

TRACKING & NATURE CONNECTION

SPRING 2016

Connecting with Nature Through the Art of Tracking

TNC Class 3 Practices and Core Routines

A. Buddy Check-in:

Make contact with your buddy each week to go tracking together, swap sit spot stories and/or complete your Master Species List for Mammals. Decide how you would like to partner to accomplish a complete species list - you could divide the work and share, or compare notes, insights and experiences on your individual work - whatever supports each of your learning style, but in partnership. You can also use this buddy relationship to just hear each other's experiences, stories, progress or questions regarding your journey with tracking. Phone or getting together in person - versus email - supports the process of connection we all are seeking. How can you support each other in this season of tracking?

B. Sit Spot for 20 minutes at least twice each week:

Sit for 20+ minutes at least 2 or more times each week somewhere in Nature you feel at ease. Daily is ideal. Convenience is a high priority in helping you actually go to your sit spot. Backyards can be great! Or a quick walk or drive to a special spot. During the sit spot, be alert, be in all your senses, and be a silent observer of anything and everything, outer and inner. This is the basis of the sit spot routine. We recommend not having any books or journals with you - just your direct awareness and body in nature at the same spot. Journaling afterwards is a great way to integrate the experience. We will elaborate more on the sit spot over time.

C. Explore your Sit Spot to identify 5 bird species that will be your Bird Language teachers.

Identify five species of ground, or ground visiting, birds that frequent your sit spot area as teachers on your Bird Language journey. Some examples are found in the attached document. Bring this list to our last class.

D. Journal Exercises - One bird journal and one mammal journal (bobcat, gray fox or coyote):

Complete one journal page before next class on a common local bird and on your chosen mammal. Make a drawing and do some research on basic natural history and record on your journal page. Make it fun and creative and capturing the essentials of that species. Use field guides, internet, etc. Do more if you are inspired.

E. Sit Spot Map: On an 8½ x 11 or larger piece of paper, draw a bird's-eye view map of your sit spot, even if it's your back yard.

Make it a scale of about 100 feet in all directions with your sit spot in the center. Include vegetation, fences, houses, alleys, landscape, etc. This map will increase your awareness and intimacy with your sit spot. You can add information about animal, birds, insects, food larders, etc as time passes. You can redraw your map as needed to mark the passage of time and the patterns that emerge as you develop a relationship with your sit spot.

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F. Master Species List for Mammals – Keep working on it if you haven’t finished!

Take a good up-to-date North American mammal field guide and starting at the beginning, go through and hand-write in your journal, or type a document, every mammal that occurs in your greater bioregion based on the range maps. This amounts to just flipping through the pages looking only at the range maps and if the map is colored in your region, look at the mammal name and write it down. You can list the scientific binomial name as well and organize the list by Order, Family and Genus. Whatever works for you. This will be your Master Species List for bioregional mammals.

G. Toes in Tracks Exercise – Complete this one if you haven’t already!

On a blank page, hand-written or typed, create five categories of number of toes in tracks for families of mammals. This list refers to what shows up in tracks typically and does not refer to vestigial toes that don’t register:

- One
- Two
- Four in fronts and hinds
- Four in fronts, Five in hinds
- Five in fronts and hinds

Go through a track field guide and using your Master Species List, create the lists of mammals under these five headings. We’ll explore this together as our share time in Class Two.

H. Practice the Honoring Routines

- **Be present with the greater ecology and all of your senses** when looking closely at tracks, sign, or a trail, looking around in each direction using wide-angle vision, listening for silence and sounds, and feeling with your skin and taste; then return your attention to the sign. Practice going back-and-forth in this way until it becomes natural to you.
- **Embody and feel gratitude.** Wildlife responds differently to this soft way of being on the landscape.
- **Fox walk** with a glide, feeling the ground each step.
- **Honor transitions** - Bring your awareness to the edge of transitions in space.
- **Release tensions with your body language** when encountering wildlife by turning your attention away from the animal softly, investigating something else, perhaps foraging a bit from the ground.
- **Connect with the animal** when engaging tracks, sign, or a trail. Connect with your mind, heart and energy as you also analyze the information; honor its being, its passage, and the sign it has left you