

6. Deer Yards

Kortright is home to White-Tailed Deer. You may see their tracks in the snow or mud (see below). Deer do not fare so well in deep snow. Their small, pointy hooves sink into the snow, and moving in deep snow can be difficult and tiring. Deer respond by moving into “deer yards”. These are stands of ever-green trees with a dense canopy of needles that keep a lot of snow from reaching the ground. Snow depth under these trees can be up to 60% less than under deciduous trees, or in meadows. Check out the snow under the spruce trees in front of you—how deep is the snow there, compared to the meadow just beyond? Deer also will tend to use the same paths to stay away from fresh, deep snow. Parts of Kortright’s Forestry Trail have stands of tall hemlocks with dense needles. Stands like those make excellent deer yards.



White-Tailed Deer



Deer Tracks in Snow (with enlargement)

Trail Map



Please note:

Trail conditions are variable in winter due to weather conditions. Please remain off trails that are marked closed.



Check us out on Facebook and Twitter and let us know what animals you have seen!

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We hope you enjoyed using our self-guided trail pamphlet, feel free to bring this pamphlet home with you or return it to the desk in the visitors centre so others can enjoy it (and we can conserve paper). There will be a different self-guided trail pamphlet available each season to help you experience nature in a whole new way. Thank you for visiting the Kortright Centre for Conservation. Come back soon!

Winter Tracks and Signs at Kortright

Please enjoy this self-guided hike around the Kortright trails. You can find a map of the trail referenced in this guide on the back page.

It is difficult to catch a glimpse of live animals on a hike in the forest. Most animals have excellent senses and can hear or smell us long before we see them. The animals that are around have either disappeared into a hole or shelter, moved away from our path or are sitting so still we don't see them. What's easier to find are the tracks and signs left behind by all these secretive creatures as they escape from our view. Use this brochure to help you learn about what may be around as you enjoy the Kortright trails.

Check out the back page for a map of the trail and look for numbered signs along the trail. The numbered paragraphs below match the signs on the trail.

1. Birdfeeders

Stop, look, listen and use all your senses! From where you stand, you can see a couple of birdfeeders along the trail; as you continue you'll pass by many more. Birdfeeders offer a great opportunity to see wildlife in the winter. Below are pictures of some common winter birds that frequent our feeders. You may even get a chance to see a red or eastern grey squirrel taking advantage of fallen seed. Look for both bird and squirrel tracks in the snow around the feeders. Maybe you'll also see tracks from other animals who have visited the feeders to feed (on the seed, or on some unlucky birds!). Our birdfeeders are technically for the birds only; the upside down pail on the pole beneath the feeder is supposed to keep squirrels off the feeders. Squirrels are quite determined and they usually find a way of getting onto them. Some have been seen climbing up a tree nearby and leaping on to the birdfeeder from above!

Did you know? The birds you see are on a constant mission to get enough food to keep themselves fed and strong enough to survive the harsh winter season. Some birds need to eat their weight in nutritious food that is high in fat every single day! Could you imagine a person weighing 140 pounds having to eat 140 pounds of food a day just to survive the cold season?! Though the birds can manage without our help, the little boost in food supply helps them out. If you decide to feed the birds at home, just be sure you're ready to commit for the whole season.



Black-capped Chickadee



White-breasted Nuthatch



Mourning Dove



Red-breasted Nuthatch



House Finch



Blue Jay



Dark-eyed Junco



Northern Cardinal

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Bird at Tree Cavity

2. Tree Cavities

Not all cavities are bad! Look at the tree with the hole in front of you. Scientists call tree holes *cavities*. This tree has quite a large cavity, but unlike our teeth, it doesn't need a filling nor does the tree need to be pulled out.

Tree cavities have so many uses!

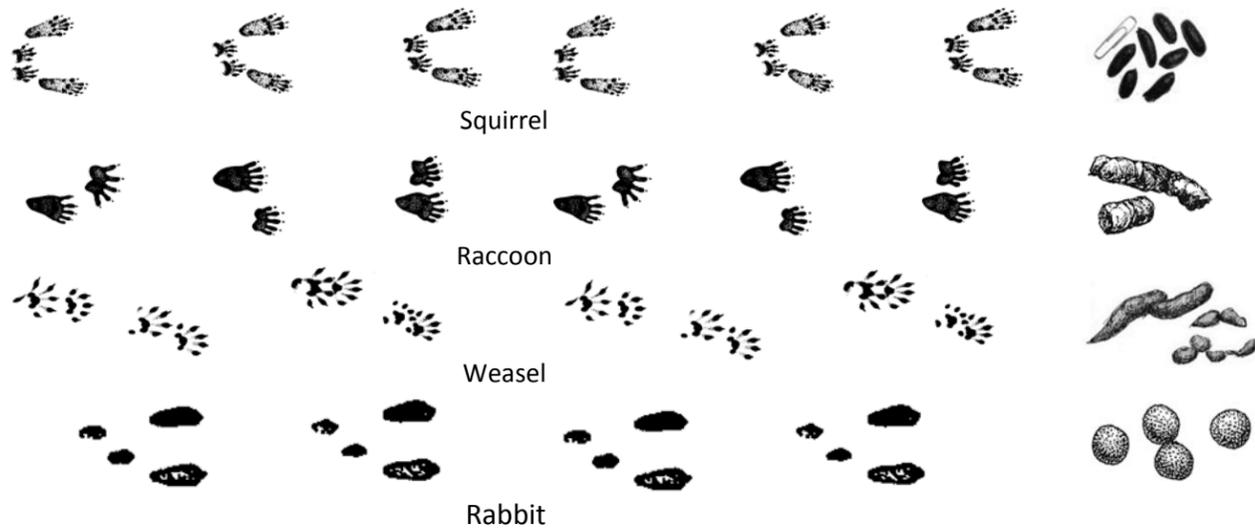
Depending on the size, shape, and location, a cavity may be used by various species of birds, mammals, reptiles or amphibians for: nesting and raising young, denning, roosting, resting, feeding, caching (hiding) food, escaping predators and hibernating! Some animals, like woodpeckers, are primary cavity users, these animals excavate their own holes. Other animals, like raccoons and owls are secondary cavity users, they use holes that were created by other animals or appeared naturally through

injury to the tree, decay or disease. How do you think the hole in this tree is being used during the winter?

Did you know? A tree cavity like the one at #2 would be a mighty fine place for a fuzzy raccoon to rest. Though they don't hibernate, during winter's extremely cold stretches raccoons may sleep for several days in a row using a cavity like this one for shelter. Some young raccoons will leave their mother in the fall, others will remain with her through the winter. Staying with mom may certainly help during those cold winter stretches so that mom and kit (young raccoon) can snuggle together to stay warm. By spring, the mother raccoon will send away any remaining young from the previous year as she makes room for her new litter. A litter of raccoons is technically called a gaze or nursery of raccoons!

3 . Tracks and Scat

If there is snow on the ground or muddy sections of path, you can look for tracks. Tracks show us lots of things! With practice you can tell what type of animal left the track and what direction it was going. Scat is a fancy term for animal feces. Scat is an animal sign that humans commonly overlook because it is viewed as dirty. Scientists study scat to learn about animal behaviour, diversity and diet. While on your hike, take a closer look at the animal droppings on or by the trail. You can usually tell what the animal has been eating by looking at the scat. When you get good at it you can tell what kind of animal left the scat behind. Use the guide below to identify some of the common tracks and scat along the trail. Don't touch the scat you find. Some animal scat, like that from raccoons can contain harmful diseases. It's always best to leave scat alone unless you're with a professional.



Red Squirrel

4. Squirrels

Listen carefully; can you hear a chittering or rattlesnake-like sound coming from somewhere in the trees? Whenever you hear that sound you know that there is an angry, defensive red squirrel nearby. Most likely, the red squirrel's hostile disposition is due to its constant state of having to protect its impressive food store or cache, which it works year round to fill. It has been reported that a red squirrel's cache in some extreme cases, holds enough seeds and nuts to fill an area the size of a garage! On average, most food caches are under one cubic metre, which is still an impressive size. There are often red squirrels running around and through this large old stump here, maybe they have a cache of seeds and nuts nearby. Look for squirrel tracks in the snow around this area.

Did you know? Eastern grey squirrels (which are the more common, larger squirrels in local cities, and can actually be brown, black or grey) do not cache their food all in one place like the red squirrels, instead they have one hiding spot for each individual nut or seed they collect in preparation for winter. The eastern chipmunk on the other hand, has an underground home complete with a nest, storage spaces for food, a toilet area, and an entry way and escape hole. During the winter, the chipmunk will stay in its burrow and sleep for most of the time, waking occasionally to grab a bite to eat from its stores while its two different squirrel cousins are above ground protecting a large cache or searching for hidden food.

5. Owls

Whooo's there? Owls, such as the great horned owl, like to roost high up in the conifers. If you're really lucky you might get a chance to see an owl roosting nearby. Owls also leave behind "pellets" at the base of trees they roost in. An owl pellet is formed from the indigestible parts of the food the owl has consumed (fur, feather and bones). The owl then regurgitates this indigestible material in a nice clean package called a pellet. Ornithologists (people who study birds) can learn a lot about an owl's eating habits by dissecting and studying the contents of owl pellets. If you want to learn more about owls, check out our evening owl prowl events taking place in January and February.



Great Horned Owl

Did you know? Owl eyes are so large that they can't move them in their sockets. Owls turn their heads to look around instead of their eyes. Contrary to popular belief, they are not able to turn their heads a full 360 degrees. Rather, due to the higher number of vertebrae in their necks, (14 compared to the 7 that humans have), they are able to turn their heads from one side to the other a total of 270 degrees. Try turning your head from one side to another while keeping your eyes fixed. It's harder than it sounds.