White Sands

National Park Service
Department of the Interior

White Sands National Monument

Common Tracks and Scat Found at White Sands

Wild animals are shy and try to avoid us. Most animals in the desert are nocturnal. During the day you can see evidence of these animals from the tracks they leave behind in the sand. Tracks, which tell the stories of night activity in the dunefield, are awaiting your discovery! If you do encounter an animal, make sure you respect its space and do not try to feed it. The images and tracks below are not to scale, but they will help you identify animal signs you might find in the dunefield.

Nevada Buck Moth Caterpillar
Hemileuca nevadensis

The length of the buck moth caterpillar can vary from one to four inches. In the monument, spring is the best time to see them because that is when they hatch. The best place to find this caterpillar is on a cottonwood tree, which is their preferred food source. Once they cocoon, they turn into the Nevada buck moth, which is black, white, and red in coloration.

tracks

Darkling Beetle
Eleodes obcurus sulcipennis

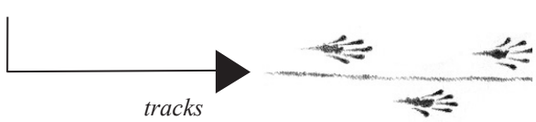
The darkling beetle, also known as the stinkbug, can be found anywhere in the monument and is most prevalent in the summer months. The length of the beetle can be over one inch. The name stinkbug comes from their defensive spray, which smells like kerosene. Being dark in color, the beetle is very easy to spot on the white sand. The dark color of the body acts as a sunscreen, protecting the beetle from the damaging rays of the sun.

tracks

Bleached Earless Lizard
Holbrookia maculata ruthveni
or Lesser Earless Lizard

The bleached earless lizard can range in length from four to six inches, with a width of half an inch. Lizard tracks can be distinguished from others by the tail track between the footprints. This lizard enjoys eating insects, spiders, and small plants that are abundant at White Sands. The white coloration of the lizard is an adaptation to camouflage with the white sand.

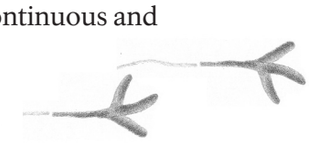
tracks



Horned Lark
Eromophila alpestris

The horned lark's height is around seven inches. Their preferred foods are seeds and insects. While a year-round resident in the monument, they are most prevalent when wildflowers are in bloom. The horned lark prefers to run rather than hop, so its tracks are continuous and in a line. The length of one print can be up to one and a half inches. The lark is a ground nester. The name horned lark refers to feather tufts at the top of the head, which look like two horns.

tracks



To learn more about White Sands, visit http://www.nps.gov/whsa

Greater Roadrunner
Geococcyx californianus

The greater roadrunner can get up to 23 inches tall and run up to 18 mph. The roadrunner likes to eat snakes and lizards but will also eat scorpions and spiders. Its tracks are always in the shape of an X because the roadrunner has two back toes in addition to the two front ones. The length of one print is three inches. Look for roadrunners near the visitor center where there is a lot of vegetation.

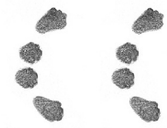
tracks

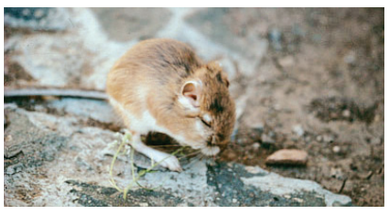
Apache Pocket Mouse
Perognathus flavescens Apachii

Fur-lined inner cheek pouches earned the Apache pocket mouse its name. Their diet consists of seeds found in the interdunal areas, and they never drink water. They get all the water they need from the seeds they eat. Their scat is rice shaped and crystal-like because of their efficient use of water. The total length of a pocket mouse varies from four to seven inches with a tail length from two to three inches. The length of their back feet is about one and a half inches with their front foot being much smaller.

scat

tracks





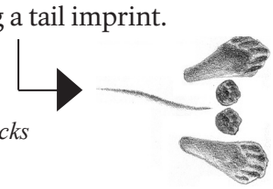
Kangaroo Rat
Dipodomys spectabilis

The kangaroo rat gets its name because of its large hind legs. If scared, it can jump up to 10 feet high. Just like the Apache pocket mouse, they get all the water they need from the seeds they eat, so the scat is the same shape and texture.

The total length of the kangaroo rat is about 13 inches with a tail length of eight inches. The tracks are very similar to the Apache pocket mouse in size, but the kangaroo rat will rest its tail when still, leaving a tail imprint.

scat

tracks



Desert Cottontail
Sylvilagus audobonii

Having a white fluffy tail, the cottontail is aptly named. Their diet is strictly vegetarian. They only eat grasses, fruits, and leaves. The scat is round and about half an inch long. At 15 inches tall with a tail length of about two inches and ears up to three inches long, the cottontail is no bigger than a domesticated rabbit. Their front foot track can be one to one and a half inches long and the back foot can be three to three and a half inches long. Cottontails, like many other mammals, can only be seen in the highly vegetated areas of the park.

scat

tracks

Kit Fox
Vulpes macrotis

The kit fox can be up to 30 inches long. Average weight is three to six pounds, similar to a Chihuahua. Their diet consists of kangaroo rats, desert cottontails, and Apache pocket mice. Their scat can have fur in it, which will leave it pointed on the ends. The tracks of a kit fox are very hard to distinguish from dog tracks in the monument. The length of one footprint is one to one and a half inches. A good distinguishing mark is that there will be claw marks with the print of a kit fox.

scat

tracks

Coyote
Canis latrans

A coyote's diet can range from garbage to big game animals like elk and deer. Their scat is pointed at the ends just like the kit fox because they consume animals with fur. The scat can also have seeds. The coyote can range in size from 15 to 45 pounds. The tracks of a coyote are difficult to tell apart from dog tracks.

The length of the back footprint can range from two and a half to three inches, with the front foot being slightly smaller. They live in the edges of the monument and eat smaller mammals like the Apache pocket mouse and kangaroo rat.

scat

tracks