but is smaller and has a shorter taper.



GREY FOX

Other Tracks and Scat

Most rodents have four toes in front and in the hind. Hares and rabbits have four toes in the front and five in the hind. Frogs, toads, and salamanders have four toes in the front and five in the hind. Lizards tracks are long and slender and show five toes for both front and hind.

Reptile scat can be quite large in diameter and will have a white nitrogenous tip. Frog and toad scat are dark cords without a nitrogenous tip. Bat, mouse, and woodrat scat all looks similar in shape; mouse and woodrat scat rolls intact under your finger but differ in size while bat scat breaks up with the slightest pressure.

Some birds like eagles, ravens, and owls cough up pellets that can look like a cord of scat.

Thanks to Arizona Natural History Association for making copies of this brochure available to the public . Much thanks to Al Cornell and Kevin Harding, Friends of the Forest Volunteers, for their assistance with the text and graphics for this brochure as well as the sand blasted tracks and scat samples located at the Visitor Contact Office.

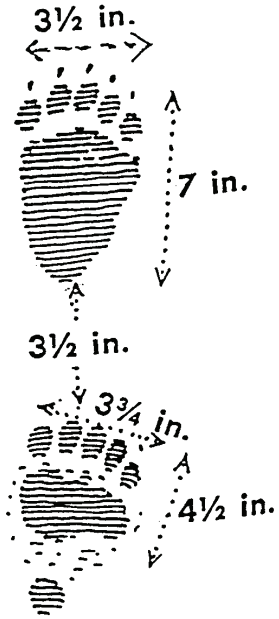
Tips for Identifying Wildlife Tracks and Scat in the Verde Valley

When you see a set of tracks and want to identify them, take note of: the general shape (tail with no tracks [snakes], tail with tracks [some lizards], hooven [ungulates], webbed, unwebbed, and padded [most mammals]); the number of toes on the front versus the hind tracks; presence of claw marks; the width and length of the track; and the pattern of the trail of tracks (symmetrical, asymmetrical, single file, right side mirror image of left, C-shaped, Z-shaped, grouped, etc).

You will also see scat and may be curious about the animal from which it came. Things to note with scat are: the shape (round spheres, elongated spheres, long cords, constricted cords, folded cords, and cords with a white tip); cord ends tapered or blunt; length and width; color; content (hair, bones, seeds).

Following are descriptions of common tracks and scat you will observe in the Verde Valley. Use this guide to help you identify the tracks sandblasted in walkways at the front of the Visitor Center as well as the sign you will see when out and about in the Verde Valley. Also, be sure to check out our scat display inside the Visitor Center.

Black Bear

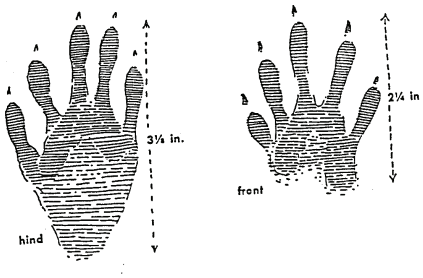


BLACK BEAR

These five-toed bear tracks are most commonly found in the canyons where a mixed conifer forest provides adequate food in the form of grasses, sedges, forbs, berries and nuts as well as reliable water. Bears are also found in chaparral and pinyon/juniper woodlands when certain food sources are avilable. The large prints make it difficult to confuse a bear's track with other mammals in the forest. The human-like hind print is much larger than the front print . Unlike human feet, the large toe on a bear is on the outside of the foot not the inside. Bear prints may or may not show claw marks depending on the gait and nature of the surface. Bear scat is the largest scat you will see in our area, often greater than one inch in diameter!

Raccoon

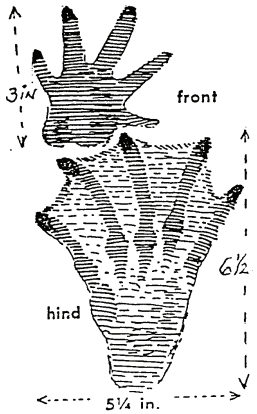
Raccoon five-toed prints are commonly found in a riparian habitat and look very much like small human hands When raccoons waddle, their feet register side by side with the smaller front foot alternating from the left to the right of the larger rear foot. Raccoons eats fruits, nuts, berries, crustaceans, fish, insects, and eggs. Their scat is often found in a latrine area at the base of trees but don't touch it because it can transmit a lethal roundworm.



RACOON

Beaver

Look for the sign and prints of this large rodent in riparian habitats. Their five-toed prints are often obscured by drag marks left by their large flat tail as the animal waddles along. Front prints often only show four toes. Beavers eat aquatic vegetation and the cambium layer under the bark of trees. Look for peeled branches near water, felled trees, and dams . You won't see beaver scat since they mostly defecate in the water.



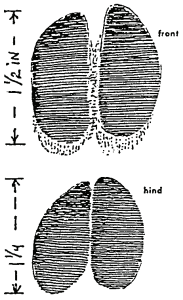
BEAVER

Otter

This five-toed animal lives on fish and crustaceans in riparian environments. It lopes along leaving the unique pattern of tracks associated with the mustelid family. Webbing and nails may or may not show in the tracks. If there is snow or mud around, look for a slide as these critters seem to love to slide on their bellies as much as walk. Otter scat will often have crayfish shells and/or fish scales.

Javelina

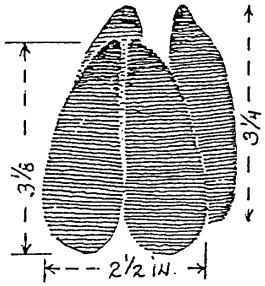
These pig-like creatures are actually not pigs but are in their own unique family. They often travel in family groups and are closely associated with desert scrub, chaparral, and pinyon/juniper habitats. Their hoof prints look like deer prints only smaller and are blunt and rounded. You may see "runs" where many javelina have traveled while seeking their favorite plant foods that include the prickly pear (despite the spines). Their scat varies from oval cords to cords 3 times longer than wide and is often observed in their bedding areas.



JAVELINA

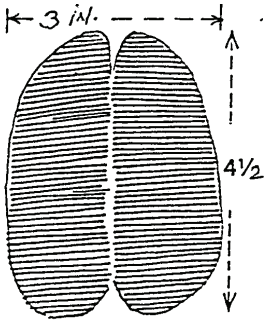
Mule Deer

Deer are widespread and can be found in many habitats that provide adequate water. Deer are browsers and primarily survive on the leaves of many shrubs, trees, forbs, and grasses. Mule deer pellets are smaller (0.3 inches long) than elk pellets (0.5 inches long).



MULE DEER

Elk

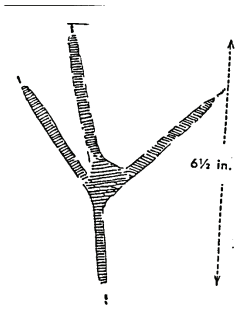


ELK

These large hooved animals are most closely associated with forested areas (ponderosa pine, mixed conifer, and pinyon-juniper woodlands) as they depend on primarily grasses and forbs as well as the leaves of shrubs and trees. While domestic cattle tracks are much larger than elk, the tracks of their calves are similar in size to elk but are much shorter and their track pattern more irregular.

Great Blue Heron

These large slow flying birds are always found near water as their diet is primarily fish. They use their large beak to stab or catch fish and down them whole. If you find these odd tracks in the mud along a lake or stream, look in the trees where these birds roost for safety from predators. Don't confuse heron tracks with wild turkey. Wild turkey are only found in and near ponderosa pine forests rather than riparian areas and their tracks have three toes pointing forward with only the tip of the hind toe sometime registering.



BLUE HERON