



A Guide to Common Tracks and Scat of Bear Creek Nature Center



First things first: What is scat?

Scat is the scientific name for poop! Scat and tracks are excellent clues to use as a naturalist and help us learn more about the animals who live here, where they are going, and what they've been eating.



Top: deer scat

Bottom: coyote scat

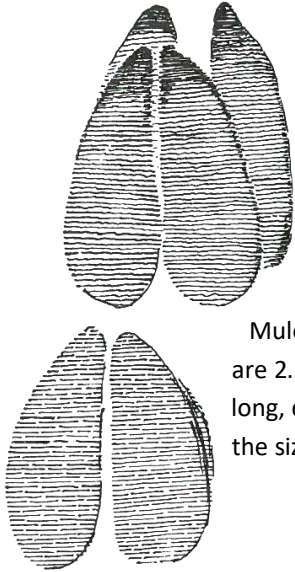
Scat can take many shapes! Some animals, such as deer, produce small, round pellets. Other animals, such as coyotes, produce scat that is longer with pointed tips at either end. Scat can also tell you about the diet of the animal who left it behind: deer scat will have small traces of leaves and grasses, while coyote scat is often full of the fur from the animals they've been eating.

Where can I find tracks?

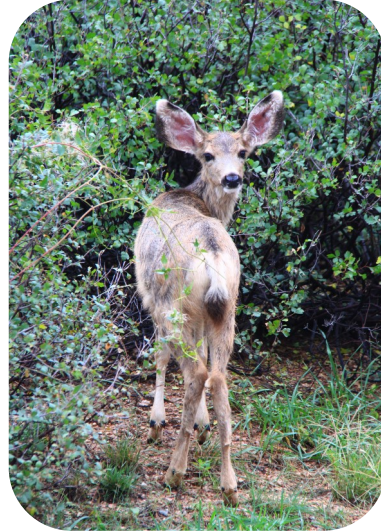
Animals tracks can be found all over the trails at Bear Creek. The loose gravel of our nature paths often reveal the footsteps and paw-steps of those who have walked on them. When the trails are muddy, or covered with fresh snow, tracks are found more easily and in great abundance.



Mule Deer



Mule deer tracks are 2.5—3.5 inches long, depending on the size of the deer

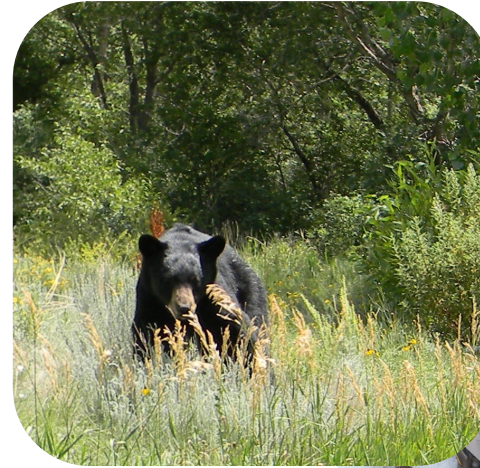


Mule deer scat, above and below, is often found in piles.



The mule deer is the most commonly seen large mammal at Bear Creek Nature Center. It is distinctive for its large ears and black-tipped tail. It is also slightly larger than the whitetail deer which is more often found farther east of the foothills. Mule deer tracks and scat crisscross Bear Creek, as they are always on the move to find more food and avoid potential predators.

Black Bear

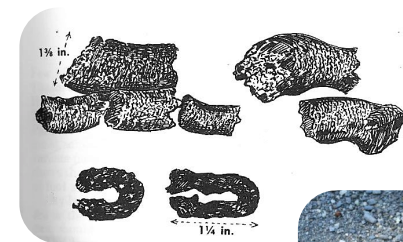


Black bear tracks. The image below was taken here at Bear Creek!



The larger prints are the back paws, which are about 7 inches long. The smaller prints are the front paws, which are about 4.5 inches long

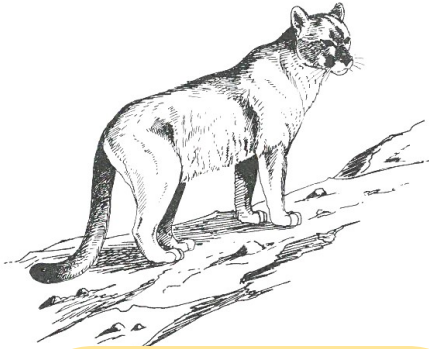
Black bears are common visitors to Bear Creek, enjoying the bounty of acorns and wasp nests to feast upon in preparation for a long winter sleep. If you see some bear scat, a close look can tell you more about the food they have been eating. While some black bears have fur that is a true black, their color can range from blond to brown!



Bear scat can sometimes change shape and color depending on the bear's diet!

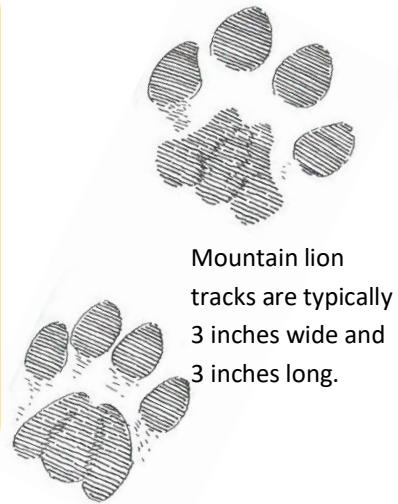


Mountain Lion

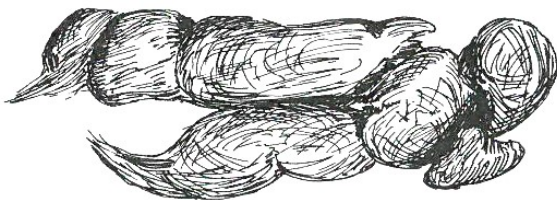


This mountain lion was captured on a game camera near Bear Creek Nature Center!

While mountain lions do visit Bear Creek Nature Center, their nocturnal nature (awake at night, asleep during the day) means that they are rarely seen by visitors. However, *evidence* of mountain lions (also called cougars and pumas) can be found at any time of day! Their tracks may look similar to dog or coyote tracks at first glance, but mountain lion tracks will not have any claw-marks above the toe pads.



Mountain lion tracks are typically 3 inches wide and 3 inches long.



Mountain lion scat has deep lines between the different segments.



Coyote



Coyotes can be seen and heard at Bear Creek Nature Center. Their tracks and scat are commonly found along the trails. Their scat can sometimes be full of the fur of the small animals they eat, such as pocket gophers and cottontail rabbits. While looking for coyote tracks, keep in mind that dog tracks can often be identical—they are both canines, after all!

Coyote tracks are $2\frac{1}{4}$ — $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, with distinctive claw marks above the toes.



Coyote scat looks a lot like dog scat. Look closely for signs of fur or bones to help determine if it came from a coyote.

Red Fox



Foxes are omnivores, which means they eat both meat and plants. Bear Creek's abundance of plants and small animals make it a great habitat for the red fox to roam. Their tracks can look similar to the tracks of a small dog. Red fox scat can take many different shapes, depending on what kind of food the fox has been eating recently.

Fox tracks may be easily confused with the tracks of a small dog. They are 2-.5 inches long.



Fox scat can be difficult to identify, varying in size and shape.

Fox Squirrel



The front tracks of a fox squirrel are 1 inch long, while the hind tracks are 2 inches long.



Fox squirrel scat is small and oval-shaped.

Fox squirrels can be seen year-round at Bear Creek Nature Center. They love to make their nests out of twigs and leaves in the gambel oak trees, which produce the acorns they love to eat. Fox squirrels bury these acorns in preparation for winter, going back to dig them up when food becomes scarce.

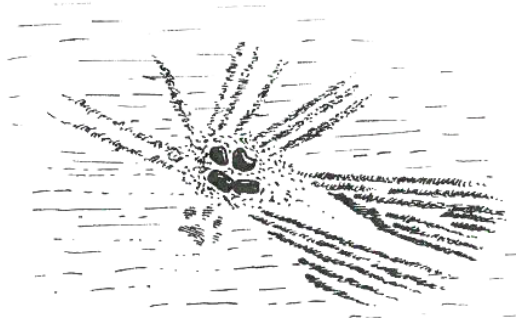
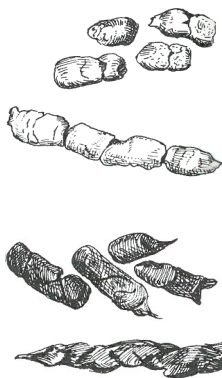
Bobcat



Bobcat tracks are less than 2 inches long.



Bobcats are crepuscular animals, which means they are most active at sunrise and sunset. They are larger than the average housecat, with a short, “bobbed” tail and distinctive spots and stripes marking their fur. They leave small tracks, with no visible claw marks above the toe pads.

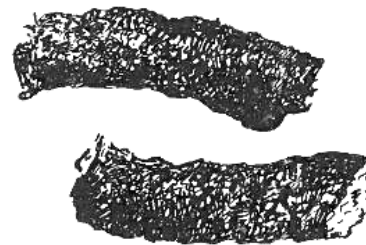


Just like a housecat using a litterbox, bobcats will scratch dirt and leaves over their scat. Bobcat scat may look similar to mountain lion scat, but is much smaller in size.

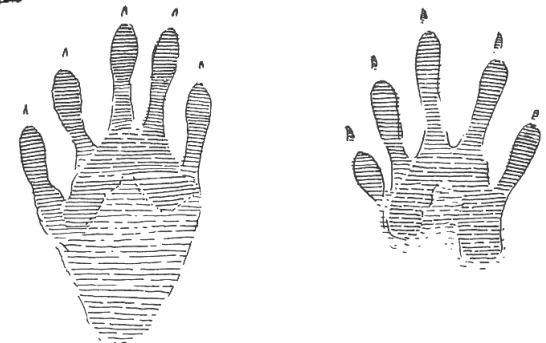
Raccoon



Raccoon's larger hind tracks are 3 inches long, while the front tracks are 2.25 inches long.



Raccoon scat is tricky to identify. It usually has a grainy texture and ranges from brown to reddish in color.



The large cottonwood trees along the banks of Bear Creek provide perfect homes for raccoons, who search out hollow trees and fallen trunks for shelter. Their tracks are easy to identify thanks to their five long toes. They use these toes to climb trees, dig up insects, and sometimes to get into garbage cans that have not been properly secured.