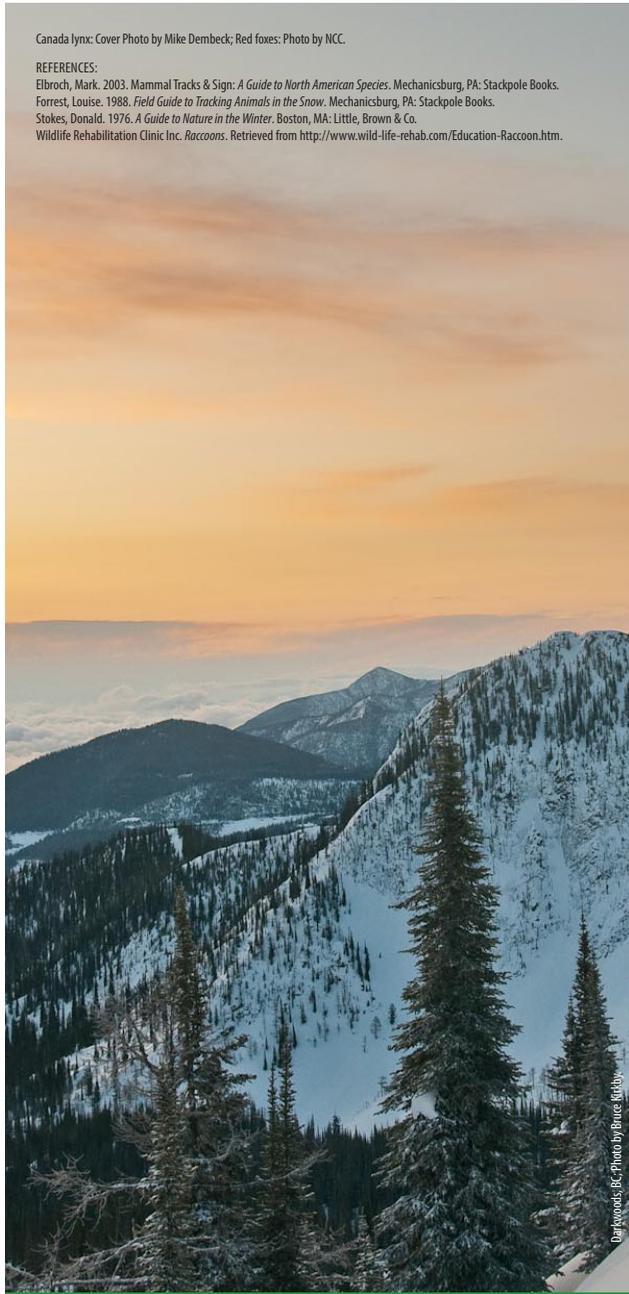


Canada lynx: Cover Photo by Mike Dembeck; Red foxes: Photo by NCC.

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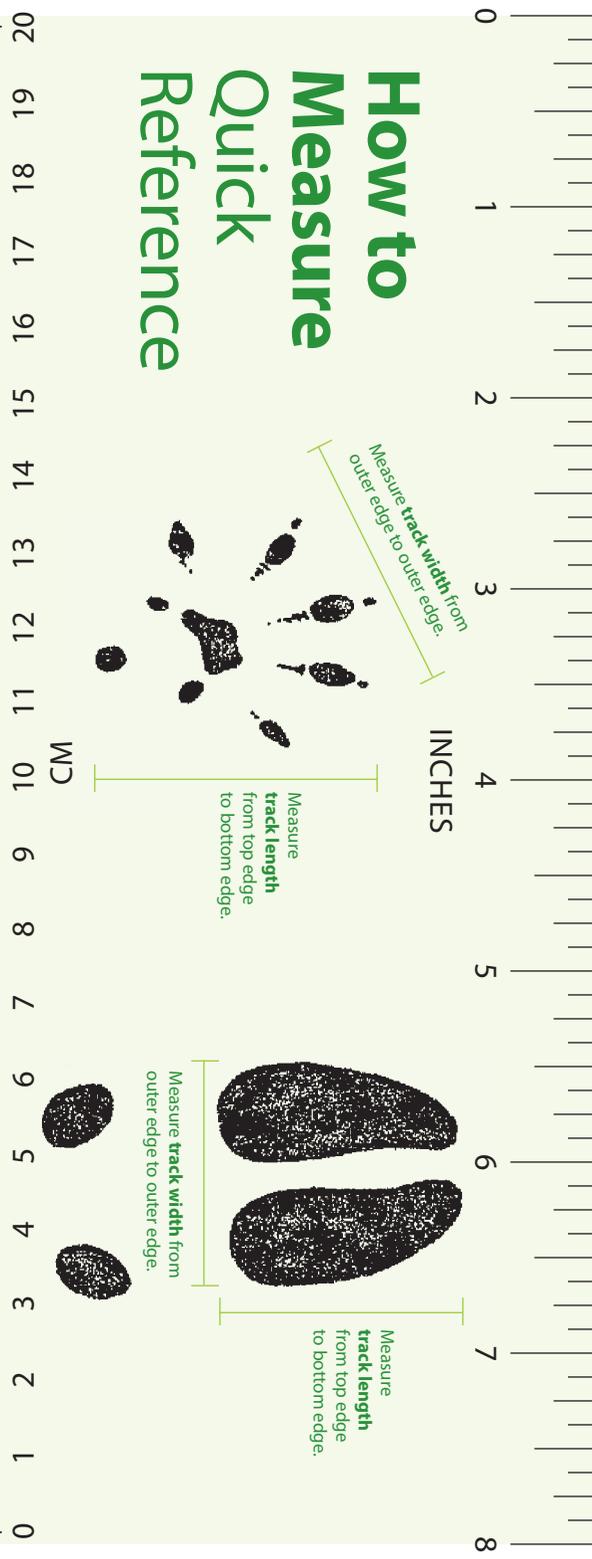


Deep woods, B.C. Photo by Bruce Eddy



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How to Measure Quick Reference



Other tracking tips

In addition to track pattern and shape, there are several other features you can examine to help you distinguish between various animals.

Number and arrangement of toes

How many toes do you see and how are they placed? Some animals, like raccoons, have five toes on both the front and rear feet, whereas hares have five toes on their front feet and four on the back. How are the toes arranged? In coyotes, toes are close together and the two outer toes are set behind the others. In bobcats, the toes are spread farther apart.

Pad shape and size

Look for teardrop-shaped toe pads in felines, minks and small weasels, and large, round toe pads in fishers. The shape and size of metacarpal pads (the “palm” of the track) can help you determine if you’re looking at canine or feline tracks. In feline tracks, the front of the palm pad has two lobes and the back of the pad has three.

Nails

Domestic dogs usually have large, dull nails. In contrast, coyote tracks are characterized by impressions of sharp, thin nails. Also, many feline tracks don’t show nails at all as their claws are retractable!



Found a track you just can’t decipher? Take a photo and upload it to www.iNaturalist.org to get help from experts and other nature lovers!

A Beginner’s Guide to Animal Tracking



Be a wildlife tracks detective!



While some of Canada's animals migrate south in search of warmer climates in the winter, a great number remain in their northern habitats when the weather turns cold. Winter is a great time to get out and explore animal tracks, as fresh snow provides a blank canvas. You don't need to be an expert to identify animal tracks and patterns. Winter animals leave many clues behind that even novice trackers can use to identify them and learn more about their behaviour.

In this animal tracks guide, you'll find all sorts of useful tips to help you identify both large and small animals on your winter hikes. From gait patterns to track shapes, this guide will help you gain a deeper understanding of Canada's winter wildlife and enjoy the best that our country's natural areas have to offer this season.

Pack this handy guide on your next outdoor adventure and be a tracks detective!

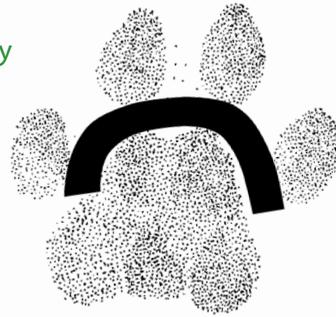
Canada lynx: Photo by Mikael Males; Striped skunk: Photo by USFWS Mountain Prairie via Wikimedia Commons; Deer mouse, Hare, Eastern grey squirrel and Raccoon: Photos by iStockphoto; White-tailed deer: Photo by Dean Mullins.

Interdigital Space Shapes

The space between the toes and pads of animal tracks (the interdigital space) can be immensely helpful when trying to identify wildlife. Common shapes in an animal's front tracks can help you determine if you've found feline or canine tracks.

C-Shape

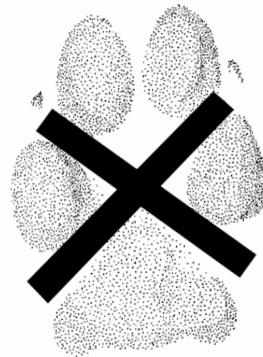
The C-shape is most commonly found in the front tracks of felines.



BOBCAT

X-Shape

An X-shape indicates a canine track like that of a red fox, wolf or coyote.



COYOTE

Two-print track pattern – walk, trot, bound



Striped skunk

Prints lie close together, usually with one slightly ahead of the other.

Deer mouse

Soft snow patterns and short spaces within the track group. There is often a tail mark between the tracks.



or

Four-print track pattern – jump (hop, bound)

Rabbits and hares

Track groups are often longer than they are wide.



Eastern grey squirrel

Front feet often land side by side.



Alternating track pattern – walk, trot



Deer

Two-toed hooves with a split-heart shape.



Raccoon

Splayed toes with elongated hind tracks.

