

explorations

TRAVEL TIPS :: DAY TRIPS :: GETAWAYS

Glacial Park, Ledyard. PHOTO BY JAMIE VAUDREY, UCONN / FLICKR (CC BY-NC 4.0)



SNOWY animal tracks :: **LESSONS AT** Native American museums :: **CT'S ESTUARINE** research reserve



Backyard detectives

TRACKING WILDLIFE THROUGH FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW

BY BRIDGET SHIRVELL

When the snow flies and the wind howls, it's tempting to hunker down indoors snuggled under a pile of fluffy blankets, but dare to venture outside, and you and your family just may discover something new about your neighbors. Your wildlife neighbors, that is.

Connecticut is home to such a diversity of species, and fresh powder presents an opportunity to find proof of the wildlife that visits our backyards in the animal tracks left behind in the snow.

"The most common tracks found in yards are squirrel, raccoon, rabbit, turkey, skunk, possum, deer, fox, coyote and bobcat," says Jason Hawley, a black bear biologist with the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

Finding animal tracks in the snow can be the adventure that gets you and your family out of the house during the cold months, especially after a fresh snowfall. Typically, southeastern Connecticut gets its first snowfall in December, but November—and even October—snowstorms aren't unheard of.

Bundle yourselves up, and take a copy of the DEEP's animal track guide with you, or use your phone to snap pictures of the tracks to investigate later. Fresh and nearly melted snow is best for spotting critter tracks.

You can start simply in your backyard or with a walk around your neighborhood. If, however, you want to make it more of an outing, pack a snack and head to the trails at Mystic's Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center, Waterford's





bobcat



coyote



Harkness Memorial Park or even the Connecticut College Arboretum. Keep in mind that if you're hoping to find animal tracks in your backyard according to the DEEP, you'll be more likely to have animal visitors if you keep outdoor lights off.

Walk slowly and pay close attention to areas near bushes, where animals may sleep at night, and around trees, where birds and squirrels skitter around looking for food.

Once you spy some tracks, the fun of identifying them begins.

Deer tracks tend to be pretty easy to identify. Look for two long imprints with a gap in between. The tracks will be about three inches long.



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rabbit



raccoon



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