

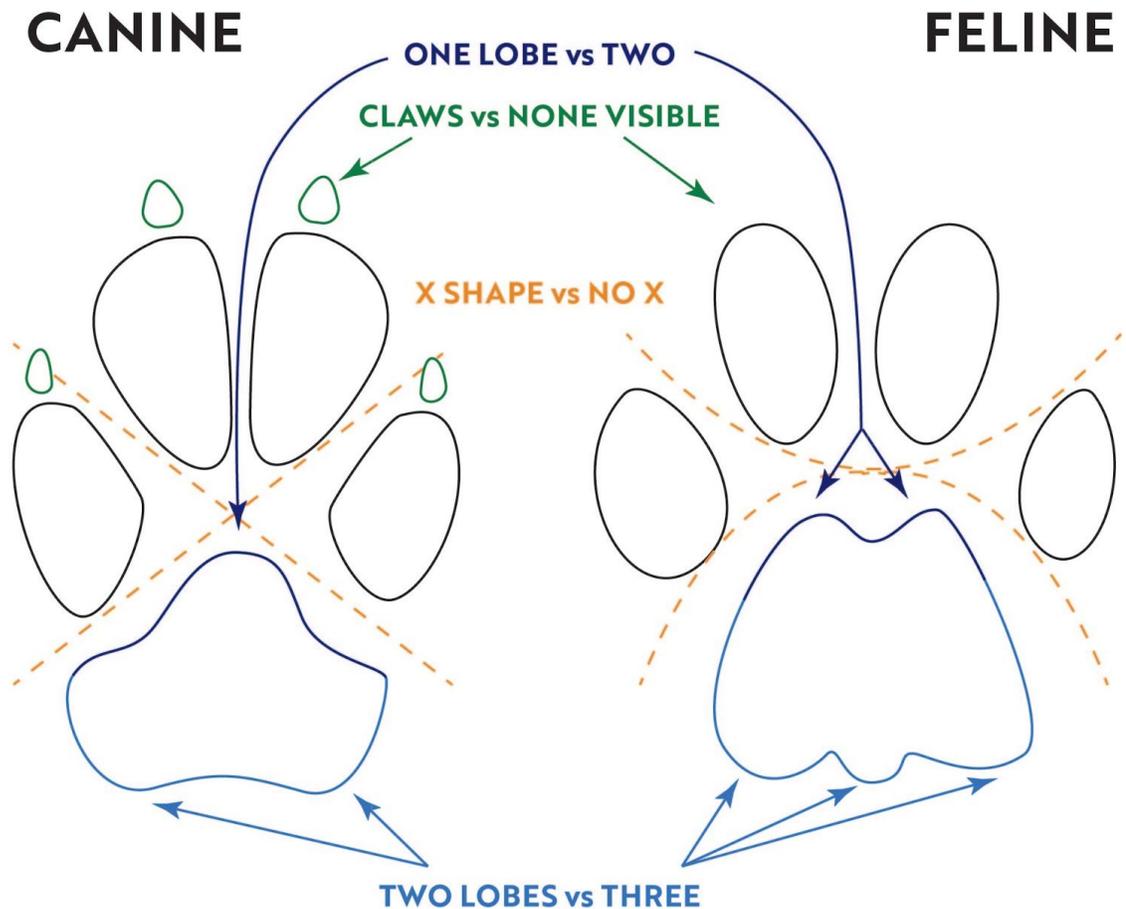
Wild Animal Tracks

Pre-Activity Questions

- Have you ever found animal tracks?
- Do all animals make the same tracks?
- What are some differences between our tracks and an animal like a dog?

Activity

- A lot of times, scientists won't actually see an animal, but they can rely on animal signs to know what kinds of animals are in an area. One of these signs are tracks.
- Animals in the same family often have similar tracks that can help you tell them apart from other animals. For example, cats and dogs both have 4 toes, but there are some key differences. Let's look at the diagram below.



Create Your Own Animal Track Plot

Materials

- Sifter or pasta strainer (a rolling pin or hammer can also be used)
- Bucket
- Shovel

Steps

1. Go into your yard and clear away about one square foot of sticks and leaves until the soil below is exposed. This is your plot.
 - If you do not have a space for this, you can also use a shallow tray on your patio, porch or path. Just make sure it isn't a tripping hazard!
2. Using a **shovel**, dig up the dirt, keeping the plot fairly level. Place the dug-up dirt in a **bucket**.
3. Put the dirt from the bucket into the **sifter** or **pasta strainer** and sift onto your plot, spreading out the dirt to create a fine layer of soil.
 - If you do not have a sifter, break down dirt clots as best as you can with a rolling pin or hammer.
4. Test your plot by placing a hand or foot in the soil and see if you left a print. Resift soil to reset your plot.
5. Leave your plot overnight and come back each morning to check.

Helpful tips

- Try placing things like small pieces of apple or carrot in the middle of the plot.
- If you want to attract a carnivore, make your plot slightly larger (roughly 2x2). Dig a hole roughly 6 inches deep and the width of a toilet paper tube. Lure them to the plot with the smell of a small piece of meat placed in the hole.

Post-Activity Questions and Activities

- What animals came to your plot?
- Did you find more than one set of tracks?
- Sketch the tracks you find. Don't forget to measure and take pictures!
- BONUS: Try this in various parts of the yard – are there some areas that have more tracks than others? Why or why not?
- Test your animal track identification skills [here](#).
- For a deeper dive into evidence of California wildlife, [Field Guide to Animal Tracks and Scat of California](#) is a wonderful resource.