

BECOMING A WILDLIFE DETECTIVE



INTRODUCTION

Many people come to the Gunflint Trail to see wildlife. Although we often think of wildlife as large animals like moose and bears, on the Gunflint Trail we're always close to wildlife because wildlife includes all non-domesticated animals, like earthworms, spiders, songbirds, frogs, snakes, salamanders, squirrels, chipmunks, and fish.

We see some animals, like squirrels and chipmunks, all the time. Other animals spend most of their lives hidden from view. However, all animals leave behind visible clues for us. By becoming wildlife detectives and learning to read these clues, you learn to discover nearby animals, even if you can't actually see them.

- Be sure not to harm or seriously disturb any evidence you find.
- Only touch an animal clue if this guide says that's okay.
- Take time to carefully observe your surroundings. You may need to use your eyes, ears, or even your nose to lead you to wildlife clues.

WHAT'S IN THE WILDLIFE DETECTIVE ACTIVITY BIN:

- Minnesota Butterflies and Moths Guide
- Animal Tracks Guide
- Minnesota Birds Guide
- Minnesota Wildlife Guide
- Magnifying glass
- 2 Binoculars
- Backpack
- Identifier

NOTES FOR WILDLIFE DETECTIVE ACTIVITIES

- Length of activity varies – depends on how long of a hike you take!
- Please do not remove this bin from Chik-Wauk grounds
- If using bin outside on Chik-Wauk grounds, check out the bin at museum front desk
- You may use the backpacks to bring the items you need for these activities with you on the Chik-Wauk nature trails.



WILDLIFE DETECTIVE ACTIVITIES

TRACKS

Have everyone in your group look at the bottoms of their shoes. Look carefully at the different designs on the soles. When each person walks on a soft surface, like a muddy road, their shoes leave tracks and you can tell who's been walking where by remembering the designs of each person's shoes.

Animals also leave tracks that tell you who's been walking by. Here are some of the most common tracks you see along the Gunflint Trail.

RUFFED GROUSE



BLACK BEAR



MOOSE



WHITE-TAILED DEER



RED SQUIRREL



ACTIVITY

Use the Animal Track Guide in the pack to learn about other tracks you see on the Gunflint Trail.

SCAT

You only see tracks when the ground is soft or damp. But animals leave behind plenty of other evidence. Animal poop, which scientists call scat, can tell you a lot about nearby animals.

Remember, don't ever touch animal scat! It carries diseases.

MOOSE:

Large pellet form, dark brown, 1- 1½" long.



GREY WOLF (and other carnivores):

2-6 inches in length, about ¾" in diameter, tube-shaped with evidence of hair.



WHITE-TAILED DEER:

Small, smooth, oval-shaped pellets, dark brown - black in color, ½ - ¾" in diameter. Pellets sometimes in clumps.



PINE MARTEN (and other members of the weasel family):

Brown-black in color, tube shaped, twisted with tapered ends.



SNOWSHOE HARE:

Very similar in appearance to deer scat, but pellets are rounded and have a coarse texture.



MOUSE (and other small rodents):

Very small, elongated black pellets. Usually about ¼" in size.



BLACK BEAR:

Dark colored and often a loose, shapeless pile filled with berries.



BIRD:

Bird scat usually looks like a small blotch of white paint. It's nearly impossible to use scat to identify a bird.



ACTIVITY

Use the scat guide that's part of the animal tracks guide to learn about other scat you might see on the Gunflint Trail.

HOMES

Just like you, many animals have houses, where they sleep and raise their young.



NESTS

Birds lay their eggs in nests. Most nests are bowl-shaped and built in tree branches, on the ground, or even in buildings using twigs, leaves, and grass held together with mud or saliva.



BEAVER LODGES

Beavers spend a lot of time constructing large lodges out of sticks that they harvest and chew. These homes have an underwater entrance and beavers live in the lodges during winter.



FROG PONDS

Amphibians, such as frogs and toads, often live near pools of still water, such as the water in roadside ditches where they lay their eggs. The eggs hatch into tadpoles who live in the pond until they grow into frogs.



HIVES

Wasps and bees live in hives or nests. Wasps construct their nests from paper pulp, while bees often construct their hives inside tree cavities.



SPIDER WEBS

You can easily recognize a spider's web. Spiders weave many types of webs, such as orbs and funnels. In addition to being a home, the web helps the spider catch food.

ACTIVITY

Take a walk and see how many animal homes can you find. At Chik-Wauk Museum and Nature Center you can find at least two animal homes. What do you think they are?

(Hint: they're both near water)

NOISES

*Sometimes we can't see animals, but we can still hear them.
Listen carefully – can you hear any of these noises right now?*

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW

A very common bird song that sounds like a high whistle of *Oh-sweet-Canada-Canada*.



FROGS

Bull frogs make a twangy sound, like a rubber being snapped.



CHICKADEE

Call sounds like *fee-bee* or *hey, sweetie* when they sing. When alarmed, they make a call that sounds like *chickadee-dee-dee*.



WOODPECKERS

Woodpeckers often make a “tip, tip, tapping” sound when pecking at a tree trunk, searching for tasty insects.



CROW

A scratchy cawing noise.



WOLVES

Just like domesticated dogs, wolves make all sorts of noises, such as barks, whines, and woofs. However, we usually associate wolves with howling. It's thought that a wolf howls to let fellow members of its pack know where it is.



RED SQUIRREL

Squirrels often make a shrill, chattering noise that sounds like they're scolding someone.



OTHER CLUES

Once you learn what to look for, you discover endless wildlife clues in the woods.

Feathers

If there's a single feather, a bird probably lost a feather. If there are many feathers on the ground, a carnivore (like a fox or wolf) may have had a tasty snack. (You may pick up a feather if you want to examine it more closely.)

Dissected Pine Cone

A pine cone picked apart to pieces is a sure sign of a squirrel feeding. (You may pick up a piece of pine cone if you want to examine it more closely.)

Trails

Do you see narrow paths heading through the forest that look too small for a human to comfortably hike on? Animals such as deer may regularly use this route through the woods.

Owl or Raptor Pellets

Different from scat, owl pellets are essentially bird barf. Because these birds eat their food whole, they must regurgitate bits of their food that they can't digest, like bones, fur, and feathers.

WHAT DID YOU FIND?

*Use this log to record all the animal clues you discovered during your hike.
That way you'll help other hikers know what to look for.*

Date:			
First Name:			
Trails Hiked:			
Animal Clues You Discovered:			
Animal Spotted:			
Other Interesting/ Things You Noted:			

WE HOPE YOU ENJOYED USING THIS ACTIVITY PACK!

Please put everything you pulled out back into the bin and place the bin back where you found it so it's ready for next person. Thank you!