



national science week 2020

Backyard Bioblitz – Animal Detective

There are animals around us everywhere and you can find traces of them if you know how and where to look. How many signs of animals can you find in your local environment?

Safety

When doing science activities outdoors, wear sun protection and comfortable, closed-in shoes. Wear gardening gloves to protect your hands and beware venomous creatures such as spiders, snakes, and wasps. Always treat the natural environment with care and try to leave it as you found it.

What you need

An area of nature with potential animal habitats, such as a backyard, garden, park, local bushland, or National Park. Take some binoculars if you have them and use a camera and the space on the next page to record your observations.



What to do

Go for a leisurely walk, taking time to closely observe nature, and look for evidence of animals in the environment. Keep an eye out for signs of birds, reptiles, and mammals. Evidence that animals have moved through an area can include scats (animal poo), tracks in damp or muddy ground, feathers left behind on the ground, or scraps of fur caught on branches. Search near sources of food or water, and around structures that could provide shelter for animals, such as: tree hollows, rock piles, holes in the ground, and caves. Depending on where you live, you might see signs of cats, dogs, rats, foxes, kangaroos, lizards, turtles, bats, insects, spiders, and a range of native and introduced birds.

If you have trouble finding evidence of larger animals, try searching for mini beasts such as slaters, millipedes, worms, and snails. Look under rocks and flowerpots or lift up leaf litter or garden mulch to see what is living close to the ground. Note that it is illegal to lift rocks in some places, such as National Parks, but it's OK to have a quick look under a rock in your own backyard. After making your observations, put everything back as it was to protect the tiny creatures.



Flying fox colony



Eastern water dragon



Slater (woodlouse)



What's happening?

Animals are adapted to living in a wide range of environments, including bushland and urban environments. The main requirements for survival are sources of food and water, shelter, and an area to move around and interact with other animals of the same species.

Results

How many traces of animals did you see?

Take photographs of your discoveries and/or record your observations here.

Did you know?

A native Australian animal's ability to survive in its environment can be threatened by a number of factors, such as invasive plants and animals, including feral cats and dogs, and habitat loss due to land clearing or increased bushfire events resulting from climate change. The good news is that conservation efforts have had some positive results with some species thriving and numbers increasing where habitats have been preserved and feral animals excluded. Even a small backyard can be designed to make a contribution to preserving habitat if it is planted with species that are indigenous to the area and includes access to shelter and water for any animals who choose to move in. This can mean having rock piles, leaf litter, and lots of vegetation to give smaller animals and birds access to food and safe places to hide.

Find out more

- Identify animals using a Field Guide app. Search the App Store or Google Play for your state or territory: "Field Guide ACT", "Field Guide NSW", etc.
- Contribute to data collection about the natural environment with iNaturalist Australia <https://inaturalist.ala.org.au/>
- Help track the urban bird population and learn how to create a bird-friendly garden with Birdlife Australia <https://birdlife.org.au/all-about-birds/birds-in-backyards>
- View photographs of the tracks of some common native and introduced mammals <https://www.survival.org.au/tracking.php>
- Discover how the Tracks App is assisting Aboriginal rangers to gather data on threatened species <https://biocollect.ala.org.au/trackshub>