

WILDLIFE VIEWING GUIDE  
TO  
IDAHO'S TRACKS  
and SCAT



## WILDLIFE VIEWING GUIDE

TO

# IDAHO'S TRACKS and SCAT

Tracks and scat aren't just clues—they're a window into the lives of Idaho's wildlife. This guide helps you read these signs so you can discover which animals are nearby, follow their paths, and experience nature up close without disturbing it. For each species, you'll find footprints, droppings, and tips to identify them, making every hike or outdoor adventure more rewarding.

### How to Use this Guide

Each featured animal in this guide includes the following information:

- **Track details:** What the tracks look like - size, shape, pattern, and any special features.
- **Scat details:** What the droppings look like - size, shape, what's in them, and where you might find them.
- **Habitat:** The types of places where you're most likely to see signs of the animal.
- **Seasonal changes:** How the tracks and other signs may look different depending on the time of year.
- **Clues:** Other signs the animal leaves behind, such as scratches, feathers, or feeding marks.

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Photo: Robby Holmes, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)

Scat is more than just waste—it’s one of nature’s most useful field signs. Every dropping tells a story about the animal that left it behind: what it ate, where it traveled, and even how it uses its habitat. Unlike tracks that may vanish with the next rain or gust of wind, scat often lingers, offering a reliable clue for wildlife watchers.

When examining scat, remember to look and **do not touch**.

- Use a stick or gloves if you need to move it and always **wash** your hands afterward.
- Pay attention to the **shape, size, and texture**. Diet changes seasonally so scat in the summer may look different from scat in the winter.

## Scat Fact

Did you know biologists can use scat to study wildlife populations without ever seeing the animals? DNA in droppings reveals species, sex, and even individual identity!



## SCAT SAFETY

Scat can carry harmful bacteria and diseases. Never touch it with bare hands and avoid getting too close. If you must move it, use a tool or wear gloves. The safest way to study scat is by observing it without touching.

Get to know what animal poop looks like, what’s inside, and the clues it leaves behind. Every shape, size, and texture tells a story about the animal that made it!

- **Amorphous** - no clear shape and looks more like a blob or smear. Often from animals eating fruit, insects, or other soft foods.
- **Pellet** - small, round, or oval droppings often left in piles. Typical of deer, elk, rabbits, and rodents. Shape and size help tell species apart.
- **Tubular** - smooth, cylinder-shaped droppings, sometimes with blunt or pointed ends. Typical of carnivores such as cougars, coyotes, and bears.
- **Globular** - loose or liquid droppings, spread out in a splashy pattern. Common in birds and amphibians, and can reflect a high-water diet.

SHAPE	DESCRIPTION	CONTENTS
Amorphous 	Loose, liquid, or splashy	High-water diet—insects, fish, fruit
Pellet 	Small, round or oval droppings, often in piles	Plant eaters—grasses, twigs, leaves
Tubular 	Smooth, cylindrical, blunt or tapered ends	Fur, bones, berries
Globular 	Round or ball-shaped in lumps	Berries, seeds, vegetation

## NATURE'S NUGGETS: The Power of Poop



Scat is more than waste, it's also how energy and nutrients flow through the ecosystem from plants to animals and back into the soil.

### Why Scat Matters

- **Nutrients for growth:** Scat fertilizes the soil with nitrogen and phosphorus, helping plants grow. Example: Deer pellets enrich forest floors where new plants sprout.
- **Seeds on the move:** Seeds of fruits and berries often survive digestion and sprout far from where they were eaten. Example: A bear's huckleberry scat can grow into dozens of berry bushes.
- **Food for others:** Many animals rely on poop for food. Dung beetles roll it, flies hatch in it, and rabbits even eat their own scat for extra nutrients.

### Fun facts:

- Dung beetles roll poop balls up to 10x their weight.
- Guano was once so valuable as fertilizer that nations fought over it.

### Poop Hotspots

Animals often leave scat in predictable places, turning the landscape into a map of their habits.

- **Latrines:** Some animals return to the same place to poop, creating large, obvious piles. Example: River otters use communal latrines on streambanks and raccoons often pick flat surfaces like logs or rocks.
- **Markers:** Predators often leave scat in noticeable spots to mark territory. Example: Coyotes and bobcats drop theirs right in the middle of trails or on top of rocks to send a clear message: "This area is mine."
- **Roosts and dens:** Animals that gather in large groups often leave a lot of scat behind. Example: Bats drop guano under their roosts. Animals that use dens usually leave scat nearby. Example: Foxes often deposit it at the entrance to their dens to mark their territory.
- **Shorelines:** Aquatic mammals frequently leave scat near water. Example: Mink place scat on prominent rocks or logs along rivers and otters leave theirs at stream edges or near dens.

### Droppings in Action

Poop is part of the gardening crew. Deer, elk, and moose scatter seeds in their droppings as they roam, helping plants spread across forests and meadows. Bears, coyotes, foxes, and even birds pitch in too—each "poop package" delivering fertilizer and future shrubs or berry patches. Over time, these gifts feed other wildlife... and sometimes people.

So next time you spot a pile of scat in the woods, remember: it's not just waste, it's nature's way of planting the next generation of Idaho's forests and fields.



## Trail Tales—Reading Nature's Footprints


Every paw, hoof, and claw mark tells a story. Who passed by, where they were headed, and even what they were doing. By learning to read these signs, you can follow wildlife trails without ever seeing the animals themselves.

### Where to Find Tracks

- **Trails and crossings:** Deer often follow the same forest paths, while coyotes stick to the edges of open routes. Over time, these become natural “wildlife highways.”
- **Water edges:** Muddy streambanks and lakeshores are like nature’s notepads. Raccoons leave hand-like prints and beavers leave webbed footprints near their dams.
- **Soft soil, sand, and snow:** These surfaces hold impressions best. Elk print heart-shaped hooves in wet meadows while foxes press neat, oval paw marks in fresh snow.
- **Near food sources:** Tracks often cluster near meals. Squirrels scurry around acorn-laden oaks while bobcats circle rabbit feeding spots.
- **Roosts and dens:** Paths to shelter leave distinctive marks. Otters create slides and tracks on streambanks and foxes leave paw prints near their den entrances.

### Tracks as Clues

Tracks are more than shapes in the dirt—they reveal behavior. Gaps between prints show if an animal was walking or running. Snow can even preserve these details for weeks, offering biologists (and careful observers) a record of wildlife movement.



**Fun fact:** Biologists can determine an animal's size, speed, and even hunting behavior just from its prints.



# ELK

*Cervus canadensis*



## Track:

- Size: 4-5" long × 3-4" wide
- Heart-shaped, with two symmetrical halves (cloven hooves)
- Pointed at front, rounded at back
- Dewclaws may show in deep snow, mud, or when running



## Scat:

- Size: ½-¾" diameter, pellets ¾-1" long
- Shape: oval to elongated pellets with pointed ends (often clumped together)
- Color: Dark brown to black



## Habitat & Range:

- Found across Idaho in mountains, forests, foothills, and open valleys
- Summer: higher elevation meadows, alpine slopes, forest edges
- Winter: migrate to lower elevation valleys, open sagebrush, and south-facing slopes
- Large herds often concentrate in winter range areas

## Clues:

- Rubs on trees and shrubs from antlers (especially in fall)
- Worn game trails in forests and meadows
- Bedding sites show an oval depression in grass, snow, or leaves
- Shed antlers (usually dropped late winter to early spring)

# MOOSE

*Alces alces*



Photo: Kevin Harber, Flickr (CC BY-NC)



## Track:

- Size: 5-7" long × 4-6" wide
- Toes are long, narrow, and sharply pointed
- Tracks often splay widely in mud, snow, or when running
- Dewclaws show regularly, especially in deep snow
- Track pattern: walking = long stride, back foot steps into the front foot's track



## Scat:

- Size: ½-¾" diameter, ¾-1¼" long
- Shape: oval/cylindrical pellets with pointed ends
- Winter: dry, firm pellets in piles
- Summer: softer, clumped, sometimes patty-like from aquatic vegetation



## Habitat & Range:

- Northern, eastern, and central Idaho in river valleys, lakeshores, wetlands, and mountain forests
- Often found near willows, aspens, and aquatic vegetation
- Active year-round

## Clues:

- Browsed willows, aspens, and shrubs (twigs stripped or broken)
- Trampled wetland edges
- Shed antlers in late winter/early spring

**Safety Note:** Moose can be very aggressive, especially cows with calves and bulls in rut. Give them space year-round.



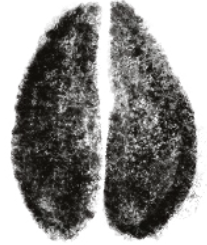
# MULE DEER

*Odocoileus hemionus*



## Track:

- Size: 2.5-3.5" long × 2-3" wide
- Two pointed toes, sharp and narrow, often with a heart-shaped look
- Track pattern: often zig-zagging; bounding gait shows widely spread tracks
- Dewclaws occasionally visible in soft ground/snow



## Scat:

- Size:  $\frac{3}{8}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter,  $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{5}{8}$ " long
- Shape: small oval pellets with pointed ends
- Winter: dry, pellet form
- Summer: clumped, soft, from lush vegetation



## Habitat & Range:

- Common throughout Idaho in sagebrush steppe, foothills, forests, and mountain meadows
- Summer: higher elevation forests and meadows
- Winter: lower-elevation sagebrush and open country

## Clues:

- Browsed shrubs and sagebrush (twig tips clipped at an angle)
- Well-worn game trails on slopes and ridges
- Shed antlers (late winter/early spring)



# PRONGHORN

*Antilocapra americana*



Photo: Michael Gold, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)



Photo: Christian Haas, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)



## Track:

- Size: 2-3.5" long × 1.5-2.5" wide
- Two sharply pointed hooves, often leave a "V" shape
- Tracks more slender and symmetrical than mule deer
- Dewclaws rarely show, even when running
- Track pattern: straight and efficient, built for speed (can reach 55 mph)



## Scat:

- Size: ¼-½" diameter pellets, smaller than deer
- Shape: round to slightly oval pellets with blunt ends
- Winter: hard, dry pellets in piles
- Summer: softer, sometimes loosely clumped, from green forage



## Habitat & Range:

- Southern and southwestern Idaho in open sagebrush steppe, grasslands, and desert plains
- Prefer wide-open country with good visibility
- Year-round residents, though they move seasonally to find forage and avoid deep snow

## Clues:

- Well-worn travel corridors across open sagebrush flats
- Bedding depressions in grass or bare ground
- Shed horn sheaths (bucks drop the outer sheath of their horns each year in late fall/early winter)



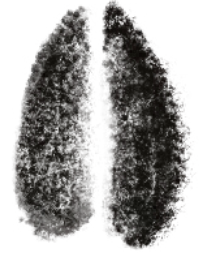
# WHITE-TAILED DEER

*Odocoileus virginianus*



## Track:

- Size: 2-3" long × 1.5-2.5" wide (smaller than mule deer, rounder)
- Toes more rounded at tips, less pointed than mule deer
- Track pattern: straighter, less bounding than mule deer; dewclaws rarely show unless running or in deep snow



## Scat:

- Size:  $\frac{3}{8}$ " diameter,  $\frac{1}{2}$ " long
- Shape: small, oval pellets (less pointed than mule deer)
- Winter: firm pellets
- Summer: clumped, softer piles from green diet



## Habitat & Range:

- Common in northern and central Idaho, especially river valleys, farmland, and forests
- Adaptable to human-altered landscapes; often seen near fields and riparian zones

## Clues:

- Heavily browsed shrubs and agricultural crops
- Rubs on saplings from bucks in fall



# AMERICAN CROW

*Corvus brachyrhynchos*



Photo: Kate St. John



Photo: torontoraptor, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)



## Track:

- Size: 1-2" long x 1-1.5" wide
- Three forward toes, one backward toe
- Tracks usually in soft soil or snow; toes slender and pointed

## Scat:

- Size: ¼-½" thick, 1-2" long
- Often black or dark brown, tubular with bird seeds

## Habitat & Range:

- Found statewide; very adaptable to forests, fields, and urban areas
- Active day and night, highly social

## Clues:

- Loud vocalizations and large flocks
- Foraging in fields, garbage, or roadsides



Photo: Adrienne Aims, iNaturalist (CC-BY-NC)



# CALIFORNIA QUAIL

*Callipepla californica*



Photo: Kim Cabrera, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC-ND)



Photo: gresyfm, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)



## Track:

- Size: 1-1.5" long x 1" wide
- Three forward toes, one tiny hind toe
- Tracks often show in soft soil or sand; small, delicate gait

## Scat:

- Size: 1/8-1/4" thick, 1/4-1/2" long
- Small, round, hard pellets; often in clusters

## Habitat & Range:

- Southern and southwestern Idaho in brushy, open habitats
- Often near water; nest on ground

## Clues:

- Scrapes in dirt where birds dust-bathe
- Covey tracks near brush or under shrubs



**Critter Clue:** Tiny tracks with three forward toes and a teeny rear toe. Often found in little running lines because quail prefer sprinting over flying.



# CANADA GOOSE

*Branta canadensis*



Photo: mikkenvedy, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)

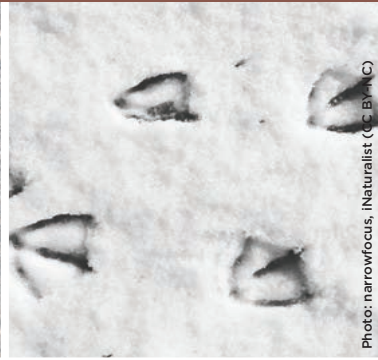


Photo: narrowfocus, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)



## Track:

- Size: 3-4" long x 2-3" wide
- Three forward toes, webbed; small hind toe
- Often in shallow mud or snow near water



## Scat:

- Size: ¼-½" thick, 1-2" long
- Cylindrical, dark green to brown, contains seeds



## Habitat & Range:

- Lakes, ponds, rivers, agricultural fields, and urban parks statewide
- Nest on ground near water

## Clues:

- Grazing marks in grass
- Feathers at resting areas on water or islands





# MALLARD

*Anas platyrhynchos*



Photo: W. Terry Hume, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)



Photo: Garth Harwood, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)



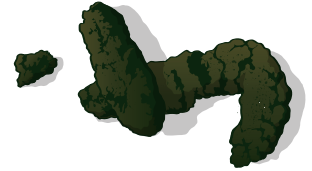
## Track:

- Size: 2-3" long × 1.5-2" wide
- Three forward toes, webbed, small hind toe
- Track pattern often in mud near ponds, lakes, and streams



## Scat:

- Size: ¼-½" thick, 1-2" long
- Soft, dark green to brown, sometimes contains seeds



## Habitat & Range:

- Wetlands, ponds, rivers, and reservoirs statewide
- Nest on ground near water

## Clues:

- Dabbling marks in mud
- Feathers near resting areas

**Critter Clue:** Mallards leave tracks that look like little arrows pointing where they're going. Each foot has three forward-pointing toes and one tiny "thumb" toe in the back that often doesn't show in the print, so their tracks look like perfect bird "peace signs" in the mud or snow.



# GREAT BLUE HERON

*Ardea herodias*



Photo: Kim Cabrera, iNaturalist, (CC BY-NC-ND)



Photo: Amanda Janusz, iNaturalist, (CC BY-NC)



## Track:

- Size: 4-5" long × 3-4" wide
- Three forward toes, one smaller hind toe
- Tracks in mud or sand near ponds, rivers, and wetlands



## Scat:

- Size: ½-1" thick, 2-6" long
- Cylindrical, often contains fish bones, scales, or crustaceans



## Habitat & Range:

- Wetlands, rivers, lakes, and reservoirs statewide
- Nest in colonies in trees or reed beds

## Clues:

- Fishing areas with plucked fish
- Wading trails in shallow water
- Large rookeries in trees

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**Critter Clue:** Great Blue Herons often poop right before taking off to lighten the load (literally)!



# WILD TURKEY

*Meleagris gallopavo*



Photo: Kim Cairns, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC-ND)



Photo: Joe Gigante, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)



## Track:

- Size: 2-3" long × 2-3" wide
- Three forward toes, one small hind toe
- Track pattern: walking = straight line; running = wide stride



## Scat:

- Size: ½-1" thick, 2-3" long
- Cylindrical, tapered, contains seeds and plant matter



Male



Female

## Habitat & Range:

- Forest edges, fields, and open woodlands throughout most of Idaho
- Roosts in trees at night

## Clues:

- Scrapes on ground under roost trees
- Feathers and tracks near feeding areas



**Critter Clue:** Male turkeys leave J-shaped droppings; females leave more spiral/coiled scat.



# COYOTE

*Canis latrans*



Photo: osited, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)



## Track:

- Size: 2.25-3.25" long x 1.5-2.5" wide (smaller than wolf)
- Four toes with claws visible; oval shape
- Tracks narrower and more pointed than domestic dog
- Track pattern: straight line when traveling



## Scat:

- Size: ½-1" thick, 4-8" long
- Twisted with tapered ends, often segmented
- May contain hair, bone, berries, or insects
- Frequently left in prominent places (trails, roadbeds, hilltops) to mark territory



## Habitat & Range:

- Found statewide in nearly all habitats: deserts, grasslands, foothills, forests, and urban edges
- Highly adaptable and widespread

## Clues:

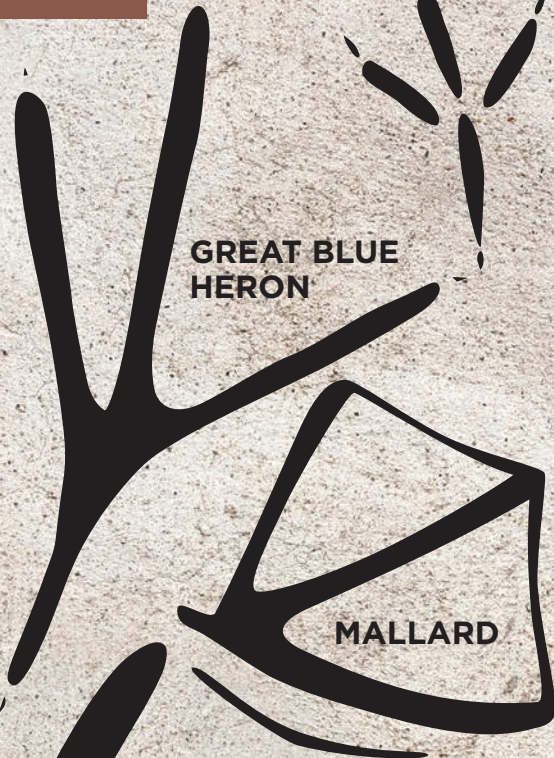
- Small prey carcasses or fur piles
- Dens in embankments or brush
- Tracks often found on trails and roads

# SIZE GUIDE

AMERICAN CROW



GREAT BLUE HERON



MALLARD



CANADA GOOSE



STRIPED SKUNK



NORTH AMERICAN PORCUPINE



FOX SQUIRREL



CALIFORNIA QUAIL



AMERICAN MINK



WILD TURKEY



6

5

4

3

2

1

0 inch

**NORTH AMERICAN  
RIVER OTTER**



**AMERICAN  
BEAVER**



**BLACK BEAR**



**GRIZZLY BEAR**



**NORTHERN  
RACCOON**



0 inch 1 2 3 4 5 6

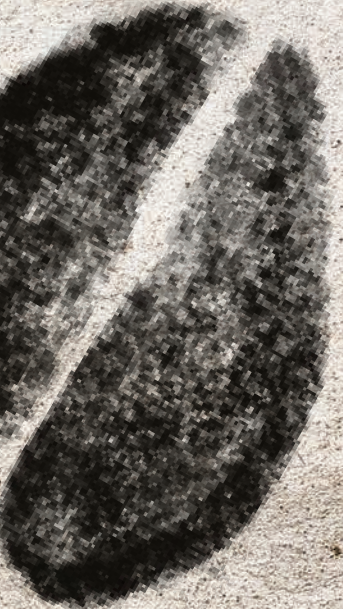
**MOOSE**



**ELK**



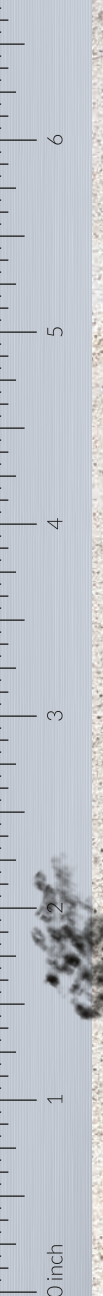
**WHITE-TAILED DEER**



**MULE DEER**



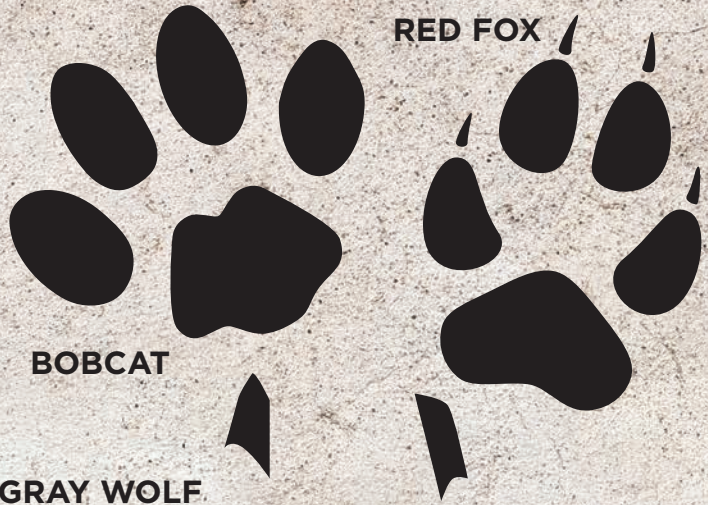
**PRONGHORN**



COYOTE



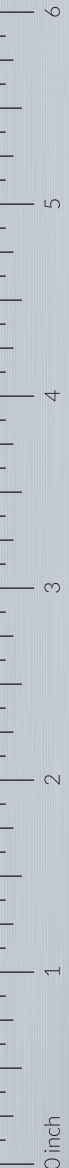
RED FOX



BOBCAT

GRAY WOLF

MOUNTAIN LION





# GRAY WOLF

*Canis lupus*



## Track:

- Size: 4-5" long × 3.5-4.5" wide (larger than coyote/ domestic dog)
- Four toes with large oval pad; claws always visible
- Symmetrical, oval shape; middle two toes align evenly
- Track pattern: direct register walk (hind foot lands in front print); very straight trail lines



## Scat:

- Size: 1-1.5" thick, 6-12" long
- Twisted, rope-like with tapered ends
- Often contains hair, bone, or hooves from prey
- Usually placed in the middle of trails or roads as territorial marking



## Habitat & Range:

- Central, eastern, and northern Idaho mountains, forests, and river valleys
- Packs range widely; home ranges cover 200+ square miles

## Clues:

- Howling at dawn/dusk
- Strong scent marking with scat and urine
- Tracks often on trails or roads



# RED FOX

*Vulpes vulpes*



Photo: Gianna Coppola, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)



Photo: Terry Kem



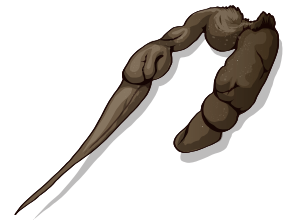
## Track:

- Size: 1.75–2.5" long × 1.5–2" wide
- Four toes with claws visible; narrow, oval track
- Often shows hair marks from furry feet in snow
- Track pattern: back foot steps into the front foot's track, straight line, dainty gait compared to coyote



## Scat:

- Size: ½" thick, 2–4" long
- Twisted, with tapered ends
- May contain berries, fur, insects, or feathers
- Often left on rocks, logs, or trail centers to mark territory



## Habitat & Range:

- Found statewide in fields, forests, farmlands, and near human settlements
- Most active at dawn and dusk

## Clues:

- Small prey remains (rodents, birds) left partially eaten
- Dens in burrows, brush piles, or under buildings
- "Fox smell"—musky odor near dens or marking sites



# BOBCAT

*Lynx rufus*



Photo: Robbie Holmes, Naturalist (CC BY-NC)



Photo: Les, Naturalist (CC BY-NC)



## Track:

- Size: 2" long × 2" wide
- Four toes, no claw marks (retractable claws)
- Heel pad: large, with 3 lobes on rear edge and 2 on front edge (classic "M" shape)
- Round overall shape, smaller than cougar
- Track pattern: back foot steps into the front foot's track; trails often meander while hunting



## Scat:

- Size: ½–¾" thick, 3–6" long
- Segmented, tubular, blunt ends
- Often contains some hair, feathers, or bone
- Commonly left covered with soil or debris (cat-like behavior)
- Often found in latrines (specific areas where they regularly leave their scat)



## Habitat & Range:

- Throughout Idaho: forests, canyons, shrublands, rocky outcrops
- Solitary, secretive, and mostly nocturnal

## Clues:

- Scratch marks or scrapes with scat buried
- Prey remains (rabbits, birds) cached or covered with debris



# MOUNTAIN LION

*Puma concolor*



Photo: Bettina W. Huber, Flickr (CC BY-NC)



## Track:

- Size: 3-4.5" long x 3-4.5" wide (round)
- Four toes, no claw marks (retractable claws)
- Heel pad: large, with 3 lobes on rear edge and 2 on front edge (classic "M" shape)
- Track pattern: back foot steps into the front foot's track; quiet, stealthy trails often along ridges or game paths



## Scat:

- Size: 1-1.25" thick, 6-12" long
- Segmented, tubular, blunt ends
- Often contains some hair, bone, or hooves
- Frequently buried or partially covered with debris



## Habitat & Range:

- Found statewide in mountains, canyons, forests, and desert rims
- Solitary and wide-ranging, usually avoiding humans

## Clues:

- Large kills cached under brush, sticks, or snow
- Scratch marks on ground (territorial scrapes)



# AMERICAN MINK

*Neogale vison*



Photo: W. Terry Hume/field Naturalist (CC-BY-NC)



Photo: North Olympic Land Trust, Naturalist (CC-BY-NC)



## Track:

- Size: 1-1½" long × 1-1¼" wide (front), 1½-2" long × 1-1½" wide (hind)
- Has five toes, though only four may show.
- Gait often shows bounding patterns, with tracks in pairs



## Scat:

- Size: ¼-½" thick, 3-8" long
- Twisted, irregular, with tapered ends
- Often contains fur, feathers, fish scales, bones, or crayfish parts
- Typically left on stream banks, logs, or rocks near water



## Habitat & Range:

- Streams, rivers, lakes, wetlands, and shorelines statewide
- Prefer areas with brushy or rocky cover near water
- Active year-round, mostly nocturnal

## Clues:

- Musky odor around dens and scat
- Prey remains (fish, frogs, small mammals, birds) near water's edge
- Burrows in banks, under tree roots, or in rock piles



# AMERICAN BEAVER

*Castor canadensis*



Photo: cikaposi, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)

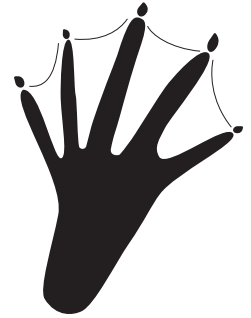


Photo: Michael Goff, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)



## Track:

- Front paw: 2-3" long × 2-2.5" wide, five toes with claws
- Hind paw: webbed, 4-5" long × 3-4" wide, often splayed in mud
- Tail drag sometimes visible as a flat, straight mark
- Track pattern: often near water edges



## Scat:

- Size: ½-1" thick, 2-3" long
- Cylindrical, fibrous, often green/brown from plant diet
- Usually deposited near lodges or canals



## Habitat & Range:

- Streams, rivers, ponds, and wetlands statewide
- Build lodges, dams, and canals

## Clues:

- Gnawed trees and branches
- Lodges and dams in waterways
- Muddy slides into water



# BLACK BEAR

*Ursus americanus*



## Track:

- Front paw: 4-5" long × 4-5" wide
- Hind paw: 6-7" long × 3-4" wide
- 5 toes with non-retractable claws
- Pad = wide crescent shape behind toes
- Hind track may look like a human footprint with claws
- Track pattern: hind foot often overlaps front; ambling, pigeon-toed stance



## Scat:

- Size: 1-2" thick, 5-12" long
- Varies by diet:
  - Berries: moist, full of seeds/skins
  - Spring plants: fibrous, greenish
  - Meat: dark, tubular with hair/bone
- Often deposited on trails or near feeding area



**Important:** Bear scat varies widely with diet and cannot be used to tell black bear from grizzly bear. Instead, identify it as bear scat and examine contents to learn what the bear was eating.

## Habitat & Range:

- Forested and mountainous regions across the state
- Especially common where berry patches grow
- Active spring-fall; hibernates in winter

## Clues:

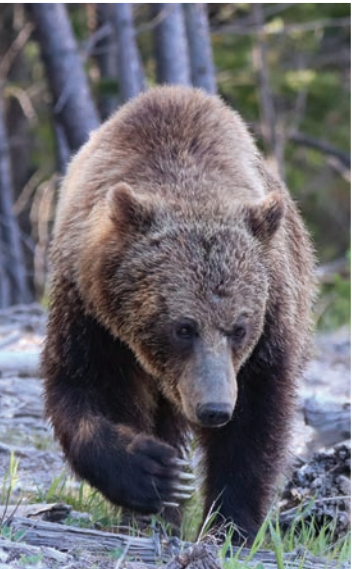
- Trees with claw marks or rubbed bark
- Logs/stumps torn apart for insects
- Digging pits for roots and tubers

**Safety Note:** Fresh tracks and scat often mean bears are nearby. Store food properly and give bears space.



# GRIZZLY BEAR

*Ursus arctos horribilis*



## Clues:

- Uprooted plants and digging pits for roots, ground squirrels, or insects
- Logs and stumps shredded apart
- Trees with claw marks, rubbed bark, or hair caught in rough surfaces
- Large soil mounds from digging dens or feeding sites

**Safety Note** Fresh tracks, scat, or digs indicate grizzlies nearby. Make noise, travel in groups, secure food properly, and carry bear spray in grizzly country.

## Track:

- Front paw: 5-7" long × 5-7" wide
- Hind paw: 7-10" long × 4-6" wide
- 5 toes with non-retractable claws (2-4" long; leave marks well ahead of toes)
- Pad = straight or slightly concave line behind toes (vs. crescent in black bears)
- Distinct "dished" impression
- Track pattern: pigeon-toed, with hind often overlapping or beside front



## Scat:

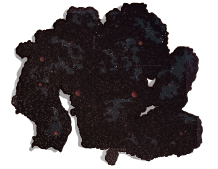
- Size: 1.5-2.5" thick, 6-15" long
- Varies by diet:

Berries: large, loose piles packed with seeds/skins

Spring plants: fibrous, green, grassy

Meat: dark, tubular, often with hair, bone, or hide

- Often deposited in open areas, along trails, or near food sources



**Important:** Scat alone cannot reliably distinguish grizzly bear from black bear. Identify only as bear scat and note diet clues instead.

## Habitat & Range:

- Found mainly in northern Idaho wilderness areas (Selkirks, Cabinet-Yaak, far eastern Idaho, Yellowstone ecosystem)
- Prefer remote forests, alpine meadows, river valleys, and berry-rich slopes
- Active spring-fall; den in high-elevation slopes or hillsides for winter



# NORTH AMERICAN PORCUPINE

*Erethizon dorsatum*



Photo: Jonathan Poppele, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)



Photo: Chris Hyde, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)



Photo: Tatiana Géttelman, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)



## Track:

- Size: 2-3" long × 2-3" wide
- Four toes on front, five on hind; claw marks visible
- Often drag marks from tail in snow or soft mud
- Toes point inward while walking
- Foot pad has pebbly texture



## Scat:

- Size: ½-¾" thick, 2-4" long
- Similar in size and shape to deer pellets
- Cylindrical pellets, dry, brown, woody diet (bark and needles)



## Habitat & Range:

- Coniferous forests, mountains, and brushy areas statewide
- Nocturnal; often climb trees for food

## Clues:

- Chewed bark or tree trunks
- Quills left behind
- Logs or stumps with chew marks
- Piles of scat pellets at entrances to den sites

**Critter Clue:** Porcupines waddle when they walk. You might see tracks that look like tiny bear tracks but often with a claw mark at the end of each toe.



# NORTH AMERICAN RIVER OTTER

*Lontra canadensis*



Photo: Tatiana Gettelman, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC)



Photo: Kim Cabrera, iNaturalist (CC BY-NC-ND)



## Track:

- Size: 2-3" long × 2-3" wide (front), 3-4" long × 2-3" wide (hind)
- Five toes with webbing; claw marks often visible
- Tail drag marks common in snow or mud

## Scat:

- Size: ½-1" thick, 3-6" long
- Cylindrical and often contains fish scales, bones, or crayfish parts; sometimes amorphous blobs
- Usually deposited on rocks, logs, or banks



## Habitat & Range:

- Rivers, streams, lakes, and wetlands statewide
- Active day and night, but more nocturnal

## Clues:

- Slides into water from banks
- Fish remains near dens
- Play areas in shallow water

**Fun fact:** Early naturalists thought otters regurgitated scales and bones like owls. In fact, it was their scat!



# NORTHERN RACCOON

*Procyon lotor*



Photo: Damon Tigne | Naturalist (CC BY-NC)



Photo: Roland P. | Naturalist (CC BY-NC)



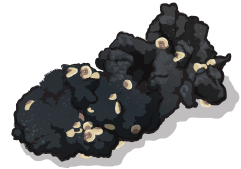
## Track:

- Size: 2-3" long x 2-3" wide
- Five toes, claw marks visible; hand-like appearance
- Often shows individual finger impressions in soft mud or snow
- Track pattern: walk = straight line, trot = paired prints



## Scat:

- Size: ½-1" thick, 3-6" long
- Tubular, segmented; may contain seeds, fur, insects
- Often deposited in latrines near water



## Habitat & Range:

- Forests, rivers, wetlands, and urban areas statewide
- Nocturnal and highly adaptable

## Clues:

- Tree cavities or burrows
- Washed food remnants near water
- Footprints often near streams or ponds





# STRIPED SKUNK

*Mephitis mephitis*



Photo: Levi Smith, iNaturalist. (CC BY-NC)



## Track:

- Size: 1–2" long × 1–1.5" wide
- Five toes, small claws visible
- Track pattern: straight line when walking

## Scat:

- Size: ½" thick, 2–4" long
- Cylindrical, segmented; often contains insects, berries, or small mammals

## Habitat & Range:

- Fields, forests, suburban edges, and riparian areas statewide
- Mostly nocturnal; den in burrows, logs, or brush

## Clues:

- Disturbed ground for digging insects or grubs
- Strong musky odor near dens or trails



**Critter Clue:** Skunk scat can turn sparkly because beetle wing covers shine when the sun hits them.



# FOX SQUIRREL

*Sciurus niger*



## Track:

- Size: 1-1.25" long × 0.75" wide (front); 1.5-2.5" long × 1-2" wide (hind)
- Four long toes on the front foot; five toes on the hind foot (hind tracks larger)
- Track pattern: bounding pattern common—front feet land almost side-by-side, hind feet swing around in front



## Scat:

- Size: ⅜" thick, ½-1" long
- Cylindrical rounded on the ends (sometimes slightly tapered)
- Often found in clusters; made up of plant matter such as seeds, nuts, and fruit



## Habitat & Range:

- Non-native, introduced to Idaho (Boise and surrounding Treasure Valley, expanding in southern Idaho)
- Prefers urban areas, parks, neighborhoods, and shelterbelts with large deciduous trees

## Clues:

- Large leaf nests (dreys) or use of tree cavities for shelter
- Chewed nutshells, seed debris, and bark stripping around feeding sites
- Loud chattering calls and bushy tail often visible before tracks or scat are noticed

## COMMON CANID TRACKS



**LARGE  
DOG**

3-5" long x 2.5-4" wide



**RED FOX**

1.75-2.5" long x 1.5-2" wide



**COYOTE**

2.25-3.25" long x 1.5-2.5" wide



**GRAY WOLF**

4-5" long x 3.5-4.5" wide

## VIEWING TIPS & ETIQUETTE



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### Do:

- **Observe, don't touch:** Look closely at tracks and scat without disturbing them.
- **Measure carefully:** Note the length, width, and spacing of tracks to help identify the species.
- **Stay on trails:** Protect fragile habitats and avoid trampling tracks.
- **Snap or sketch for later:** Photos and drawings let you study patterns without moving the signs.
- **Notice details:** Count toes, look at claw marks, shape of scat, and contents for clues.
- **Leave everything in place:** Don't remove tracks or droppings; nature leaves them for a reason.
- **Take your time:** Tracks and scat can be subtle. Careful observation reveals the best clues.

### Safety:

- **Keep a safe distance from animals:** Wildlife may be nearby. Watch quietly and avoid approaching.
- **Be cautious around scat:** Droppings carry germs—don't touch and wash hands if needed.

### How You Can Help Wildlife:

- **Keep areas clean:** Pick up trash and avoid leaving food that can harm animals.
- **Support healthy habitats:** Plant native vegetation, avoid using pesticides, and protect wetlands and forests.
- **Report wildlife safety concerns** and any suspected illegal activity such as hunting out of season to the **Citizens Against Poaching Hotline** at 1-800-632-5999 or [idfg.idaho.gov/poacher](http://idfg.idaho.gov/poacher)



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## TO LEARN MORE

For more information about Idaho wildlife, contact:

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