



Signatures in the Snow

- Ron Winch

There was once a time when reading animal tracks was a matter of life and death. Knowing and understanding animal signs was critical to identifying the animal and ultimately the survival of the hunter. A pile of acorn shells cut into neat strips meant a gray squirrel was nearby. Meat for dinner!

Reading the Signs

Now with fast food restaurants on every corner and refrigerators in every kitchen, tracking animals for the purpose of survival is no longer necessary - except, possibly for wildlife photographers. However, tracking animals may be the only way to really "see" into their lives. Reading animal tracks is just like reading a book. I recall a scene from a TV documentary on Australia where the host asked an aboriginal tracker how he could follow an apparently invisible trail across the outback. The reply, "You read books to learn, I read tracks and signs."

Under Cover

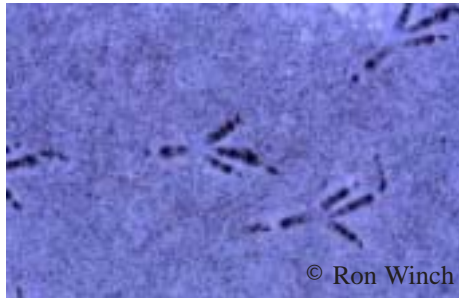
In urban areas many animals that have become acclimated to man are frequently seen, however in more wild areas it is a treat to catch a glimpse of a fox or mink. These are rare experiences because most wild animals are careful to avoid humans. Even in the summer, the smaller animals like beavers, raccoons, otters and 'possums are seldom seen unless they blunder into

the path of an automobile. During the winter, these animals are even more difficult to observe.

Many mammals remain hidden in dens, burrows and tree cavities during the most severe periods of winter. Those that do wander out in search of food do so in the shadowy predawn hours or at dusk. The dim light coupled with the protective coloration of the animals' fur hide them from all but the sharpest eyes.

Tracks and Trails

Although we usually do not see these animals, we can learn of their presence through the signatures they leave on the snow-covered landscape. The paws of animals leave prints or tracks in the snow. A series of tracks make a trail. Other signs might include droppings, urination posts and patterns and claw marks on tree bark. These visible clues alert us to the presence of the very shy animals that are active in our neighborhoods throughout the winter.



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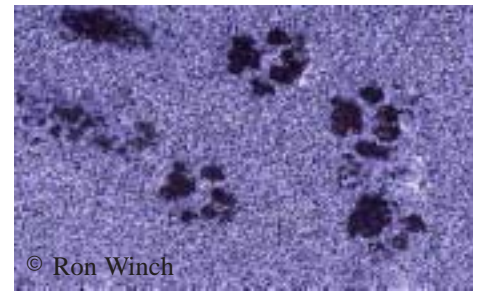
Open the Door

Tracking an animal is opening the door to the life of that animal. It is an educational process, like learning how to read. In fact, it is learning how to read. Following an animal's trail may bring you closer to the animal physically, but more importantly, it brings you closer to it in perception. The longer you follow an animal, the more you understand its life. If you spend half an hour finding the next track, you may have learned a lot about finding the next track, but not much about the animal. If you spend time learning about the animal and its ways, you may be able to find the next track without looking.

If you know an animal well, you will know where to look for it and when. If

you are to be successful in your search for an animal, you must sit and wait for it. Sitting and waiting isn't much good unless you are sitting and waiting in the right place.

Ultimately, tracking an animal makes us sensitive to it - a bond is formed, an intimacy develops. We begin to realize that what is happen-



© Ron Winch

ing to the animals and to the planet is actually happening to us. We are all one.

Where to Begin

Sounds exciting. Where do we begin? Arm yourself with a good field guide such as "A Field Guide to Animal Tracks" by Olaus Murie, or "A Field Guide to Mammal Tracking in North America" by James Halfpenny, and venture out to your favorite nature center trail after a fresh light snow. You are likely to find stories written in the snow by squirrels, rabbits, raccoons, 'possums, pheasants, crows and owls. ENJOY!

*Tracks clockwise from upper left:
Cottontail, Cat, Crow*

Rod Planck Presents *How to Photograph Nature*

The cost for this one day seminar is \$69 for tuition, seminar handouts and more. Register online at www.RodPlanck.com or pick up a registration form at the next meeting. The seminar will take place on Sunday, April 13th at: Marriott/5801 Opus Parkway Minnetonka, MN 55343 (952) 935-5500

I Wanna Buy One of Those!

Photographic field trips are always a great way to meet new photographers, learn some new techniques, or find new locations for future trips. Dale Bohlke has been conducting field trips all year, with more to come. The January field trip scheduled in Monticello for waterfowl (especially the Trumpeter Swans that winter at this location) was close to home so I decided I would join the group for a couple of hours. Right away I could sense how safe this photo excursion



Flying Trumpeters, John Pennoyer
Nikon 100F, Nikon 500mm lens, Provia 100F @ 200, Matrix metering, EV -1/3 (darker background makes it necessary to stop down. I could have gone to -2/3), Manual Focus

was going to be. Of the nine or ten members that were there, three were doctors. Dr. Dale, Dr. Joe and Dr. Dave were all there so I knew that if my 500mm lens fell off my tripod and hit my toe, I would be well taken care of. However, for Dr. Dave to help me a Trumpeter would have had to have flown into my mouth! Due to my work schedule and other factors, 95% of my photography is solo. It was very refreshing to have other photographers there to share ideas, talk smart and pretend that we really knew what we were doing. The weather wasn't bitterly cold, but a little "nippy", just right to have a little steam coming off the river to add a little something to help make a spectacular image.

I always enjoy looking at other photographers' equipment, and at this outing there was a wide range of equipment to look over. Listed below

are some "gizmo's" that caught my attention!

Hand Warmer

I do lots of cold weather photography and the things that always get cold are my fingers. I don't care what type of gloves/mittens that you use, if you are doing lots of shooting in very cold weather your fingers will get cold!! A gadget that one of the members had was a down tube that goes around your waist and when you are not shooting you stick your hands in there, put in a couple of Chemical hand warmers and your fingers will get toasty warm. I wanna buy one of those!!

Ball Head

My ball head is an original Arca Swiss ball head that I bought used about 18 years ago. It has performed flawlessly, but with my new 500mm lens it is not stable enough. I am constantly fighting "ball head flop". I was able to play with a new Arca Swiss B1 and a Gitzo. Both of those are certainly better than my present one. I wanna buy one of those!!

Wimberly Side Kick

To go along with my new ball head, I also will need a Wimberly Side Kick. This unit fits right on an Arca Swiss style ball head and you now have a modified "Gimbal head". This is without a doubt the best way to photograph moving subjects. There were at least 3 Side Kicks in use and I was able to manipulate a couple of them. The Side Kicks are good for most Long telephotos in the 500mm range or less. Anyone shooting a 600mm or larger would probably need the regular Wimberly head. I wanna buy one of those!!

Nikon D100

Probably within a year I will begin the transition stage to digital. I personally feel that will be the trend in Nature Photography. As folks begin to buy new Camera bodies, they will begin to opt for the Digital technology. I

was able to take a couple of photos with a Nikon D100. Although I have played with them at National Camera, this is the first time that I have seen one in the field. It is amazing that once you understand the basics of photography and exposure, you will not have any trouble with this new technology. As I looked through the viewfinder on this camera, I noticed that it was set-up Matrix at EV: +2/3. So I took an image knowing that with film the Swans would be over-exposed, and of course with digital they were too! I set the EV to -1/3, which is where I would have set my film camera, and the exposure was right on. So it makes no difference if you shoot film or digital, you still have to have the basic understanding of exposure! I also wanna buy one of those!!

I had to leave at around 10:00 AM for a prior commitment. The morning was fun even though there were not a lot of Swans at this particular time. After I loaded all of my camera gear into my 2003 Chevy Trailblazer (company car), I headed back to the



Trumpeters in Mist, John Pennoyer
Nikon 100F, Nikon 500mm lens, Provia 100F @ 200, Matrix EV: +1/3 (the mist made it necessary to open 1/3 so as not to underexpose), Manual Focus

homestead, turned on the electric heated seats and about a mile down the road my little tush was nice and toasty warm! "YOU can buy one of those"

Good Shooting

Personal Note: I want to thank Dale Bohlke for arranging all of these Field Trips. This is a valuable experience for our members that has been missing for many years.

**Minnesota
Nature Photography
Field Trips**



These are the updated plans for the monthly field trips. Additional modifications are possible. All trips are open to prospective members. Trips will take place as planned regardless of weather. For further information contact Dale Bohlke at (952) 445-6125 or dbohlke@mn.rr.com

March

March 8, 9 AM Visitors Center, Room B
Subject: Travel Photography
Notes: Each member will bring a few slides of a recent trip and discuss photo opportunities at that location. Nature slides only. Bring your camera in case it snows.

April

April 19, 5 PM until dark, River Terrace SNA
Subject: Pasque flowers and sunset
Notes: Meet at Cannon River Trailhead, Cannon Falls. Be prepared to get low!

May

May 10, 7 AM - 10 AM, Tierney Woods
Subject: Ephemerals & Ferns

June

June - 3rd Weekend, sunset (Tentative)
Subject: Butterfly Weed, Schaefer or Black Dog Prairie

July

July - 2nd Weekend (Tentative)
Subject: sunset at Roscoe Prairie, possible sunrise, followed by butterflies at Regal Meadows

August

August 4th Weekend, before sunrise (Tentative)
Subject: Monarch Migration
Notes: Photograph Monarch butterflies before they warm up



**Photography Workshop
Offered in Orr, MN**

John Pennoyer will again be instructing at the Black Bear Photography Workshop at the Vince Schute Wildlife Sanctuary in Orr, MN. There will be two three day workshops: July 26-28 and August 16-18. The cost is \$250.00 with all proceeds going to

the American Bear Association. There is no greater place in North America to photograph free-roaming black bears. Pick up a brochure at the next meeting.

January Awards

Judges: Mary Kay Bertas & Joe Kandiko

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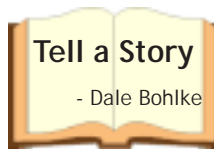
Dale Bohlke	Culver's Root Sunrise
Dave Ellenbecker	Three Showy Lady Slippers
Kathy Hobbs	Bathing Time
Duane Wraalstad	Suman #8

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Michele Burkstrand	A Casual Glimpse
Ted Galambos	Surface of a Pond
Marilyn Gladitsch	Rue Anemone
Jeff Hahn	Everglades Frog
Jeff Hahn	Honey Bee
Rick Hobbs	Snow Goose
John D. Jenkins	Water Fall
John D. Jenkins	Desert Light
Cathy Jones	Gull #1
Marsha Kessler	Passing Storm
Duane Wraalstad	Web 26

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Kim Bahma	Morning Fog
Joel Bahma	Sunset
Mariann Cyr	Crane in Motion
Mariann Cyr	Yucca at Sunset
Ted Galambos	Sunset at Naniboujou
Kathy Hobbs	At the Highest Point
Vijay Karai	Speak No Evil
John D. La Mere	Marmot
Dottie Lillestrand	Begonia Leaf #1-03
Jean McDonough	Thor's Hammer
Jean McDonough	Slot Canyon #2
George Ryan	Iced Teeth
Tom Samuelson	Mr. Blue
Florence Scholljegerdes	Half-Way Up
Florence Scholljegerdes	Autumn Silhouette



What Are You Shooting?

What are you shooting? Kodak, Fuji, digital? Is your camera a Nikon or Canon? "A Minolta, you've got to be kidding!" Does the camera or what is in it really make much difference? I doubt it. Ansel Adams was quoted as saying "There are two people in every photo, the viewer and the photographer." Dewitt Jones has said it is what is four inches behind the camera that really matters. What do your photos say about you? Are you showing your technical competence or your creative vision when you share your slides? Although you may not have thought about it, the viewer does see you in each photo. Each of us has a multifaceted personality, let it show in the variety of stories you tell.

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Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month,
Sept-May at the Visitor Center of the Minnesota Valley
National Wildlife Refuge, 3815 East 80th Street,
Bloomington, MN

February Program:

Presentation of
Botany International
Slides

MINNESOTA BOTANY
INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION OF PHOTOGRAPHY



January Survey Results

Do you own a digital camera?

- Yes - 7
- No - 11

Should there be a separate classification for captive shots?

- Eliminate Captive Slides: 1
- Caption Slides as Wild or Captive: 3
- Follow PSA Rules: 4
- Separate Classification for Captive Slides: 11

It is obvious from the variety of responses received and from the discussion at last month's meeting, that this topic is important to many members. Several members expressed strong opinions about following the PSA rules. Others wanted to have all but Slide of the Year awards compete equally, and still others suggested medals for each category at year end.

If you'd like to voice your opinion regarding this issue, please feel free to talk to any of the club officers or email them at the addresses listed above.

FIRST CLASS MAIL




In this
issue...

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- Tell a Story
- Black Bear Photo Workshop
- Birder's World Photo Contest
- Field Trips and more...

BIRDER'S WORLD

Photo Contest

Enter and win great prizes and help a great conservation cause!

ENTERING IS EASY

Enter up to six original color transparencies (35mm or larger) or color prints (5x7 or larger).

Enter your photo in one of these categories:

Flight: photos of bird(s) taking off, in flight, or landing

Habitat: photos of bird(s) in scenic, natural settings

Portrait: photos of one bird, close up

All images must be of bird(s) living in the wild. Select photos will appear in the August 2003 issue of BIRDER'S WORLD Magazine.

YOUR PHOTOS WILL HELP A GREAT CAUSE!

BIRDER'S WORLD will produce prints of select winning photographs and donate them to the Midwest Birding Symposium, to be held September 11-14, 2003 in Green Bay, Wisconsin. The prints will be displayed during the symposium and auctioned off. Proceeds from the auction will benefit non-profit Prairie-Chicken conservation efforts.

Entries must be received by March 14, 2003

For more information, visit www.birdersworld.com or pick up a copy of the contest rules at our next meeting.