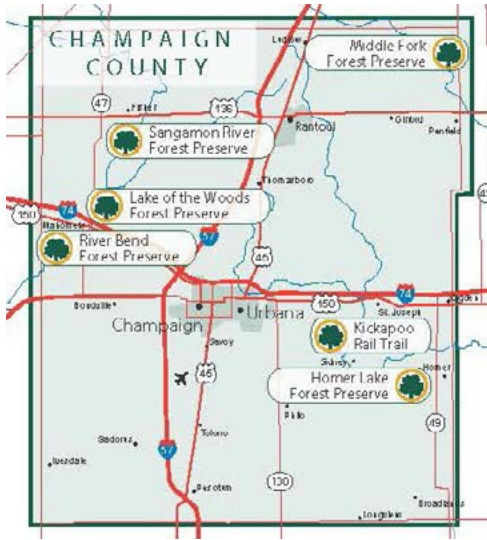


About CCFPD

The forest preserves are great places to visit year round, with loads to see and do in the winter. Explore snow-covered forests, frozen lakes and wetlands, and frosted, windblown prairies.



Winter Activity Guide



Make more of your winter with CCFPD

1. Visit all 6 forest preserves. Check out www.ccfpd.org for more information.
2. Try out sledding; especially at the sledding hill at Homer Lake Forest Preserve.
3. Say 'hi' to the animals at the Homer Lake Interpretive Center. Visit www.homerlakecenter.org for open hours.
4. Check out the night sky at the first and only International Dark Sky Park in Illinois-Middle Fork River Forest Preserve. Visit www.ccfpd.org for more information and directions.





What's Inside

The days are getting colder and darker, but don't let that stop you from exploring nature in the winter. There are loads of things to do outdoors and lots of wildlife to spot this time of year.

This booklet is full of ideas and activities to guide you as you explore nature, whether you are at one of the forest preserves or in your own backyard.

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Burrows: Burrows is a hole or tunnel in the ground made by an animal. It could be anything from mice to ground hogs to even crayfish.



Deer Antlers: Male White-tailed deer grow antlers starting in the spring. Their antlers fall off in late winter after mating season.



Cocoons: many animals, including spiders and insects, make cocoons. In the picture is a moth cocoon. The caterpillar will stay in the cocoon all winter and emerge as a moth in the spring.



Bird feathers: Birds molt, or shed, their feathers year-round. Winter is the perfect time to find them, especially if there is snow on the ground.



Beaver gnaw: Beavers eat the inner bark of trees and use trees to make their homes. Keep your eyes out for these chewed on trees, also called beaver gnaws.

Hidden Treasures

Winter is a great time to search for things animals have left behind. Make dash marks next to the things you find on your winter hike.



Squirrel Nest: Squirrel nests, also called dreys, are built high up in trees, usually where two limbs meet.



Paper Wasp Nest: Paper wasps construct their nest out of dead wood and plant materials. The nests are usually gray or brown. You can find them hanging high up in trees or on the eaves of buildings.



Bird Nest: Birds make a lot of different types of nests but winter is the easiest time to see them. Not all of them look like the nest pictured.



Chewed nuts: Animals leave behind partially eaten food like the walnut in the picture. This walnut was chewed on by a squirrel. Can you see the teeth marks?

Tips for a Great Outdoor Adventure

Heading outside in the wintertime is exciting, but make sure you are prepared. Here are some tips to help make the most of your outdoor adventure.

1. Plan ahead. Research where you are heading. For example, if you are going to one of the Champaign County Forest Preserves, visit www.CCFPD.org where you can find trail maps, open hours, attractions and highlights, and driving directions. Also, be sure to check out the weather before heading out to make sure there won't be any winter storms approaching.
2. Dress properly. In the wintertime, always wear multiple layers of clothing, that way you can remove some layers if you get warmer. Better to be too warm than too cold. A hat, gloves, and a scarf are always a good idea too. Be sure to wear shoes and socks that will keep your feet warm and dry.
3. Respect nature. Never chase or harass wildlife. This may cause them to use up valuable energy needed for survival. Always leave a natural area in better condition than you found it in. Please don't let trash become litter.
4. Be persistent. Don't be disappointed if you can't find the animal you were hoping to see. Learn to recognize the signs that animals leave behind, such as tracks, scat, and chewed food, which can give you clues about what animals were there.



Winter Wildlife Detective

Winter is the best time to sharpen your wildlife detective skills! To survive winter, animals must be able to keep warm and find food and water. The animals that can't do this either migrate to somewhere warmer or sleep the winter away (hibernate).

Animals that stay active in the winter leave clues behind. As a detective you can find these clues to figure out what the animal is and what it was doing.

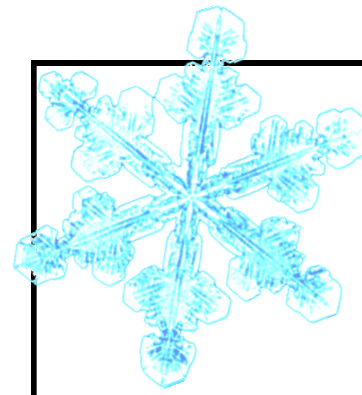
Owls eat smaller birds and rodents, and consume them whole. They can't digest the bones, feathers, fur, and teeth, so that is hacked up later in the form of a pellet. You can find these pellets underneath trees, especially evergreen trees, year round.



All animals poop. These animal droppings, also known as scat, can tell you that an animal was there. And since animals eat different things, their scat is also different.



Animal tracks (footprints) can tell you what kinds of animals are around. Many are the familiar mammals, like squirrels and rabbits, but many tracks are of mammals that only come out at night. Animal tracks can tell you about where the animal might have been going and what it might have been doing.



Did You Know.....

It can take anywhere between ten minutes and one hour for a snowflake to reach the ground. Sometimes, they get carried back up into the sky and it takes longer for them to reach the ground.

Did You Know.....

In January 1887, a Montana rancher reported snowflakes "larger than milkpans." That would make them around 38 centimeters (15 inches) across.

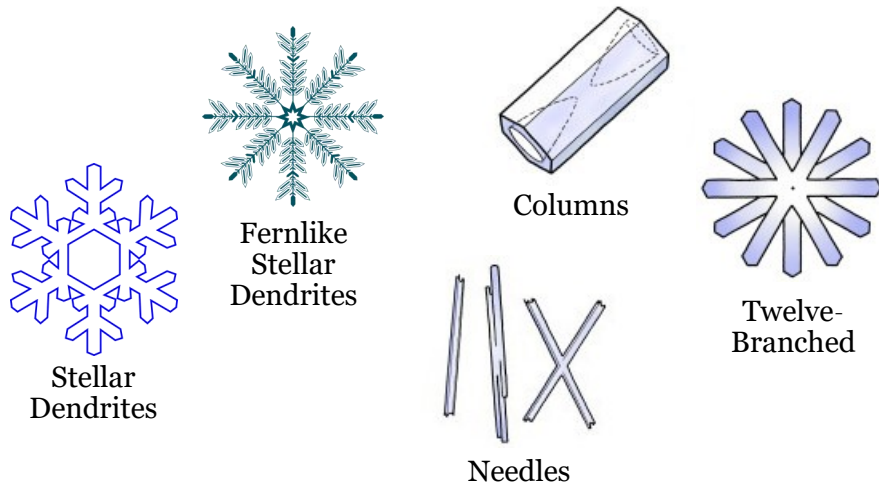
Snowflake Explorer

Snowflakes form from moisture in a cloud. When there is too much liquid water in a cloud, it will try to rid itself of the excess. If the temperature is right, some of that excess can flash freeze into crystals. For a snowflake to form, dust and pollen from the air attach to water particles. As the particles continue to fall, other water molecules will attach to it, creating different shapes.

You can become a snowflake explorer by catching them before they reach the ground. Try catching them on a dark surface-this can be your coat sleeve or a dark piece of paper. Draw the different snowflakes you are able to catch on the next page.

How many different types of snowflakes did you discover?

There are many different shapes of snowflakes. Here are a few examples.



Animal Scat

Here are some of the most common kinds of animal scat that you can find in Illinois. Match the animal to its scat.

Answers on the bottom of the page.



Coyote

A





Canada Goose

B





White-tailed Deer

C





Gray Squirrel

D



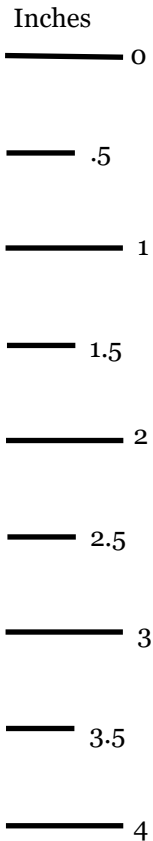
Answers: Coyote (A), Canada Goose (B), White-tailed Deer (C), Gray Squirrel (D)

Animal Tracks

Winter is the perfect time to track animals because of the snow. An animal track is an imprint left behind in soil, snow, or mud, by an animal walking across it.

Can you match the animal to its track? *Answers at the bottom.*

Use this ruler to measure tracks that you find.



Red Fox



Coyote



Opossum



White-tailed Deer



Gray Squirrel



Raccoon



Virginia Opossum



Downy Woodpecker



Chickadee



Coyote



Blue Jay



Red-tailed Hawk



Raccoon



Barred Owl

Be aware some of these animals are harder to find than others. If you find a clue the animal left behind-like a track or scat-you can count it.

Spotting Winter Wildlife

Make dash marks next to the animals you see this winter.
Which animal are you seeing the most this winter?



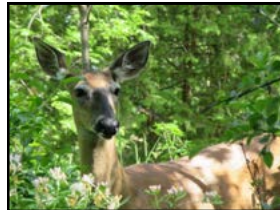
Canada Goose



Eastern Cottontail



Gray Squirrel



White-tailed Deer



Fox Squirrel



Northern Cardinal



Dark-eyed Junco



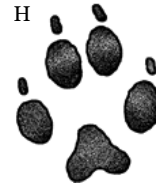
Red Fox

F: Front foot

H: Hind or back foot

B

H



F



F: 2"

H: 2"

D

F



F: 2"

H: 1.8"

H



E



F: 2.5"

H: 2.5"

A



F: 2.5"

H: 2.25"



C

H



F



F: 2"

H: 2.5"

F

F



F: 1.5"

H: 2.5"

H



Answers: Red Fox (B), Coyote (A), Gray Squirrel (F), White-tailed Deer (E), Opossum (C), Raccoon (D)

Animal Tracks (cont'd.)

Animal tracks can be difficult to identify. Check out this key to help you narrow down the animal that left the track behind.

How Many Toes?	Track Shape	Animal
4 toes on front, 4 toes on back	Back track is oval	Rabbit
	Round, no claw marks	Cat
	Oval with claw marks	Dog, Coyote or Fox
5 toes on front, 5 toes on back	Small and human hand-like	Raccoon
	Back foot 'thumb' sticks out	Opossum
	All others	Skunk, Mink, Weasels
4 toes on front, 5 toes on back	Tiny (1/2 - 1 inch)	Mice, Chipmunks or Shrews
	Medium (1-2 inches)	Squirrels
	Large (3-6 inches)	Muskrat

In the upper left hand corner: a fox is walking. In the lower left corner: a squirrel is slowly walking (probably looking for food).
The fox sees the squirrel and starts running towards it (the tracks are further apart). The squirrel, seeing the fox, runs and climbs the tree (the squirrel tracks change when it starts running).

Answer to 'What Happened In This Picture'

What Happened In This Picture?

A series of tracks may reveal whether an animal was running or walking, whether it was traveling with another animal and in what direction. They can even show a predator following its prey.

Take a look at this picture. Can you figure out what is happening? Once you figure it out, check out the answer on page 8.

