

Survival and Food

Animal Food Identification 1

Background

According to the Rule of Threes, a person cannot go without food for more than about three weeks and that is assuming a minimal amount of labor. However, in a survival situation, just finding food can take major effort let alone what it takes to prepare it safely. Animals and plants both come with their own set of complications and ultimately food *production* (agriculture) is the only way to really ensure a steady supply of food but at least in the short term, a person in a survival situation must live off the land once his/her supply is exhausted. In this lab, we will take a look at one of the fundamental skills needed to identify and attract potential animal food sources.



Animal vs. Vegetable

It is not uncommon these days to find several people in a typical social circle that are vegetarians. In fact, it is becoming more and more popular. This form of diet is perfectly acceptable from a nutrition point of view but there is scientific evidence supporting the fact that this type of diet *does* result in certain vitamin deficiencies. Conversely, a meat heavy diet also has its own set of liabilities which are just as well known.

However, in a survival situation, some important decisions need to be made about food. Most important among these decisions is a basic fact that there are no vertebrates with poisonous flesh in North America. This of course assumes the animal is cooked first to kill any bacteria, viruses, etc. but in all truth, the flesh of any mammal, bird or freshwater fish in North America is safe to eat. Plants, on the other hand, are much more dangerous fare and multitudes of poisonous plants exist across North America. In short, eating wild plants (especially berries) is much more dangerous than eating meat without considerable expertise to know the difference between an edible plant and a poisonous one (see Figure 1). For this reason, we are going to start with understanding a little bit more about animal attracting and identification, the predecessor of trapping.



Figure 1: At left are the berries of *Hedera helix*, otherwise known as the European Ivy while at right are the berries of *Gaybussacia*, the Huckleberry. While eating wild huckleberries is quite safe and they are often used in cooking (esp. pies, ice cream, muffins, etc.) and even in traditional medicine for treating infections, eating the berries of the European Ivy would quickly lead to vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhea. Would *you* be able to tell the difference?

Understanding Animal Behavior

The biggest problem in adding meat to a diet in a survival situation is that it has to be caught first and this can be quite a challenge. Aside from actively hunting for meat which takes considerable skill, energy and technology, trapping is the smarter way to go. Once set, traps require minimal maintenance and energy outlay so while the traps are waiting for prey, the user can engage in other worthwhile activities like shelter building or procuring drinkable water. But keep in mind that trapping is an art form. Do not forget that in trapping, the trapper is trying to entice an animal, often equipped with considerable intelligence and guile, to place its foot in perhaps a 2" snare in order to spring the trap all without the trapper even being there. This takes considerable skill to say the least and the first skill does not even require the use of a snare.

Using “Signposts”

In trapping, a signpost is something that is used to identify what kinds of animals are frequenting an area the trapper wants to use to catch food. If the trapper is familiar with an area or has seen obvious signs of animal activity, this might not be necessary but quite often it can save valuable time in the long run and should be considered. What a trapper is trying to create with a signpost is a lure for local wildlife to come and take a look so that the animals that visit can be identified, typically by their tracks. Then, once the visiting animals can be identified, more effective traps can be set for the animals present. A signpost is *not* intended to trap or kill any animals so that should not be a worry if you have strong feelings about this. We will not be killing anything as part of a lab.

Making a Signpost

Find an area where frequent animal activity is likely and place a firm stick in the ground. Around the stick, clear an area about 5 feet in diameter so that the surface remaining is likely to capture imprints of any animal that comes in to investigate the stick. You might have to place some fine sand, soil, etc. in the area to capture prints detailed enough to identify their source. The finer the surface, the better the tracks will be (see Figure 2).

Once set up, any kind of visual or scent attractant can be used to lure animals in for a look. Often times, a combination of both is very effective. Like humans, other animals are creatures of habit and will notice when something is different about their surroundings and are naturally curious.

Don't worry about your own “scent control”. Perhaps you've heard about how mammal mothers will abandon their young if they smell humans on their babies. This is largely untrue and in a suburban or urban area, the smell of humans and our belongings is practically on everything. Plus, many suburban animals have come to depend on humans for handouts or garbage so tend to be attracted to the scents rather than be repelled.

Bait your signpost with something that you think might attract wildlife and then let nature take its course. This will no doubt be a waiting game so you need to leave some time aside for animals to come in for a closer look. They might be quite wary at first but over time and if the signpost does not look dangerous, most animals will come in for a closer look.



Figure 2: A typical signpost with tracking area around it.

For bait, consider the following. Scavengers will be attracted to flesh especially once it is rotting so small amounts of meat, fish or the like will be strong attractors pretty quickly. Smaller animals and birds might be attracted by piles of seeds or fruit. It all depends on what you are trying to attract. However, do not forget that, in order to attract animals, the signpost must show them something unusual. Trying to attract a squirrel with a pile of acorns in an oak tree forest will probably not be successful. However, leaving some walnuts with their shells cracked open to release the scent of the nut might be just the ticket. You are going to have to make the animal curious by showing it something it has not seen locally. You will have to *generate* curiosity. Remember, most animal activity revolves around eating, sleeping or breeding...that's it. This means that most of their behavior is predictable over time and rather straight forward. Your goal is to try and figure out what the patterns are.

Instructions

- Find one or more locations where wild animal travel seems likely and prepare a signpost.
- Bait the signpost and wait for animal activity to be recorded on the ground at the site. Remember, in order for you to progress to Part 2 of this lab, you must have some type of animal tracks to work with so if at first you do not succeed, reset the signpost until you can gather some data.
- Photograph any animal tracks with a measuring tool in the photo for scale (ruler, tape measure, etc.) Both the length and width of the tracks should be measured (see Figure 3). Be sure to photograph directly top down so there is no distortion.
- Complete the datasheet on the following page.

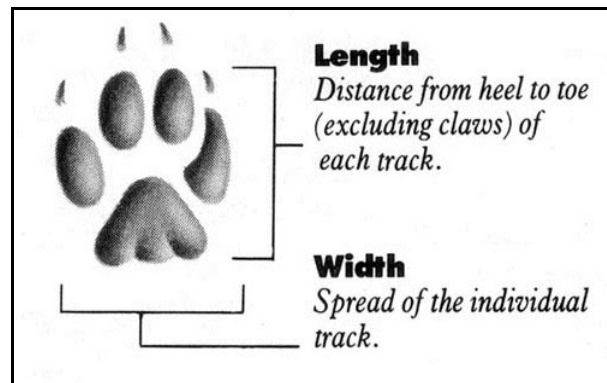


Figure 3: How to measure animal tracks.

Name _____ **EXAMPLE** _____ Period _____ **EXAMPLE** _____

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Signpost Observation Sheet

Date/Time Set 21Apr20 1400 hrs.	Date/Time Checked 22Apr20 0600 hrs.
Attractant/Bait Fish guts	Location Description Light forest, nearby creek approx. 50 ft away High level of undergrowth/cover for animals Multiple mammal tracks in area prior to bating

Track Evidence w/ Measurements and Description (Photos)



Print measures 2 3/4" (7.0 cm) long w/out claws and 2 1.2" (6.35 cm) wide.

Claws visible on all toes. Obvious "splayed" impression.

Overall quality good.



Print measures 2 7/8" (7.3 cm) long w/out claws and 2 1/2" (6.35 cm) wide.

Claws visible on all toes. Tight configuration of toes.

Overall quality fair.

Overall track width 4 5/8" (11.75 cm) wide.
Possible front and rear track from same animal.
Non overlapping prints.