

**Aims:**

Learn about animal field signs, how to look for them and how to recognise the animal leaving the signs.

**You will need:**

- Clipboards and pencils
- Copy of "Spotter Sheet" per child to record the signs you find
- Animal signs guide per group

**Discussion:**

How do you know what animals are in your local area if you don't see them?

Animals leave all kinds of signs that they have been here. Can you think of any?

- Fur, hair and feathers
- A home e.g. nests, burrows, holes in trees or molehills
- Droppings i.e. spraints and poo
- Footprints (tracks)
- Feeding signs e.g. nibbled leaves, nuts or cones or animal / bird remains
- Disturbance e.g. paths regularly taken by animals, browsed trees or scratches in the ground or on trees

Animal tracking is important in locating invasive non-native animal species. The invasive American mink is detected by finding its footprints - so learning to read animal tracks and spot signs is a really good skill.

**Instructions:**

1. Split the group into sets, give everyone a spotter worksheet and give each set an animal signs guide (see right).
2. Each group should explore a defined area and try and find signs that animals have been there.
3. Each person should complete their spotter sheet if they find an example of any animal sign by drawing a picture of it, describing it and, if they can, name or guess the animal that left that sign (if you've got a camera you could also take a photo).
4. If you need to, do a bit of research when you get back to the classroom to identify or find out more about the animal signs you found.

**Do more:**

Animal signs tell us more than just that an animal was here, with a bit of experience we can work out which direction it was travelling, whether it was walking or running, what it had eaten, what it was doing, whether it was alone etc.

Ask each child to pick one of the signs they have found and write a short story around that animal, which includes how the sign was left there.

**Handy notes:****Animal signs guide**

FSC publications have a great [guide to mammal tracks and signs](#)

or

Download and print these three animal signs guides from the Woodland Trust:

[Animal Homes](#)

[Animal Footprints](#)

[Animal Poo](#)

It's a good idea to think about the place or area to visit for this activity in advance so that you have a good chance of the group finding signs. Woods and river edges can be good but remember gardens or playgrounds can be used too – animal signs are all around us if you look.