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The Wirral Ship Fellowship – Wirral Vikings

hunting & tracking

The skills required for hunting and tracking

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hunting & tracking were essential skills to the Anglo Saxon and Viking landsmen 1000 years ago.

It would be part of the essential skills required to maintain food stocks for a harsh winter. Just like the fishermen who's catches could be processed for winter use by smoking or salting the hunters job would be obtain fresh meat for preserving for the long winters.

Some animals could be trapped in various ways but most have to be tracked and tracking was an entire skill in itself.

A tracker does not follow footprints but follows the signs related to the movement of the animal through it's environment.

These signs can be broken down into a number of categories.

Tracking

Tracking uses a series of clues to define where an animal walks.

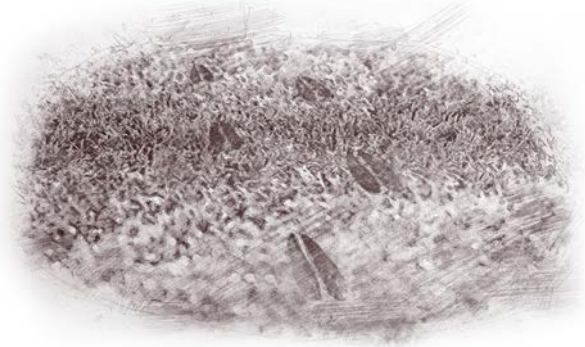
The basic signs can be broken down into a few categories.

- Distribution
- Pressure
- Deposits
- Colour
- Discard
- Disturbance

distribution

Nature has a strange way it creates uniformity.

The natural world creates an even distribution of elements like grasses or fallen leaves. When an animal disturbs this uniformity its tracks can be spotted. The regular pattern pressed into mud or sand.



pressure

As animals travel they depress the ground they travel over.

This might be created by an animal walking or when they are at rest. The area of pressure will be easily noted by the experienced tracker.

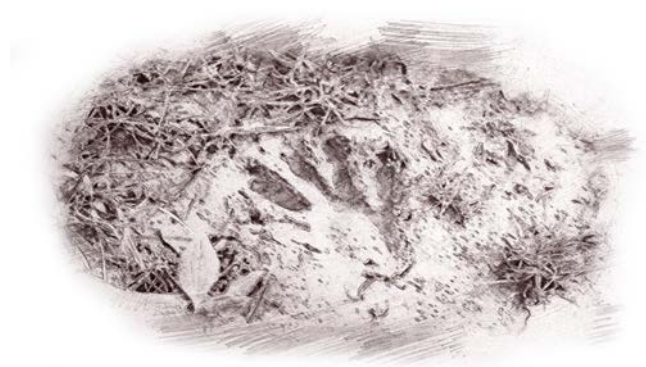
other item as they move through the environment. Faeces is also an item that can be found on an animals journey through the environment.

disturbance

Disturbance is a change in the environment that does not correspond to one of the options above.

These may be broken twigs or bushes disturbed with broken stems, sediment in water moving about. Insects disturbed by the passage of an animal.

These disturbances are changes in the natural order of things.



looking into the clues

A tracker must use all the clues at their disposal in order to follow the trail.

A tracker must use all the clues at their disposal in order to follow the trail. The track must combine all the clues in order to track the animal they are following. This may mean very limited footprints but by combining with other clues they may be able to follow the pray.

Remember – Follow the signs, not the footprints.



deposits

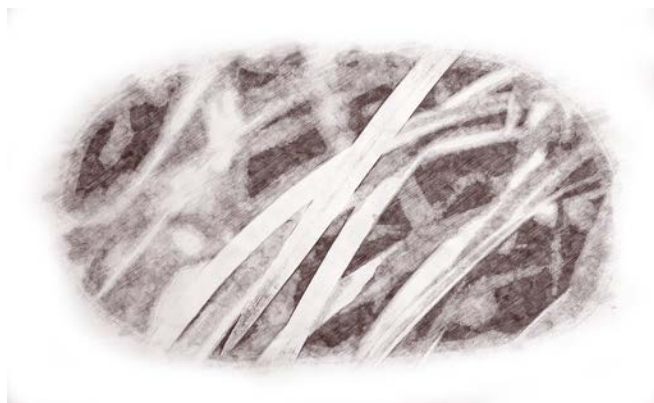
Talking elements from one location to another.

An example of this would be an animal walking through a muddy field and then onto a grass area. Some of the mud might then drop off the animals hooves for example onto the grass. The deposits are the transfer of elements from one area to the next.

colour

Animals walking through an area can interact with foliage and cause minute change in colour.

The breaking of grasses as an animal walks can cause colour change in grasses or leaves. Animals can also cause colour changes on dry leaves when they disturb the top layer and reveal a darker more wet underside of the leaf.



discard

Discards are the material animals may leave behind.

Discards are the material animals may leave behind. The discarded material might be hair dropped naturally or caught on a branch or

hunting

Hunting animals for food in ancient times would use hunting or trapping.

Whereas fishermen might use hooks or nets to catch fish the Hunter would either use trapping or hunting with a bow.

Trapping uses various types of snares and trapping methods depending upon the animal you hope to catch. Trapping would usually be used for small animals with trap set by their usual runs or pathways.

Hunting with a bow will utilise a number of different techniques depending upon the environment the hunter is in and the prey he is hunting.



Types of hunting include:

- Stealth Hunting
- Spot & Stalk
- Ambush
- Calling
- Ground Hunting
- Raised Hunting
- Hide Hunting
- Dense Cover Hunting

stealth hunting

Stealth hunting require the hunter to move quietly and stealthily.

This method of hunting that requires the hunter to move slowly and quietly through the environment, carefully observing their surroundings and staying alert for any signs of game.

This technique is suited for heavily wooded areas or dense vegetation where game animals are likely to seek cover. The goal of stealth hunting is to stalk the game in their natural habitat without alerting them to the hunter's presence.

This technique requires hunters to exercise extreme patience and have keen observational skills. They will use their tracking techniques to observe animal tracks, droppings, and other signs of recent activity. Stealth hunters often rely on their knowledge of animal behaviour and habits to anticipate the movements of their target species.

spot & stalk

This method of tracking involves the Hunter spotting the game and then picking the best route to narrow the distance to the animal until bow range.

Spot & stalk involves the hunter spotting the target animal from a distance and then carefully close the gap to get within bow range.



This technique is particularly effective in open terrains such as grasslands or rocky hills, where visibility is good, and spotting game from afar is possible.

By taking to the high ground the hunter can scan the landscape for signs of the animals. Once a potential target is located, the hunter must plan their approach, taking into consideration wind direction, terrain features, and any available cover to remain concealed.

Spot & stalk hunting is physically demanding as it often involves covering significant distances on foot while closing in on the target.

It requires both mental acuity and physical endurance to execute the approach effectively.

ambush hunting

In this technique the hunter finds a concealed location, such as a tree or ground hide, and waits for the target to come within bow range.

This method is highly effective near animal trails, feeding areas, water sources, or other areas with known animal activity.

This hunting requires patience, as hunters may spend long hours waiting for the right opportunity. Hunters should remain motionless and silent while in the stand or blind, as any sudden movement or noise can alert nearby animals.

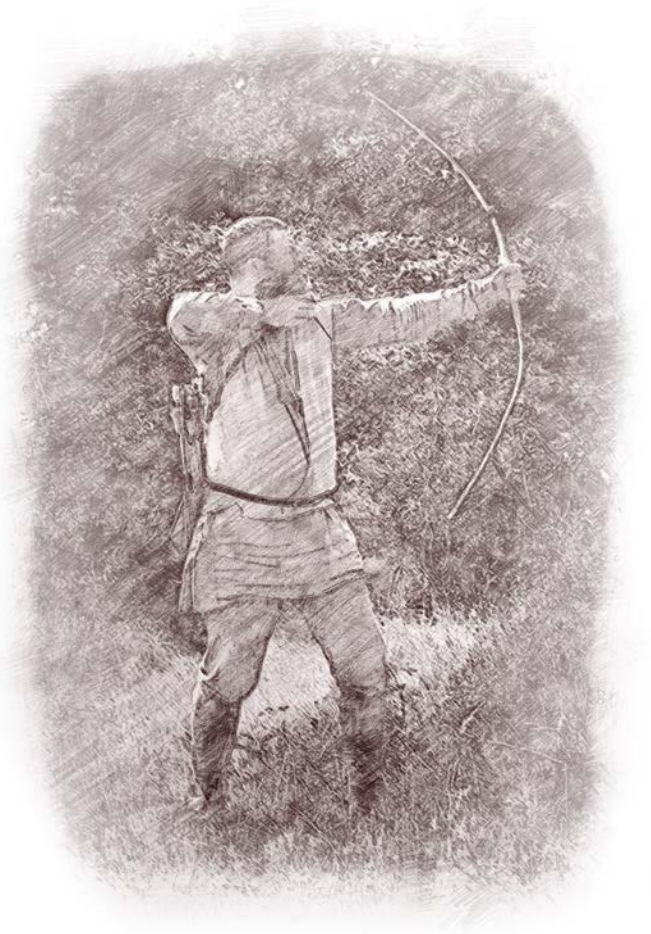
Hunters must be ready to draw and release their arrows quickly and accurately when the moment arises.

calling

Calling are specialized techniques used to attract game.

This method is highly effective for hunting elusive species, such as deer, as it mimics the sounds of fighting or mating animals, sparking their curiosity or aggression.

For instance, deer hunters use grunt calls to replicate the sounds made by receptive does or dominant bucks seeking to assert their presence.



ground hunting

Ground hunting involves a stalking game at eye level.

Ground hunting keeps the hunter on the same level as the animals.

Ground hunting is well-suited for areas with dense vegetation or hilly terrain, where a more hands-on approach is necessary to get close to the game. To be successful, hunters must blend into their surroundings.

The main challenges of ground hunting is getting close enough to the target without being detected. Animals have keen senses and can easily pick up on any unusual sounds, scents, or movements.

ecosystems. Hunting slingshots are primarily used for hunting small birds and animals.

raised hunting

Raised hunting is a method that places the hunter high above the ground in a tree or elevated platform.

The raised position provides a unique view of the surrounding area.

Raised hunting is advantageous when hunting deer, placing the hunter above the deer's line of sight, reducing the chances of being detected. Raised platforms offer a safety advantage, keeping away from the animal's immediate vicinity.



hide hunting

Hide Hunting uses natural hides to conceal the hunter from the animals they are hunting.

Hide can be portable like cloaks, or camouflaged shelters that offer hunters an chance to observe and wait for animals to pass.

Natural hides are created using natural vegetation or terrain features, allowing hunters to blend into the natural environment.

It is effective when hunting in areas with known animal trails, feeding grounds, or water sources. By remaining hidden, hunters can wait for their target to come within bow range, increasing their chances of a successful shot.

dense cover

Stalking in thick cover demands exceptional stealth.

This technique is used by experienced hunters who are comfortable traveling through dense vegetation.

Hunters move cautiously and quietly through the terrain, utilizing natural cover to remain undetected by The animals.

This method is most effective when hunting animals that seek refuge in thick vegetation, such as wild boar.

animal tracks

This section shows a series of footprints that might have been seen 1000 years ago.

These are a series of animal that might have been seen around Wirral during the time of the Hiberno Norse inhabitants of the Wirral.

We will show the real footprint, an example in situ and some information about the animals.

beaver

Caster Fiber (Genus)

These dam-building rodents can transform their local environment by creating new wetland habitats.



Beavers have brown fur, a flat, broad tail and huge orange teeth. One of the largest members of the rodent family, beavers can weigh as much as 30kg and measure well over a metre from head to tail.

Beavers are herbivores and do not eat fish as commonly thought. Their diet is made up of aquatic plants and grasses, as well as the bark, twigs and leaves of trees.

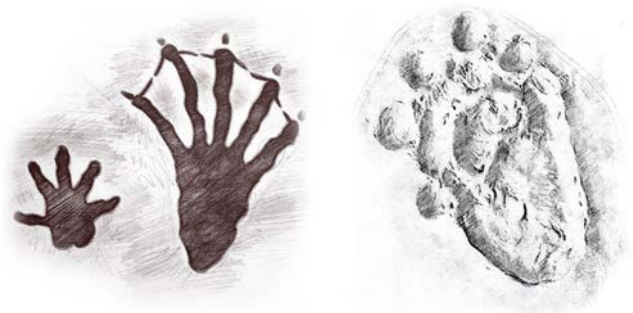
Beavers were originally hunted to extinction in the UK around 500 years ago. In 2009, the Scottish Government approved a trial reintroduction at Knapdale, Argyll. However, these were not the first beavers to return. A few years earlier, beavers were discovered on the

River Tay, having either escaped from captivity or been illegally released. In 2010, a similar situation occurred on the River Otter in Devon, with a population of unknown origin discovered.

Beavers build dams to restrict water flow and create ponds of still, deep water. Within these ponds they construct lodges in which they live, safe from predators. Beavers use their huge teeth to fell trees and divide them up into smaller branches, which are dragged into place to build the dams. Lodges are made of sticks and branches held together with mud, which also provides insulation.

Fresh water surrounded by woodland is ideal beaver habitat, providing both food and shelter. The rodents are crepuscular, meaning they are most active at dawn and dusk. To be in with a chance of seeing one, visit an area where beavers are known to be present.

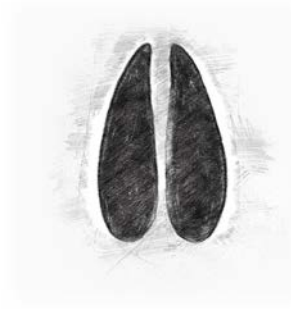
Quietly watch the water and listen out for any splashing or gnawing sounds. It's much easier to see signs of beaver activity than to spot the animal itself. Felled trees, stripped branches, dams and lodges are all evidence that beavers are active in an area.



Fallow deer

Dama (Genus)

The name fallow is derived from the deer's pale brown colour.



Fallow deer were originally confirmed native only to Turkey, but potentially native to the Italian Peninsula, the Balkans, and the island of Rhodes in Greece; introduced from Roman times onwards to the rest of Europe and UK and around the world in more recent times.

They have been part of the UK since being introduced by the Romans for food and escaped like so many introduced animals do.

Deer prints have two oblong and pointed toe impressions that sit alongside each other, making the shape of an upside-down heart.

Different species of deer can be hard to tell apart, but generally, the diminutive muntjac leaves tracks that are about 3cm long, while the impressively large red deer leaves tracks up to 9cm long.

red deer

Cervus elaphus (Genus)

The red deer is one of the largest deer species. A male red deer is called a stag or hart, and a female is called a hind.



century have brought their number back up.

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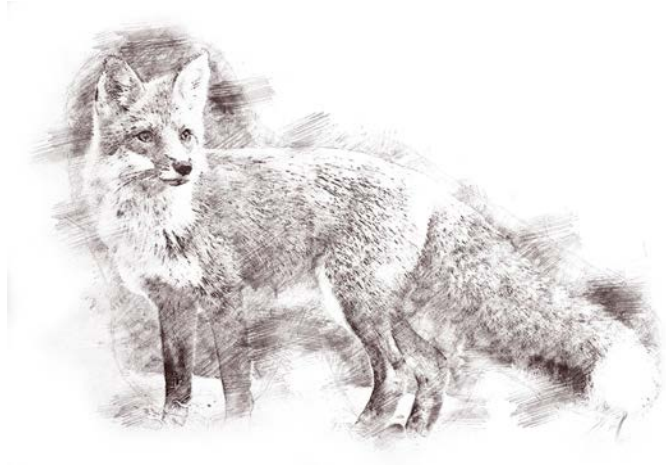
The red deer inhabits most of Europe, the Caucasus Mountains region, Anatolia, Iran, and parts of western Asia. It also inhabits the Atlas Mountains of Northern Africa; being the only living species of deer to inhabit Africa. Red deer have been introduced to other areas, including Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, Peru, Uruguay, Chile and Argentina. In many parts of the world, the meat (venison) from red deer is used as a food source.

European red deer have a relatively long tail compared to their Asian and North American relatives. Subtle differences in appearance are noted between the various subspecies of red deer, primarily in size and antlers.

During the viking period red deer were fairly common but due to excessive hunting they became rare. Recent projects in the last

FOX

Vulpes Vulpes (Genus)



Russet-red fur, pointed ears and a bushy tail make the fox unmistakable. Often smaller than people imagine, they typically weigh 5–8 kg and stand around 40cm at the shoulder.

Foxes are opportunistic omnivores and this allows them to survive in a wide range of habitats. Rabbits and field voles are common prey, but a fox's diet can include everything from worms and beetles to deer fawns and fruit. In the Viking period foxes would come into homesteads looking for any food discarded by people.

Foxes are social animals and live in loose family groups. These are normally made up of a breeding male, female and their young. Mating takes place in winter and this is when foxes are at their most vocal, barking and screeching loudly as they look to attract a mate and fend off rivals.

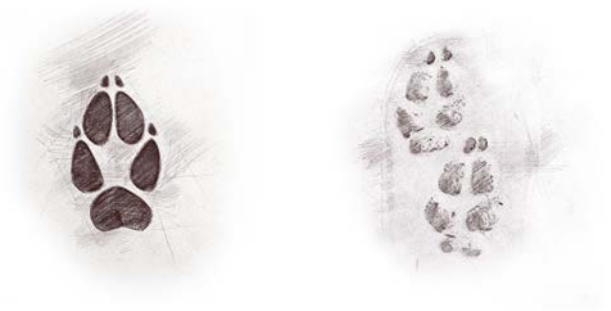
Come spring, the female will give birth to a litter of cubs in an underground den. Normally, four or five cubs will be born and they will be cared for by both the male and female.

By autumn, the cubs are fully self-sufficient. Some will leave to establish their own territories, while others may remain with the family group. Those that stay sometimes help their parents to raise the following year's young.

Foxes are crepuscular, meaning they are most active around dawn and dusk, but it is not unusual to see them during the day.

Even if you don't spot a fox in the woodland, you may see signs of their presence.

Fox poo, known as scat, is often deposited on footpaths and prominent spots such as molehills and rocks. It is normally twisted and will contain remains of the fox's food, such as fur and bones.



otter

Lutra (Genus)



Otters are carnivorous mammals in the subfamily Lutrinae. The 13 extant otter species are all semiaquatic, aquatic, or marine, with diets based on fish and invertebrates. Lutrinae is a branch of the Mustelidae family, which also includes weasels, badgers, mink, and wolverines, among other animals.

The word otter derives from the Old English word *otor* or *oter*. This, and cognate words in other Indo-European languages, ultimately stem from the Proto-Indo-European language root **wódr*, which also gave rise to the English word "water"

An otter's den is called a holt or couch. Male otters are called dogs or boars, females are called bitches or sows, and their offspring are called pups or cubs. The collective nouns for otters are bevy, family, lodge, romp (being descriptive of their often playful nature) or, when in water, raft.

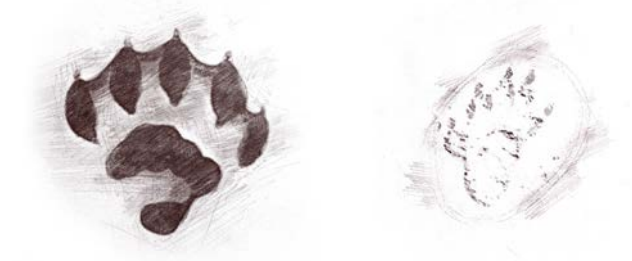
The gestation period in otters is about 60 to 86 days. The newborn pup is cared for by the bitch, dog, and older offspring. Female otters reach sexual maturity at approximately two years of age and males at approximately three years. The holt is built under tree roots or a rocky cairn, more common in Scotland. It is lined with moss and grass.

After one month, the pup can leave the holt and after two months, it is able to swim. The

pup lives with its family for approximately one year. Otters live up to 16 years; they are by nature playful, and frolic in the water with their pups. Its usual source of food is fish, and further downriver, eels, but it may sample frogs and birds.

Otters have long, slim bodies and relatively short limbs. Their most striking anatomical features are the powerful webbed feet used to swim, and their seal-like abilities for holding breath underwater. Most have sharp claws on their feet and all except the sea otter have long, muscular tails. The 13 species range in adult size from 0.6 to 1.8 m (2.0 to 5.9 ft) in length and 1 to 45 kg (2.2 to 99.2 lb) in weight.

Footprints are webbed and large (up to 9cm long and 6cm wide), with five toes and a large rear pad impression. Claw marks aren't usually visible, and sometimes only four toes imprint, but if it's a muddy area, you might just see the distinctive 'drag' of a tail.



red squirrel

Sciurus (genus)

The red squirrel or Eurasian red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) is a species of tree squirrel in the genus *Sciurus* common throughout Europe and Asia.



The red squirrel is an arboreal, primarily herbivorous rodent.

The red squirrel has a typical head-and-body length of 19 to 23 cm (7+1/2 to 9 in), a tail length of 15 to 20 cm (6 to 8 in), and a mass of 250 to 340 g (9 to 12 oz). Males and females are the same size. The red squirrel is somewhat smaller than the eastern grey squirrel which has a head-and-body length of 25 to 30 cm (10 to 12 in) and weighs between 400 and 800 g (14 oz and 1 lb 12 oz).

The long tail helps the squirrel to balance and steer when jumping from tree to tree and running along branches and may keep the animal warm during sleep.

Red squirrels occupy boreal, coniferous woods in northern Europe and Siberia, preferring Scots pine, Norway spruce and Siberian pine. In western and southern Europe they are found in broad-leaved woods where the mixture of tree

and shrub species provides a better year-round source of food.

The red squirrel is found in both coniferous forest and temperate broadleaf woodlands. The squirrel makes a drey (nest) out of twigs in a branch-fork, forming a domed structure about 25 to 30 cm in diameter.

This is lined with moss, leaves, grass and bark.

Tree hollows and woodpecker holes are also used. The red squirrel is a solitary animal and is shy and reluctant to share food with others. However, outside the breeding season and particularly in winter, several red squirrels may share a drey to keep warm.

The red squirrel eats mostly the seeds of trees, neatly stripping conifer cones to get at the seeds within, fungi, nuts (especially hazelnuts but also beech, chestnuts and acorns), berries, vegetables, tree sap and young shoots.

This is the common bounding pattern of a red squirrel in snow. When it bounds, or hops, its smaller front feet land first, and then the larger hind feet pass to the outside and around the front feet to land in front of them.



wulf

Canis lupus (genus)

The wolf (*Canis lupus*;[b] pl: wolves), also known as the gray wolf or grey wolf, is a large canine native to Eurasia and North America.



More than thirty subspecies of *Canis lupus* have been recognized, including the dog and dingo, though gray wolves, as popularly understood, only comprise naturally-occurring wild subspecies.

The wolf is the largest extant member of the family Canidae, and is further distinguished from other *Canis* species by its less pointed ears and muzzle, as well as a shorter torso and a longer tail.

The wolf is nonetheless related closely enough to smaller *Canis* species, such as the coyote and the golden jackal, to produce fertile hybrids with them.

The wolf's fur is usually mottled white, brown, gray, and black, although subspecies in the arctic region may be nearly all white.

The English "wolf" stems from the Old English wulf, which is itself thought to be derived from the Proto-Germanic *wulfaz.

The Proto-Indo-European root *wĺkʷos may also be the source of the Latin word for the animal lupus (*lúkʷos). The name "gray wolf" refers to the grayish colour of the species.

Since pre-Christian times, Germanic peoples such as the Anglo-Saxons took on wulf as a prefix or suffix in their names.

Examples include:

Wulfhere ("Wolf Army"),
Cynewulf ("Royal Wolf"),
Cēnwulf ("Bold Wolf"),
Wulfheard ("Wolf-hard"),
Earnwulf ("Eagle Wolf"),
Wulfstān ("Wolf Stone")
Æðelwulf ("Noble Wolf"),
Wolfhroc ("Wolf-Frock"),
Wolfhetan ("Wolf Hide"),
Scrutolf ("Garb Wolf"),
Wolfgang ("Wolf Gait"),
Wolfdregil ("Wolf Runner"),

Wolf tracks can be identified by the following characteristics:

- Claws evident,
 - General oval shape,
 - Track is longer than wide,
 - 4 toes, symmetrical,
 - Single lobe on the front of the main foot pad
- The tracks are about 5 inches long by 4 inches wide, and are larger than coyote tracks.
- Wolves "single-track", meaning their hind feet prints fall on top of their front prints, while dogs have proportionally wider chests than wolves do, which causes their rear feet to fall beside rather than on top of the prints made by the front paws.



Tracking quiz

Can you tell which animal belongs to which set of tracks?

