

WHAT'S WALKING THROUGH YOUR BACKYARD?

Did you know that humans aren't the only ones living in your neighborhood?

Many different animals may visit your yard, whether or not you see them. While neighborhoods are built for humans, many animals may wander through as they make their way to or from their home in the woods, called a habitat. In fact, many developments are built where animals' habitats used to be.

Animals usually come to our backyards looking for some food in the form of plants, pet food, and garbage. Just as you go to the grocery store to get food, animals scavenge for food both in and outside of the woods, looking for the best grub they can find.

How could you tell if an animal visited your backyard if you did not see it? What signs might they leave behind? Write some guesses below!

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....

Tracking Stations

One way to tell if an animal has visited your backyard is the footprints they leave behind. These tracks are easy to spot in snow and mud. If it has rained or snowed recently, go check your backyard and see if you can find any prints!

Tracking stations are one way to find out what is visiting your backyard when the weather is sunny and the ground is dry. The

goal of a tracking station is to create a place covered in a material which will show that an animal has walked over top that area. So, be creative if you do not have the exact materials listed below!

Supplies

1. piece of plywood or thick plastic or any thin, flat, water-resistant material
2. mud, sand, or any substance that would be displaced by something walking through it

Instructions

1. Prepare mud or sand. If using mud, mix dirt and water until it is the consistency of peanut butter- there should be enough water to keep the dirt from drying up too quickly!
2. At dusk, spread the mud or sand evenly over the plywood.
3. Place the plywood in a sheltered area, near bushes and trees and outside of a fence, if possible. Great places to leave it also include next to garbage bins, bird feeders, holes in the ground, or woodpiles.
4. Check your tracking station the next morning to see what visited you!



Animal Tracks

Just as we leave footprints behind in the snow or mud, one way you can tell an animal has been somewhere is that it will leave a footprint behind. These footprints are called animal tracks and are unique to each type of animal.

On the next page you'll find some examples of common tracks made by both wild animals and domestic animals(pets):

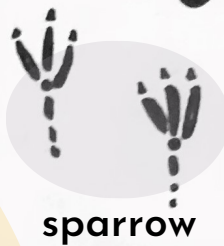
cottontail rabbit



raccoon



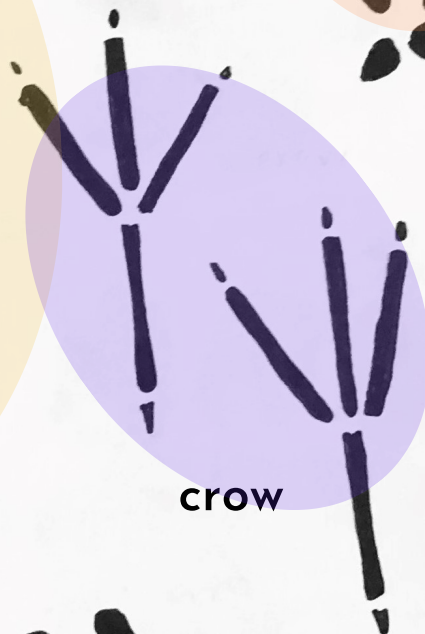
chipmunk



sparrow



grey squirrel



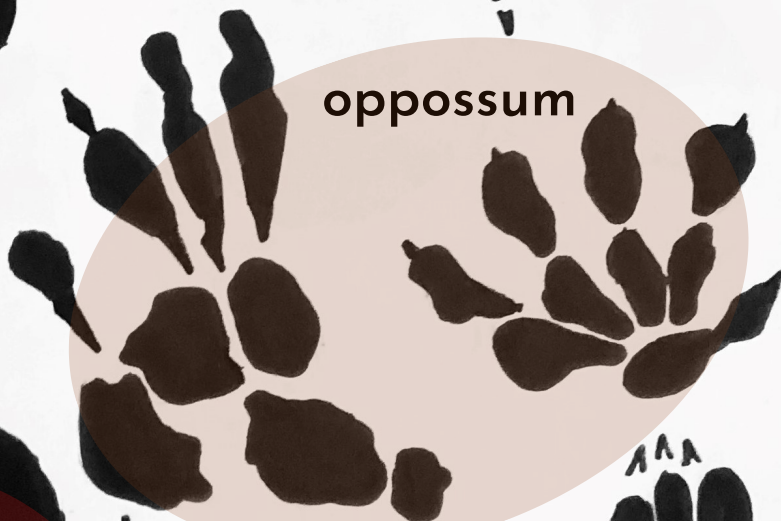
crow

red fox



skunk

opposum

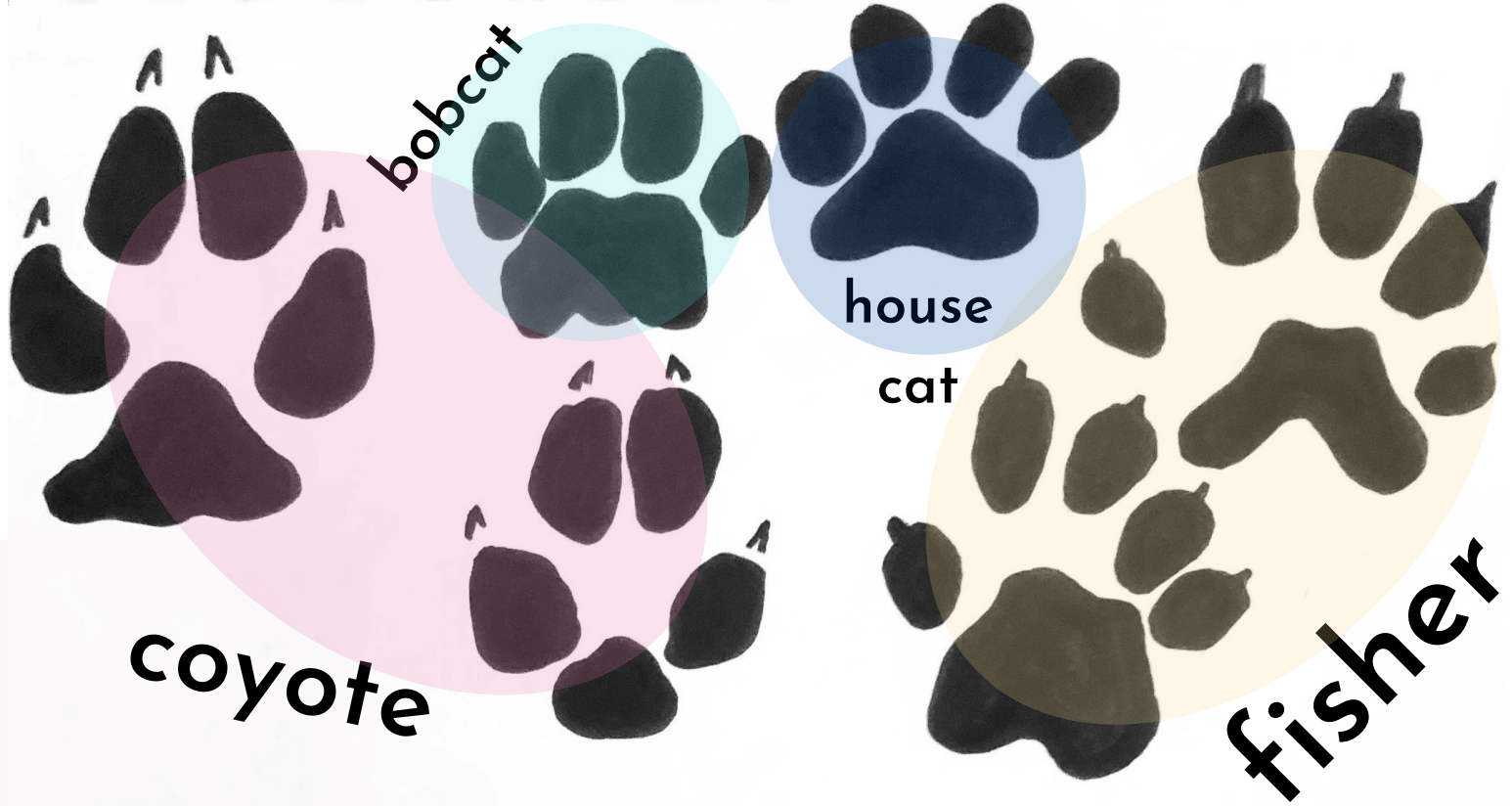


dog



woodchuck/
groundhog





**Take a look at your tracking station
and all around your backyard. What
animal tracks did you find? Draw
and label what you see!**

Now, take a moment to think about what things make animal tracks look different. For example, how is a coyote's footprint and dog's footprint different? Also consider what differences you would see if these two types of animals were walking next to each other. Think about how the characteristics of a species (ex. height, mass, number of legs) might translate to what footprints an animal leaves behind. List bellow how you can differentiate between animal tracks!

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....

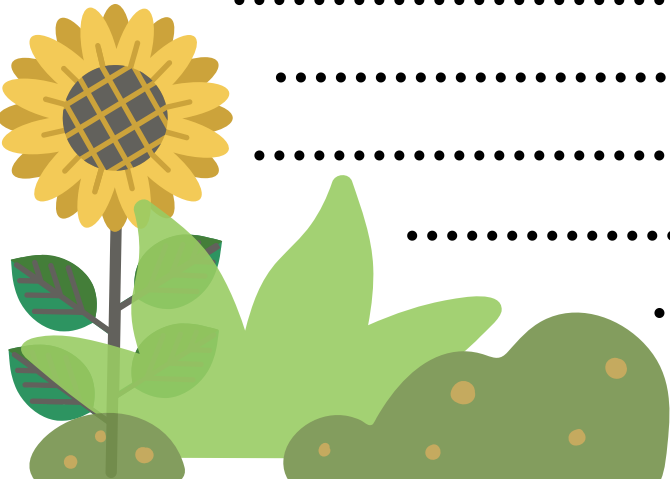


More evidence!

Animals leave more than just footprints behind! What other evidence of an animal's presence could you find? Brainstorm by thinking about what sort of waste you leave may behind (hint: think about what you do in your kitchen and bathroom- what might the actions in these spaces look like for animals?) List some possibilities below! Look for some real life examples in your backyard!

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....

What do you think the animals whose tracks you found were doing in your backyard? What could have drawn them to your house? Look at where the tracks appear to be leading to or from and see if anything has been left behind! Write the possibilities below and explain your thinking!



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Animal Tracking

Now, think of all the evidence you have collected during this activity. Draw out a map on the next page of where animals have been in your backyard. To get started, draw the border of your backyard. Then, make a mark wherever you found any evidence (like animal tracks or food scraps). Label these points with what evidence was there. After laying out this data, try to connect different pieces of evidence to see if you can draw a line showing the path an animal took through your backyard!

