

MAINE COAST HERITAGE TRUST

Take-Along Tracking Guide

MCHT steward **Kirk Gentalen** says that winter's snow cover makes it the ideal time for amateur animal trackers to visit land preserves and learn about wildlife.

LOOK FOR SIGNS OF THESE ANIMALS AT MCHT PRESERVES!



Otters

- As with all weasels, otter tracks show five toes and, sometimes, claw marks.
- Depending on the type of snow, otters sometimes slide on their bellies for efficiency. These tracks set them apart from other weasels.
- When not sliding, otters bound/lope, meaning their rear paws land close to the tracks of their front paws. Because of this, their tracks look like two sets of paws side-by-side.
- Otter tracks are usually found near water or shorelines.

Fishers

- Like otters, fishers are weasels and leave tracks with five toes and, sometimes, claw marks.
- Fishers don't slide like otters do, but they do bound.
- Tracks may end at a tree, either because the fisher ran up the tree to escape something or because it could be the site of their den.
- Fishers love to scavenge. Their tracks may be found close to dead animals.

Porcupines

- Porcupines will stay in trees for days rather than walk through deep snow.
 - When porcupines do venture through snow, their short legs and stout bodies have a plow-like effect.
 - Porcupine tracks also often include quill markings.
- Fun fact:** If you see a bunch of conifer-needle clippings littering the ground under a tree, chances are porcupines are snacking in the branches above!

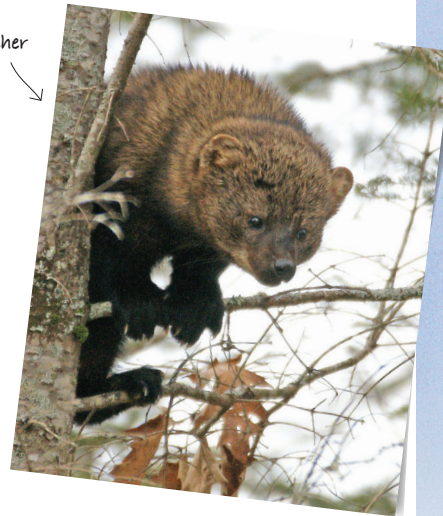
Bobcats

- Bobcat tracks show four toes but no claws — because cat claws are retractable!
- Bobcats walk in direct register, meaning their hind paw lands directly in the print of their front paw — the most efficient way to travel through snow.
- Bobcat tracks are rounder than the tracks of wild dogs.
- Just like house cats, bobcats are stealth hunters. Their tracks are often found on the perimeter of a clearing or sheet of ice.

Coyotes

- Coyote tracks are narrow and show four toes with claws. Like dogs, their close relatives, coyotes don't have retractable claws.
- Coyotes walk in direct register, so their hind paws land directly in the print of their front paws.
- Wild coyotes know where they are going, and their tracks are straight. This distinguishes them from the tracks of domestic dogs, which change direction and speed frequently.
- Tracks include frequent urine marking, similar to how domestic dogs mark while out on a walk.

Fisher



These otter tracks show five toes, with the front paw tracks and rear paw tracks close together!



KIRK'S TIPS FOR TRACKING

▶Go early in the morning. As it gets later in the day, the sun will melt away the details of animal tracks in the snow.

▶Don't bring your dog. Leaving your dog at home will keep it safe — no dog owner wants to deal with porcupine quills! — and help avoid disturbing the wildlife you're tracking.

▶Backtrack. When you find a set of tracks, don't follow them in the direction the animal was traveling. Instead, follow tracks back to where the animal came from. You might get to see something exciting, like its home, and you will avoid potentially scaring an animal off its food source.

FLIP OVER
to learn which
MCHT nature pre-
serves to visit for ani-
mal tracking, and why
conserving large areas
of land is important
to wildlife!



Porcupine



Why Is Land Preservation Important for Wildlife?

Seventy-five percent of Maine's native plants and animals are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. As temperatures warm, threatened species will have to move to survive, but too often development makes this impossible. "The most iconic one that comes to mind is moose," says Jeremy Gabrielson, senior conservation and community planner for Maine Coast Heritage Trust. "When I was in high school, I regularly saw moose in Cape Elizabeth, but that's far less common now." Local housing development alone doesn't explain their absence; rather, widespread habitat fragmentation has stopped the animals from traveling long distances. "A moose thinks twice before it crosses a roadway," Gabrielson says. "If you put enough obstacles in its way that make it think twice, it just won't continue."

While species like moose and bobcats have a large home range, smaller species also need to move around. A breeding population of pine martens, nocturnal mammals that live in conifer-dominated forests, can exist on a single piece of land, but in order to maintain that population, the offspring must go elsewhere. "With a lot of the mammals we have in Maine, the young will travel to a new area to find a mate," Gabrielson says. Amphibians, also common in Maine, breed in vernal pools and then spend time in the nearby upland. "They don't necessarily go far," Gabrielson says, "but a road between the place where they breed and the landscape where they will live as adults can have a serious, detrimental impact."

Maine Coast Heritage Trust is working to strategically preserve and connect large blocks of land to ensure enough habitat for animal populations to live out their lives. The resulting expansive corridors not only support Maine's flora and fauna, but also benefit humans who enjoy the solace of open and undeveloped space.

Take our guide to these MCHT preserves to look for signs of resident wildlife this winter!

► **WOODWARD POINT**

Located in Brunswick, this 87.5-acre preserve invites visitors to explore its trails in search of wildlife and picturesque scenes of northern Casco Bay.

Look for these tracks: Bobcat, coyote, otter, and porcupine

► **ERICKSON FIELDS**

This former Rockport dairy farm features a 1.8-mile trail and gardens where young people grow food for the community.

Look for these tracks: Bobcat, coyote, fisher, and porcupine

► **ROCKY LAKE**

Featuring nearly 6 miles of lakeshore and 3,057 acres in Whiting, this wildlife-rich preserve is a haven for outdoor enthusiasts throughout the year.

Look for these tracks: Coyote, fisher, otter, and porcupine

► **WITHERLE WOODS**

Located in Castine, Witherle Woods has a rich military history, offers pleasant views of Penobscot Bay, and features groomed cross-country-skiing trails.

Look for these tracks: Bobcat, coyote, fisher, and porcupine

To learn more about Maine Coast Heritage Trust preserves and to download this guide, visit mcht.org/nature-guide.



**Maine Coast
Heritage Trust**