Skills Session: Animal Identification

Time Frame

1 hour

Materials

• Local animal guides
• Charts, posters, and handouts from state or federal conservation agencies

Resources

• Boy Scout Handbook—chapter 4, “Second Class Scout”

Goals

By the end of this session, participants will be able to

• Demonstrate knowledge and respect for animals in their community.
• Explain how they will create the desire to learn more about animals.
• Discuss and identify signs, tracks, nests, and additional evidence of animal life in their community.

Assignments

• Identify or show evidence of at least 10 kinds of wild animals (birds, mammals, reptiles, fish, mollusks) found in your community.
Before You Begin

This session can be taught separately or combined with the Plant Identification skills session in the form of a leisurely walk through the camp area.

Lesson Plan: Animal Identification

By using charts, posters, and other resources, participants will be able to identify signs of wildlife in their area. They will discover things like where animals live, what they eat, how they survive, how they raise their young, and whether they prey on other creatures.

Kinds of Wild Animals

A handy chart in the Boy Scout Handbook tells about the different kinds of wild animals: birds, mammals, reptiles, fish, amphibians, invertebrates (insects, spiders, crustaceans, snails, clams, oysters, mussels, squids).

How to Find Evidence of Animals

Observers use a number of techniques to find evidence of animals.

• Looking—tufts of fur caught on twigs, overturned stones, shells on a shore, a feather on the ground; movement in the brush, in the water, and in the sky

• Listening—the buzz of insects, croaking of frogs, birdsong, chatter of a squirrel or raccoon, slap of a beaver’s tail, silence

• Smelling—the aroma of flowers, trees, earth, moss, stagnant water, saltwater

• Touching—vibrations in the air, changes in water temperature or activity

Most of all, finding evidence of animals takes patience.

Tracking

Every animal traveling on land leaves tracks—footprints, bent grass, broken twigs, chewed leaves, scat, rubbed bark, a shiny strip of slime—that teach you much about the creatures themselves. Tracking takes practice—in your yard, alongside rivers, and in parks, fields, and forests. Here’s how.

• Find some tracks to follow left in winter snow, soft soil, or in pebbles and brush that have been disturbed.

• Study a single track and fix its details in your mind—even measure and sketch it.

• Track early in the morning or late in the day, when shadows cast in the prints make them easier to see.

• Think like an animal—where would you go if you were the animal?

See the Boy Scout Handbook for more details about tracking animals.

Activity

In conjunction with the nature trail and walk for the Plant Identification skills session, walk through the trail area and identify signs of animal life, as well as areas that animals would inhabit. Practice these Leave No Trace principles: Leave What You Find, and Respect Wildlife.