

# Animal Tracks and Traces

by Mary Holland



# Animal Tracks and Traces

Animals are all around us. While we may not often see them, we can see signs that they've been there. Some signs might be simple footprints in snow or mud (tracks) and other signs include chewed or scratched bark, homes or even poop and pee (traces). Children will become animal detectives after learning how to "read" the animal signs left all around. Smart detectives can even figure out what the animals were doing! This is a perfect sequel to Mary Holland's *Animal Anatomy and Adaptations* series.

Animals in this book include: female yellow-bellied sapsucker (title page), opossum, gray squirrel, raccoon, wild turkey, north American river otter, moose, white-tailed deer, red fox, black bear (on cover and inside text), coyote, beaver, white-footed mouse, and humans.

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The *For Creative Minds* includes

- Who Has Eaten Here?
- Whose Track is This?
- Animal Signs to Look For
- Other Animal Signs

Thanks to Hannah Gelroth, Director of School Programs and Teacher Professional Development at the Vermont Institute of Natural Science for verifying the accuracy of the information in this book.

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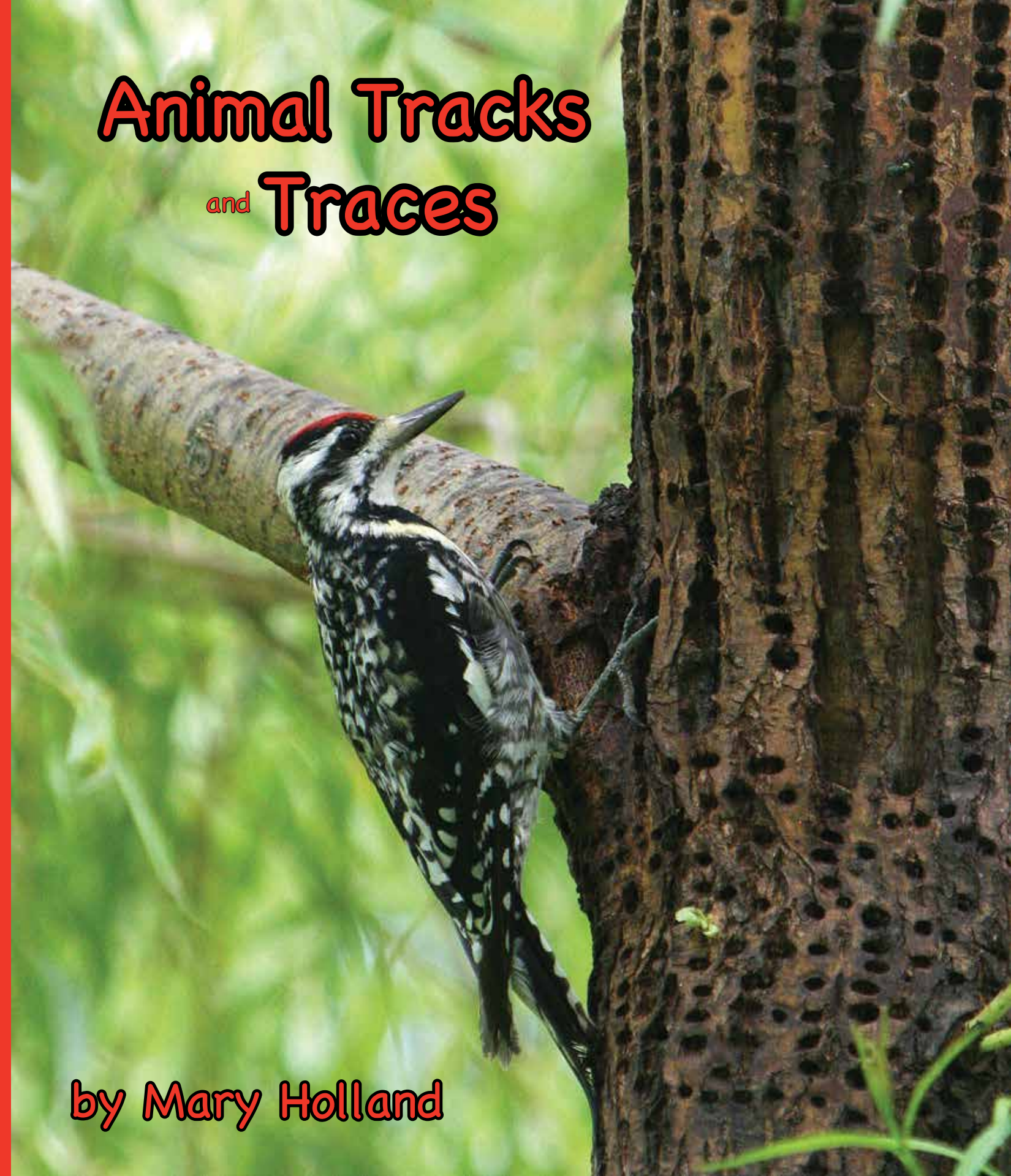
**Mary Holland** is a naturalist, nature photographer, columnist, and award-winning author with a life-long passion for natural history. After graduating from the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources, Mary worked as a naturalist at the Museum of the Hudson Highlands in New York state, directed the state-wide Environmental Learning for the Future program for the Vermont Institute of Natural Science, worked as a resource naturalist for the Massachusetts Audubon Society, and designed and presented her own "Knee-High Nature Programs" for libraries and elementary schools throughout Vermont and New Hampshire.

Her other children's books with Arbordale include *Otis the Owl*, *Ferdinand Fox's First Summer* (NSTA / CBC Most Outstanding Science Trade Book and Moonbeam Children's Book Award), *The Beavers' Busy Year*, *Yodel the Yearling*, *Animal Ears*, *Animal Skins*, *Animal Noses*, *Animal Tails*, *Animal Eyes*, *Animal Legs*, and *Animal Mouths* (NSTA / CBC Most Outstanding Science Trade Book). Mary's book *Naturally Curious: a Photographic Field Guide and Month-by-Month Journey Through the Fields, Woods and Marshes of New England* won the 2011 National Outdoor Book Award for the Nature Guidebook category. *Naturally Curious Day by Day* was published in 2016. Mary lives in Vermont with her lab, Greta. Visit Mary's blog at [naturallycuriouswithmaryholland.wordpress.com](http://naturallycuriouswithmaryholland.wordpress.com).



Mary Holland

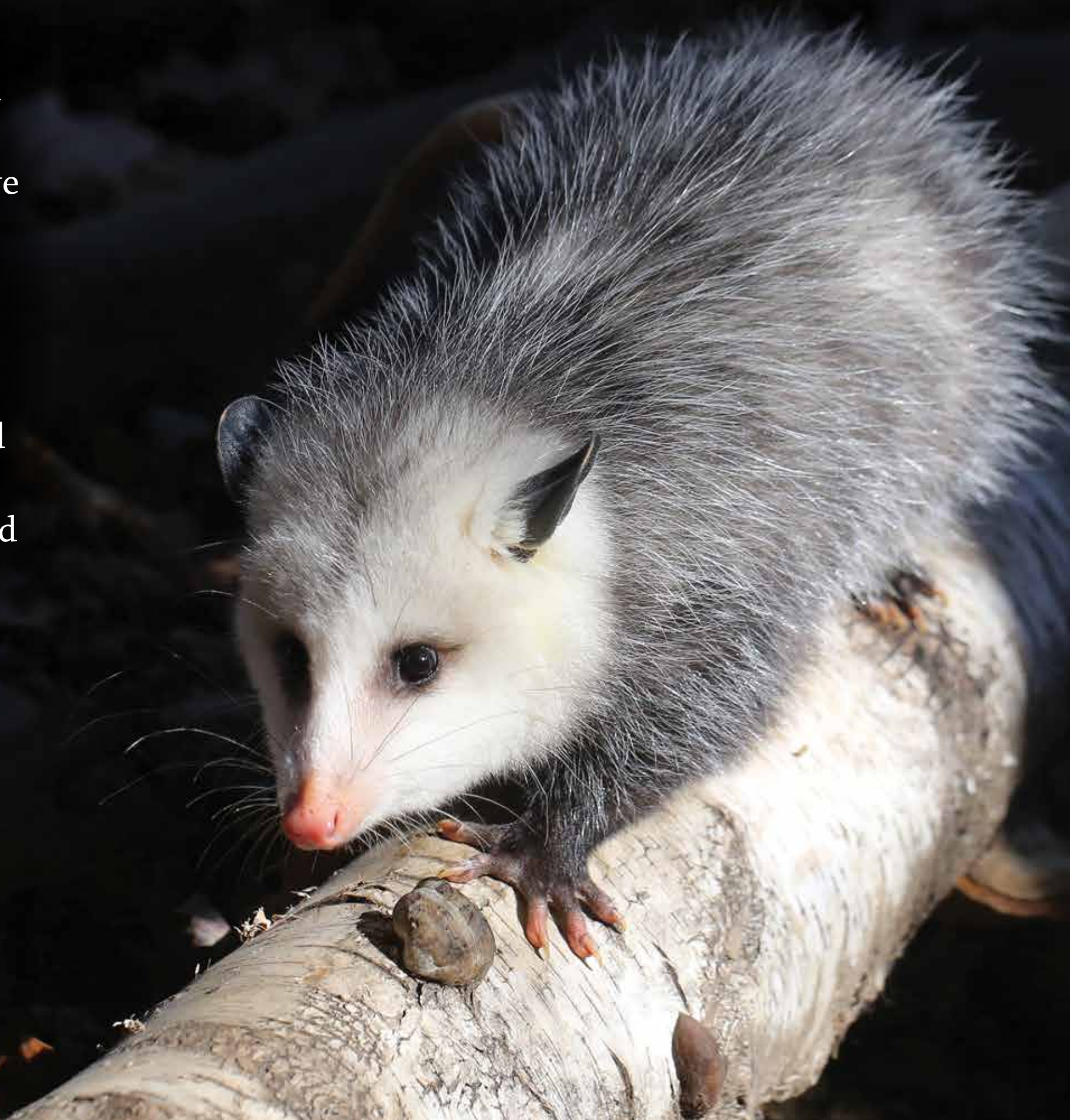
# Animal Tracks and Traces



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Have you ever seen a skunk? A raccoon? Or an opossum? Most people haven't because these animals are active at night (nocturnal) when we are sleeping. Then they are asleep during the day when we are awake.

Wherever nocturnal animals go, they leave all kinds of traces. It's fun to go outside during the day and look for their signs. The tracks and other traces of animals may tell you who has been there, where they went and what they did during the night.





When an animal walks in dirt, sand, mud or snow, they leave tracks (or imprints of their feet) where they have stepped. Notice where you find tracks. Do they go along a stonewall? Are they near a stream? Do they cross a field? If they go from tree to tree, a squirrel may have made them.



When you look at an animal's track, you will often see toe prints. Different animals have different numbers of toes. Raccoons have five toes. Bobcats have four toes, and deer have two toes. When you find an animal's track, count the number of toes and that may help you know who made it.

The toes point in the direction the animal is travelling. Which way is this raccoon going?



Most birds have four toes: three in front and one in the back. Many birds fly more than they walk, but wild turkeys walk more than they fly. Look for their tracks in the snow.



## For Creative Minds

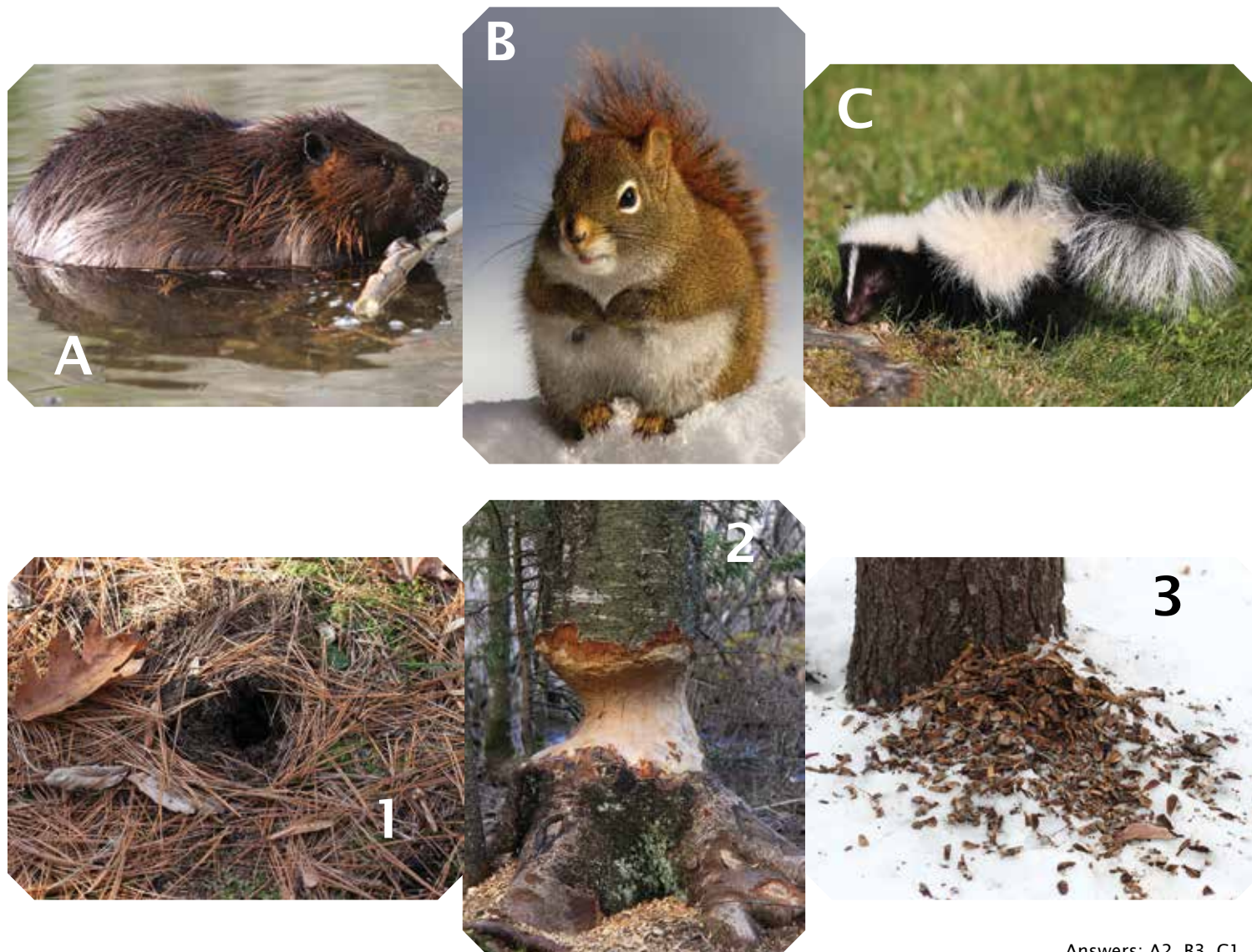
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### Who Has Eaten Here?

Match each animal to its food sign.

- A. Beavers cut down trees with their teeth and eat the bark.
- B. Red squirrels eat seeds in cones and the uneaten scales drop to form a pile (midden).
- C. Striped skunks dig little round holes in the ground looking for insects.



Answers: A2, B3, C1

### Whose Track is This?

Match each animal with its track.



A white-tailed deer walks on two toenails.



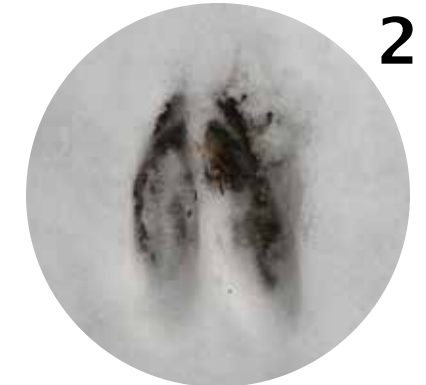
Dogs have four toes.



Fishers and other weasels have five toes.



Birds have three toes in front and one in back.



Answers: Deer-2; Dog-1; Fisher-4; ruffed grouse-3

## Animal Signs To Look For

Animals leave all kinds of signs that they have been there, not just tracks. Look for some of these other animal signs around you.



spider web



feather



cocoon



holes in leaves  
chewed by  
insects



bird-wing marks



bird nest



animal's  
home



skull



bald-faced  
hornet nest



frog eggs



owl pellet



scat

## Other Animal Signs



**Fly:** Inside the round “ball” found on some goldenrod stems (gall) is a young fly waiting until spring to come out.



**Beaver:** Beavers mark their territory by building piles of mud and leaves (scent mounds). They leave their scent (castoreum) on the scent mound which tells other beavers to stay away.



**Honey bee:** Honey bees usually build their wax combs in tree cavities, but sometimes they build them out in the open.



**Pileated woodpecker:** Pileated woodpeckers drill big holes in trees looking for carpenter ants to eat.



To my favorite track detectives: Otis, Lily Piper and Leo—MH

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Holland, Mary, 1946- author.

Title: Animal tracks and traces / by Mary Holland.

Description: Mt. Pleasant, SC : Arbordale Publishing LLC, [2020] | Includes bibliographical references. | Audience: Ages 4-9 | Audience: Grades 2-3

Identifiers: LCCN 2019033032 (print) | LCCN 2019033033 (ebook) | ISBN 9781643517476 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781643517520 (trade paperback) | ISBN 9781643517827 (ebook other) | ISBN 9781643517728 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Animal tracks--Juvenile literature. | Animal behavior--Juvenile literature.

Classification: LCC QL768 .H65 2020 (print) | LCC QL768 (ebook) | DDC 591.47/9--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019033032>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019033033>

Lexile® Level: 610L

key phrases: animal behavior

Title in Spanish: *Las huellas y rastros de los animales*

Animals in this book include: female yellow-bellied sapsucker (title page), opossum, gray squirrel, raccoon, wild turkey, north American river otter, moose, white-tailed deer, red fox, black bear (on cover and inside text), coyote, beaver, white-footed mouse, and humans.

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Printed in China, December 2019  
This product conforms to CPSIA 2008  
First Printing

Arbordale Publishing  
Mt. Pleasant, SC 29464  
[www.ArbordalePublishing.com](http://www.ArbordalePublishing.com)

