

## What's That Scat?

All Ages

Every animal poops, and almost every kid loves talking about it. So you might as well dig a little deeper and understand it! There is plenty to learn from scat, the forest word for poop, including which species live and move around in your neighbourhood. Not only all that, scat often tells what those critters are eating. Sometimes, even when we do not see the animal, we can tell what it was doing just by looking at the droppings (another word for poop).

Scat Detectives pay attentions to;

- ⇒ Size and Shape
- ⇒ Location— type of habitat and where in that habitat the poop was plopped.
- ⇒ Content—use your eyes for this first, then sturdy sticks if you must take it apart— be sure to sanitize your hands when done.
- ⇒ Smelling scat is not necessary (nor safe). If it smells, it is pet poop, move on.



Little dark droppings on leaves may be from a caterpillar.

**Size and Shape**— Scat comes in all sizes and shapes.



Deer drop small oval pellets in a large cluster in more open spaces.

The food an animal eats (its diet) and the size of the organs in its digestive tract affect the size and shape of the droppings. Deer are large animals but have a small colon opening (part of digestive tract). Their droppings are small and often confused for Rabbit scat.



Rabbit scat is round. Clusters of rabbit droppings and nipped twigs are signs of rabbit visitors.

**Herbivore** (plant eater) scat is usually in the form of compact roundish or oval pellets full of plant fibres.

**Carnivore** (meat eater) scat is usually long, thin and tube-like with a point at one or both ends. It often contains bone bits, feathers, or fur. It can be very dark to black if the animal was eating meaty bits and light and full of fur if it was eating bones and hide. Local carnivores include the fox, coyote, mink, weasel and fisher.

**Omnivores** eat meat and plants. Their tube-shaped, lumpy, blunt-ended scat (looks like a Tootsie Roll) can contain seeds, bone bits, feathers, fur and plant fibres. Raccoons and skunks are common local omnivores. Foxes and coyotes will eat fruit and berries in season, but they still make pointy poop.

**TIP:** Record your scat-hunting adventures in a pocket journal. See page 4 for instructions.

For hands-on learning, try a **Scat Snack** for yourself (the activity is under *Projects*). You may have to close your eyes to eat these tasty but gross looking treats.



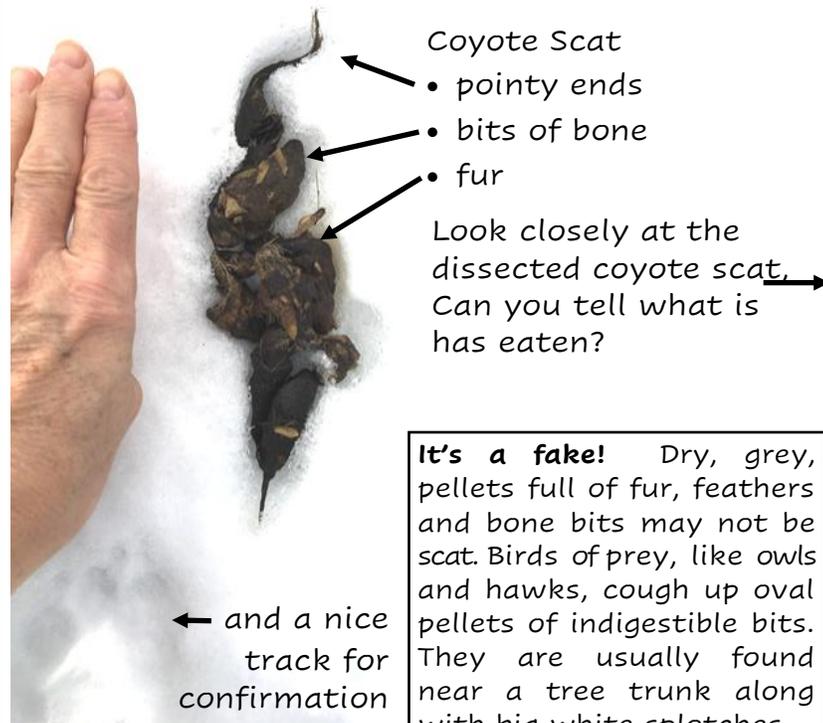
**Location** - Different animals like different habitats (places to live). Wild turkeys prefer to live in the woods and scrubby fields. Canada Geese like to live near water like ponds and lakes. Turkey and goose scat looks similar. The habitat where you find the scat will help you decide which bird likely made the deposit.

Some animals have telltale pooping patterns. Racoons like to poop on top of logs and stumps. Sometimes they use the same spot, called a latrine, over and over and over. Coyotes aren't shy, and they'll leave a deposit in the middle of a path or trail. A big pile of deer-type pellets outside a den or under a tree is likely porcupine scat. When you know your poop, you know what animals to look for in your area.



Wild turkey scat shows the green plant bits. The white part is a bird urine (pee).

**Content**— Using your eyes to examine scat is enough to tell you what an animal has been eating. Finely ground plant fibres, seeds, fruit, bits of bone, fur, feathers can be readily seen on the surface. More can be learned pulling apart the scat. Use sturdy sticks, and wash your hands afterwards.



- Coyote Scat
- pointy ends
  - bits of bone
  - fur

Look closely at the dissected coyote scat, Can you tell what is has eaten?

← and a nice track for confirmation

**It's a fake!** Dry, grey, pellets full of fur, feathers and bone bits may not be scat. Birds of prey, like owls and hawks, cough up oval pellets of indigestible bits. They are usually found near a tree trunk along with big white splotches.



**Caution!! Gross content below.**

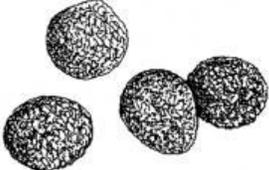
Nature finds a use for everything including scat! Animals sometimes roll in scat or other smelly things to hide their natural scent. Prey animals hope predators won't be able to smell and find them. Predators hope their prey won't smell them and hide. As scavengers, vultures eat dead things. Anti-bacterial juices in the digestive tract keep vultures safe from getting sick after eating rotten food. This also means vulture poop and vomit kills bacteria. Vultures, after standing on their decomposing dinner while eating, will 'sanitize' their feet by poop and throw-up on them.



# Animal Scat Match

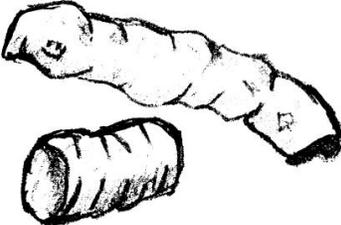
Draw a line from the scat to the name of the animal that produced it.

1



- round, slightly squashed pellets
- size of a chickpea
- finely chewed plant material
- tan, dark brown, or black

3



- lumpy tube, blunt ends
- 5 to 8 cm, size of a Tootsie Roll
- seeds, fur, crayfish bits, feathers
- dark brown to grey

5



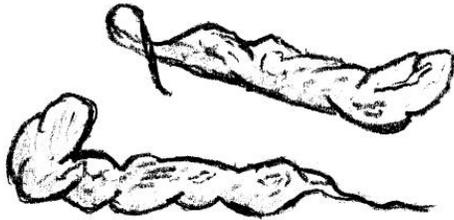
- thin, twisted tube, both ends pointed
- 5–10 cm
- fur, feathers, bone bits, seeds
- dark brown to black

7



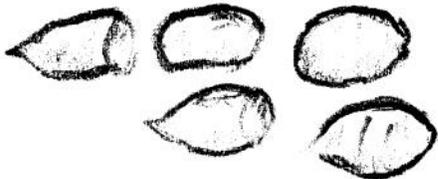
- cylindrical, coiled pile or J-shaped
- diameter of a large drinking straw
- chewed plant matter, white paste
- green–brown, one white end

2



- long tube, pointed end,
- 7–15 cm long
- fur, bone bits, feathers,
- dark, can be grey if mostly fur

4



- oval pellets, dimple at one end
- size of an almond, in small piles
- very finely chewed plant matter
- dark brown, or black

6



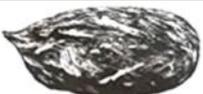
- thin tube, pointed both ends
- size of a grain of rice
- finely chewed plant material
- very dark brown

8



- tube-shaped, blunt ends
- 3 to 5 cm long
- insects, seeds, fur, feathers
- dark brown, or black

9



- oval shaped, 2–10 cm,
- fur, feathers, bone bits
- grey, very dry—**this is not scat!!**

Rabbit

Fox

Raccoon

Mouse

Turkey

Deer

Coyote

Skunk

Owl

Answers  
1. Rabbit 6. Mouse  
2. Coyote 7. Turkey  
3. Raccoon 8. Skunk  
4. Deer 9. Owl  
5. Fox

**How to make a simple, pocket-sized journal.**

- \* Cut the page in half along the solid line.
- \* Put the top half on top of the bottom half, and fold along the dotted line to form a booklet. This printed page will become the back cover. The adjacent page will be the title page. (Scat Journal, Scat Log, Doodoo Diary, Pocket Poop Journal—you get the idea!)
- \* Add as many inside pages as you like. Use blank paper, lined paper or a combination of both.
- \* Punch two holes on the fold side using a hole punch.
- \* Bind the pages together with round-head brass fasteners or ribbon. This allows you to add more pages as needed.
- \* Record data about your finds— date, place, weather, observations, thoughts, and theories
- \* Include a sketch or two

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My



By