

# WINTER IN ALTONA FOREST

Some animal foot prints

by Larry Noonan  
natural history editor Doug Lockrey

## **HIKING IN ALTONA FOREST IN THE WINTER**

Hiking in the winter is not everyone's favourite activity especially if cross country skiing is not possible. The wild flowers and weeds are not visible in their spring and summer glory and the deciduous trees are somewhat more difficult to identify during the winter.

However, hiking in the winter with the bright snow coating and the crisp air presents an opportunity for a unique experience. Winter is a good time to examine dried wild flowers and to collect wild flower seeds. Plant galls are more visible and insect homes can be examined closely with no danger. One of the most rewarding activities in the winter is finding and identifying animal signs such as scat, forage and tracks.

The easiest thing to examine and learn about is winter animal tracks.

Some important terms to understand when studying tracks:

Dewclaws – two small, toe-like projections behind the foot usually on hoofed animals.

Direct register – the hind foot falls on the fore foot print.

Draglines – lines with the tracks caused by feet, tail or body

Pace - distance from the centre of one print to the centre of the next

Register – a mark left by an animal's body part such as foot or claw

Straddle – width of the track

Stride – see pace

Tracks – pattern of foot prints

Identifying tracks involves two things: the gait and the shape.

### **GAIT PATTERNS**

Gait is the method used by the animal to move. Most animals move by the equivalent of human walking. Moving faster tends to attract attention and the hunters and the prey do not want to attract attention to themselves. The basic gaits are: pacer, diagonal walker, bouncer and galloper.

# GAIT PATTERNS

The gait patterns of animals in Altona Forest include the following: walking (pacer and diagonal walker), bounder and galloper.

## Pacer

Examples of pacer walkers are raccoons and skunk.



## Diagonal Walker

Examples of diagonal Walker are dog, fox, cat, coyote and deer.



## Bounder

Examples of bounders are weasel, rabbit and skunk.



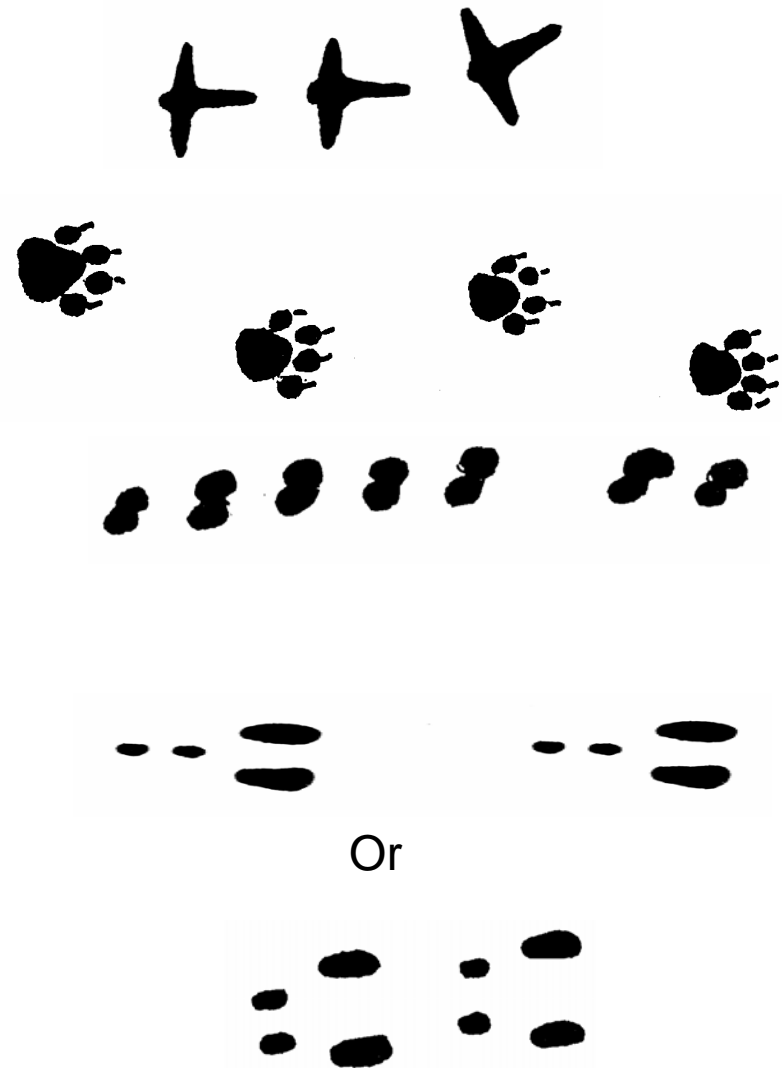
## Galloper

Examples of gallopers are rodents such as squirrels, chipmunks, mice as well as rabbits.



# Key to Identifying Winter Tracks

- Straight line ([go to page 5](#))
- Alternate ([go to page 6](#))
- Arranged in Pairs ([go to page 7](#))
- Arranged in groups of four ([go to page 8](#))



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- Bird's foot (go to page 9)
- Not a bird's foot (go to page 10)

- Four toes no claws (page 6a)
- Drags tail or body (page 6b)
- Prints in definite pairs (page 11)
- Diagonal walker (page 10)

# House Cat

- House Cat is a diagonal walker with four toes of equal size and no claws 95% of the time.



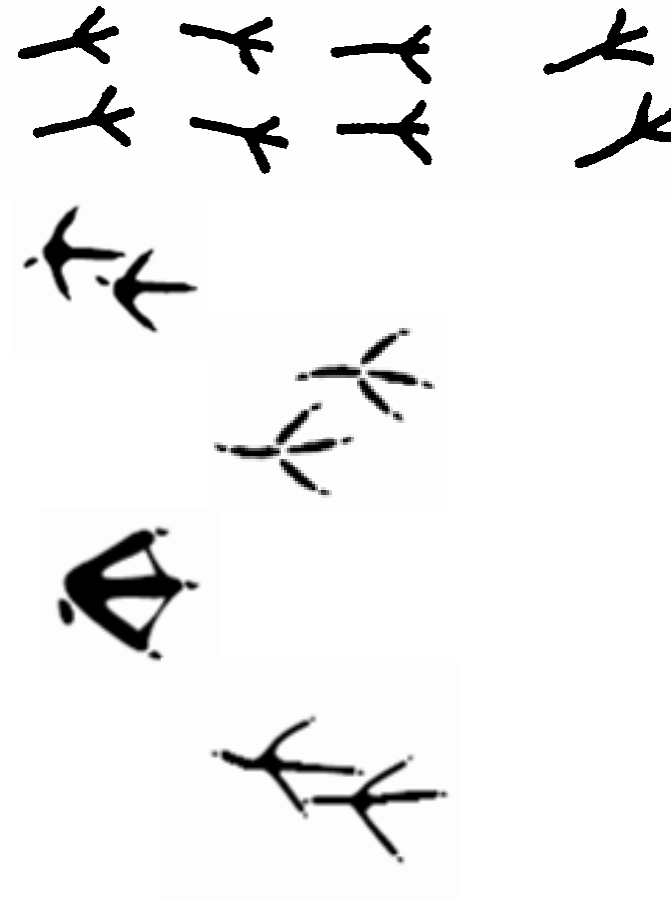


# Porcupine

- Foot dragging – porcupine
- The porcupine has a waddling gait.
- Tracks are pigeon-toed and somewhat obscured by the dragging feet and in deep snow the body leaves a trough.

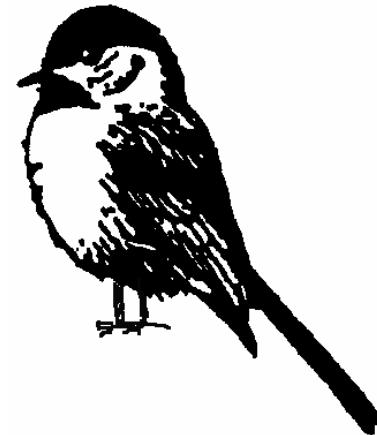
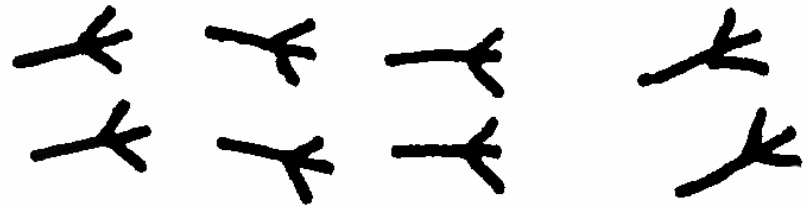


- Bird's foot – songbird such as chickadee or sparrow (see next page 7a)
- Bird's foot – 13 - 17 cm long ([go to Page 16](#))
- Bird's foot – approximately 8 cm long ([go to Page 17](#))
- Bird's foot – 10 - 13 cm long ([go to Page 18](#))
- Bird's foot – 17 - 21 cm long ([go to Page 19](#))
- Not a bird's foot – ([go to page 11](#))

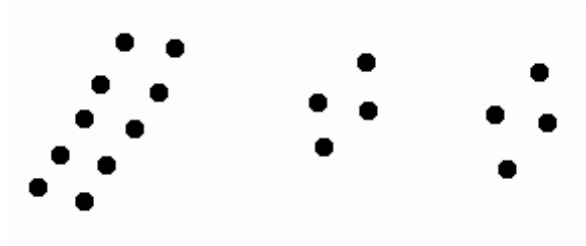
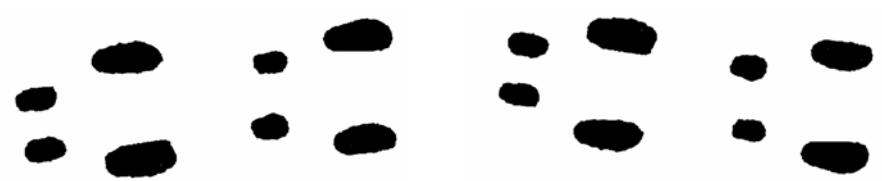


# Black Capped Chickadee

- Chickadee – small song bird very common in Altona Forest especially around the pond.



- Front and rear feet together (page 8a or 8b)
- Front and rear feet not together ([go to page 13](#))
- Diagonal or diamond shape for the four feet. ([go to page 14](#))
- Group of four in irregular shape. ([go to page 15](#))

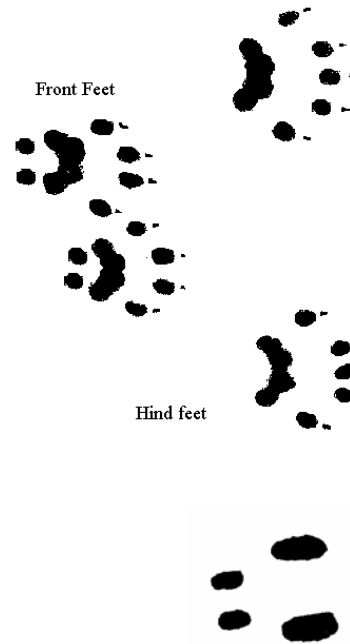


Running

walking

# Squirrel

- Squirrel are gallopers. They have four toes front and 5 toes rear with claws.
- The fore print falls slightly ahead of the hind prints.
- Since they are tree dwellers, both their pairs of feet are parallel or side by side in the trees for better gripping and are side by side on the ground.



Fore print 2.5 – 4.6 cm and 2.5 cm wide.

Hind print 5.8 – 7.6 cm long and 2.8 – 4 cm wide



# Chipmunk

- The chipmunk is a ground dweller and is sometimes called a ground squirrel.
- Fine details of prints are rare because the chipmunk is very light.
- Fore foot has four toes and hind foot has five.
- Track is erratic.



[Page 8 b](#)



Fore print is 2 – 2.5 cm long and 1 – 2 cm wide while the hind print is 1.8 – 3.3 long & 1.3 – 2.3 wide.

# Ruffed Grouse

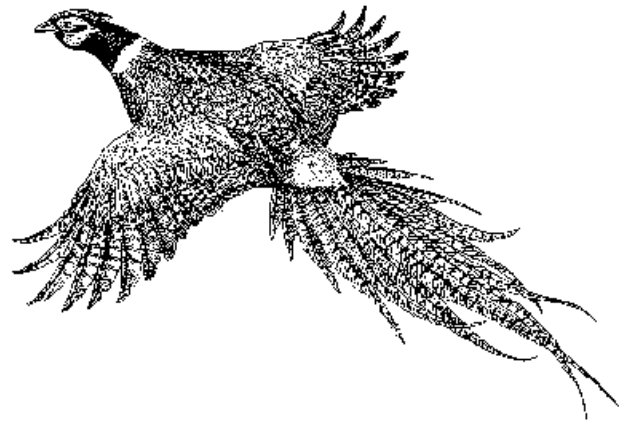
- Ruffed Grouse are ground-dwellers and, although common in the cedar sections of Altona Forest, are hard to spot because of their camouflage.
- The track is usually straight and the prints clear because of the bird's weight.
- Not a grouse ([go to Page 7](#))



5 – 7.6 cm long

# Pheasant

- Large bird with clear tracks

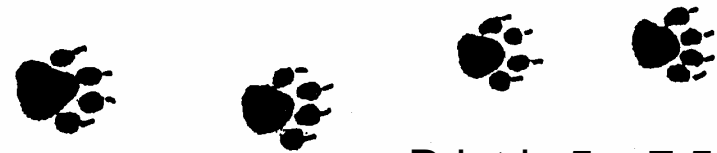




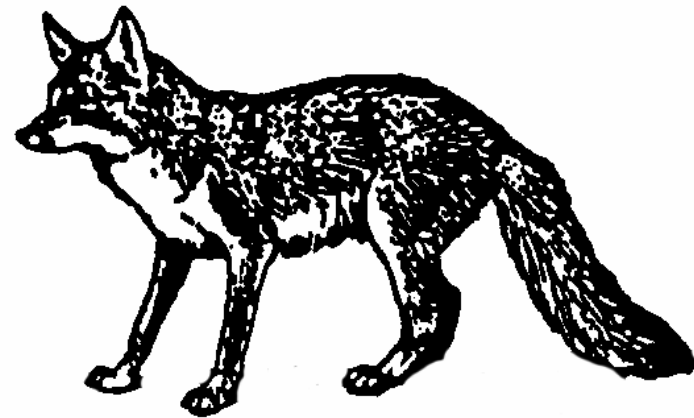
- Four toes, claws showing – toes of equal size (go to page 10 a) -- fox
- Four toes, claws showing – inner toes larger than outer (go to page 10 b) -- dog
- Four toes, claws showing – outer toes larger than inner (go to page 10 c) – coyote
- Two toed hoof (go to page 10 d) white-tailed deer
- Similar but not here [go to page 11](#)

# Fox

- Four toes, claws showing – the toes are of equal size
- There is a ridge on the heel pad.
- The trail is made up of straight alternating prints with the hind print direct registering on the slightly wider fore print.



Print is 5 – 7.5 cm long and 4 – 6 cm wide.



# Dog

- Four toes, claws showing.
- Inner toes larger than outer.
- Diagonal walker



Running gait

# Coyote

- Four toes, claws showing.
- Outer toes larger than inner
- Trail is often very straight as if the animal knows exactly where it wants to go and take the most direct route.

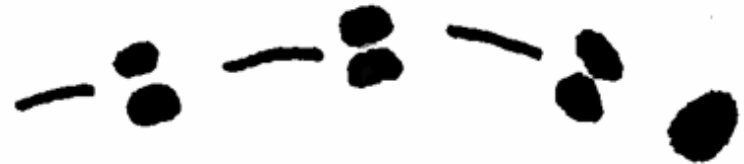


Print is 6 – 8 cm long and 4 – 6 cm wide



Running gait

- Pattern width about 5 cm – mouse (page 11a)
- Pattern width more than 5 cm – [\(go to page 12\)](#)
- Similar but not here – [go to page 10](#)



# Mouse

- Mouse – often the tail drags and makes a mark in the snow between the foot prints.
- Fore prints show four toes, three palm pads and two heel pads while hind prints show five toes and three palm pads.
- Clear prints are difficult to find as the mouse is so light.

Fore print is about .8 cm long and .8 cm wide. Hind is about 1.5 cm long and 1. cm wide.



# Star-Nosed Mole

- The star-nosed moles has star-like tentacles protruding from its nose which helps it navigate its many tunnels.
- It prefers swimming, even under pond or river ice, and therefore its prints are very rare.
- The paws are made for digging.
- Signs of this mole are its molehills of piled mud.



Star nosed mole – face

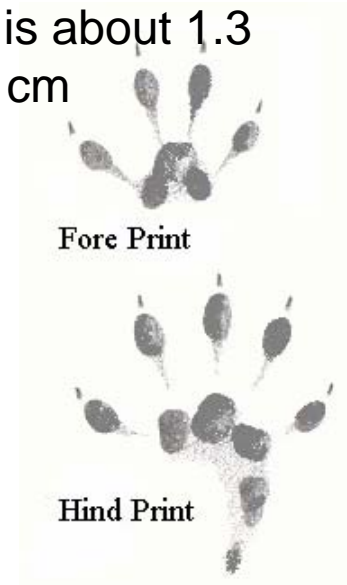


Star nosed mole claws.

# Meadow Vole (Field Mouse)

- The meadow vole is a diagonal walker.
- It hops when running.
- Many of these small creatures live in Altona Forest especially around the pond and in the fields and clearings.
- Hind print sometimes registers in the fore print.
- Since the vole is so light, its prints are often not distinctive.
- One sign of the meadow vole are its runways where it usually takes the same path.

Fore print is about 1.3 cm by 1.4 cm



The hind print is about 1.5 cm by 2 cm.

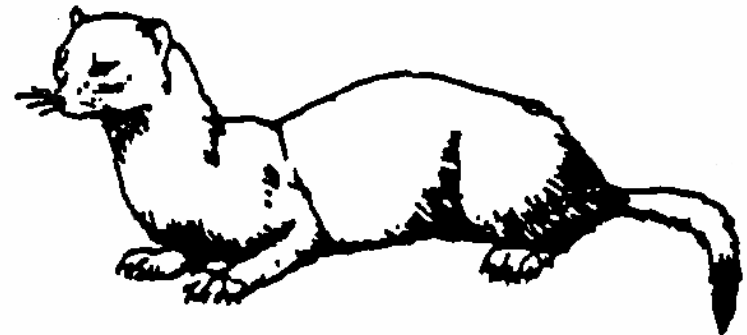
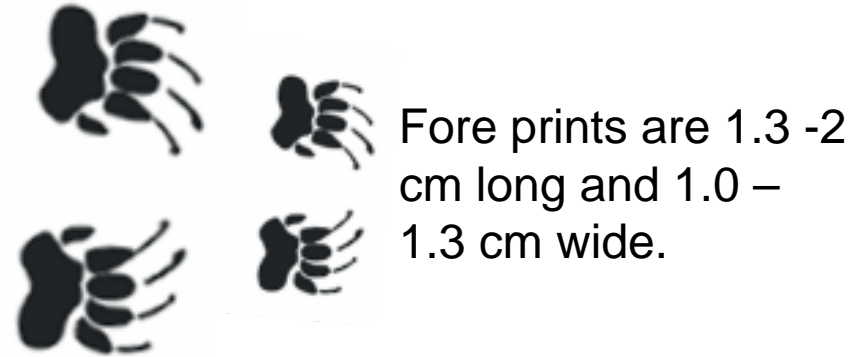


- Five toes with claws and hind lands on fore prints (page 12a)
- Gait like bounding (page 12a)
- Five toes almost human-like (page 12b)
- Gait paired fore and hind print opposite (page 12b)



# Weasel or Mink

- Hind feet register on fore prints
- Five toes front and 5 toes back with claws.
- Usually the weasel track forms a bounding pattern of paired prints.



# Raccoon

- One hind footprint paired with opposite front foot print – raccoon. A pacer gait.
- Five toes front and 5 toes back with claws.
- Almost human looking.



Fore print is 5 - 7.5 cm long and 4.5 - 6.5 cm wide

Hind print is 6 – 10 cm long and 5 – 6.5 cm wide.

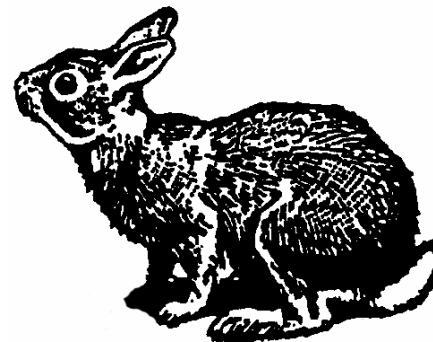


# Rabbit

- The elbow on the rear foot may or may not show in the print.
- Hind feet at least 2 times larger than front feet.
- Very common in Altona Forest and one of the most abundant prints visible on a hike.

Fore print is 2.5 – 3.8 cm long & 2 -- 3.3 cm wide.

Hind print is 7.6 – 9 cm long & 2.5 – 4 cm wide.



# Skunk

- The skunk has one hind footprint paired with opposite front foot print. A pacer gait.
- Five toes front and 5 toes back with claws.
- Almost human looking.



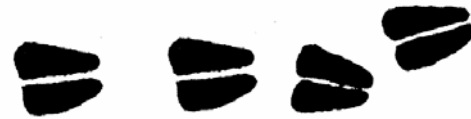
Fore print is 3.8 to 5.6 cm long & 2.5 – 3.8 cm wide

Hind print is 3.8 – 6.5 cm long & 2.5 – 3.8 cm wide

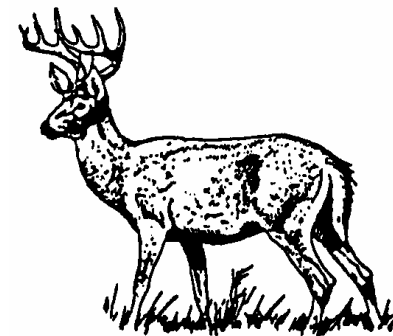


# White-tailed Deer

- Two-toed hoof – white-tailed deer.
- The larger toe is on the outside.
- Diagonal walker.
- Front feet are  $\frac{1}{2}$  larger than rear feet.
- If running, the dew claws may be visible as two small circles behind the print.
- The sex of an adult deer can be determined by examining the prints. If the rear foot is in a wider stance, it is a female. (wider pelvis) If the front foot is a wider stance, then it is a male. (wider shoulders)



A closer look at the deer foot. 5 – 9 cm long and 4 – 6.5 cm wide.



# Wild Turkey

- Wild turkeys are large birds.
- They are not common in Altona Forest but have been seen visiting the western edge of the forest on a number of occasions.



9 – 13 cm long



# Crow

- The crow has slender feet with four toes.
- Typically a diagonal walker

Length is 6.4 –  
7.6 cm





# Canada Goose

- The Canada Goose is not common in Altona Forest but will visit if easy food is detected.
- It has large feet which are also wide.



10 – 13 cm long



# Blue Heron

- The blue heron does not visit Altona Forest very often but with the rockery just north, it is frequently seen flying over the area and may be an occasional visitor.
- Tracks are straight.

17 - 21 cm long track



## Quick Reference

- House Cat -diagonal walker; 4 toes of equal size and no claws 95% of the time.
- Porcupine - foot dragging; waddling gait; pigeon-toed; body leaves a trough.
- Chickadee
- Squirrel – gallopers; 4 toes fore 5 toes rear with claws; fore print falls slightly ahead of the hind prints; pairs of feet are side by side
- Chipmunk - fore foot 4 toes hind foot 5; track is erratic.
- Ruffed Grouse and Pheasant - track usually & clear. ← ← ← ←
- Fox - 4equal sized toes; claws show; ridge on heal pad; trail straight; hind print direct registering on the slightly wider fore print.
- Dog – 4 toes, claws showing; Inner toes larger than outer; diagonal walker.
- Coyote - 4 toes; claws showing; outer toes larger than inner; trail straight.
- Mouse – tail drags; fore prints show 4 toes, 3 palm pads and 2 heel pads; hind prints show 5 toes and 3 palm pads.



## Reference

- Weasel - hind feet register fore footprints; 5 toes fore & hind with claws; track often bounding pattern.
- Raccoon - One hind footprint paired with opposite front foot print; pacer gait; five toes front and 5 toes back with claws; almost human looking.
- Canada Goose -- 10 – 13 cm long prints
- Crow – slender feet with four toes
- Heron – tracks are straight; 17 to 21 cm long
- Meadow Vole – diagonal walker; small prints
- Star-nosed mole -- Signs of this mole are its molehills of piled mud; rarely see prints
- Rabbit – bounder; distinctive print pattern; hind print much larger and appears ahead of the fore prints in snow
- Skunk – five toes fore and hind;
- Wild turkey -- large prints; 9 – 13 cm long
- White-tailed deer – split toe; 5 – 9 cm long and 4 – 6.5 cm wide

