



## Activity: Small Mammal Tracking



The **Owl Box Initiative** is a project helping to protect the Barn Owl. Project scientists are working with farmers and the wider community to provide nest boxes and improve habitat to help Barn Owls increase their numbers.



Barn Owls are at the top of the food chain, they are a predator that need a lot of mice, voles and shrews to eat. The **Owl Box Initiative** will be running an experiment to see how many small mammals are present in areas where Barn Owls live.

To do this, we can look for them in the following ways:

- We can catch them using a **live trap**, with bedding and food inside. The traps are checked two times a day, and then release any small mammals that are caught after recording what has been found.
- We can take pictures of them with a special camera, called a **Trail Camera**, which we can leave outside on the ground or in a tunnel. The camera takes pictures when triggered by the movement of anything that walks past.
- We can also leave out an **ink tracking tunnel**; small mammals walk through a dark tunnel for some food in the centre and leave their footprints on the way out, after walking through some food colouring. We then look at the footprints to see which small mammals they belong to.



Just like the **Owl Box Initiative** project, you can help scientists understand more about what type of small mammals live near you. You can carry out your own experiment by making and setting up your very own ink tracking tunnel.

By identifying the small mammal footprints left behind in your tunnel and downloading the Mammal Society's **Mammal Mapper App**, you can enter your survey results and be a scientist too!



## Materials you will need to make your ink tracking tunnel...

### **The tube:**

- Two large empty, cleaned milk bottles
- One milk bottle lid
- Black bin bag

### **Inside the tube:**

- Two pieces of A4 paper
- A piece of wood
- Butter lid
- Clean, flat sponge
- Food colouring or ink (non-toxic)
- Two elastic bands
- Food (e.g. peanut butter, hot dogs etc)



### **Extras:**

- Scissors
- Sticky tape
- Metal coat hanger

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# How to make your ink tracking tunnel...



## Video Link: How to make your own ink tracking tunnel

**Step 1.** Cut the ends off of both your milk bottles, leaving the two rounded tubes. Then place one end of one tube into the end of the other tube, so they overlap and become a long 'tunnel'.

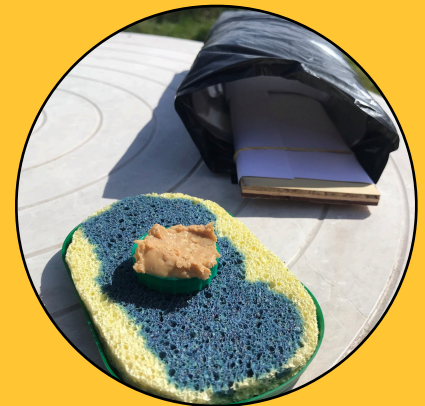
**Step 2.** Cut the black bin bag into a strip big enough to fit around the tunnel and secure it with some sticky tape (small mammals like dark areas to explore).

**Step 3.** Wrap the two pieces of paper around the wood and keep in place with an elastic band at each end. Sit the wood wrapped in paper into the tunnel as this is what the small mammals will walk on to leave their footprints.

**Step 4.** Next, pour the ink/food colouring into the butter lid, acting as a tray. Place the sponge on top to soak up the liquid, so the feet of any small mammals will pick up the colouring.

**Step 5.** Put some food in the milk bottle lid and place on top of the sponge which is sat in the tray. Put the tray, sponge and food in the centre of the tracking tunnel, on top of the wood.

Your tracking tunnel is now ready to be placed outside. Small mammals like to run down edges of areas such as hedges, fences and walls. Find a good location and leave the tunnel overnight. The tunnel can be checked each day for footprints and to refresh ink, paper and food if needed.

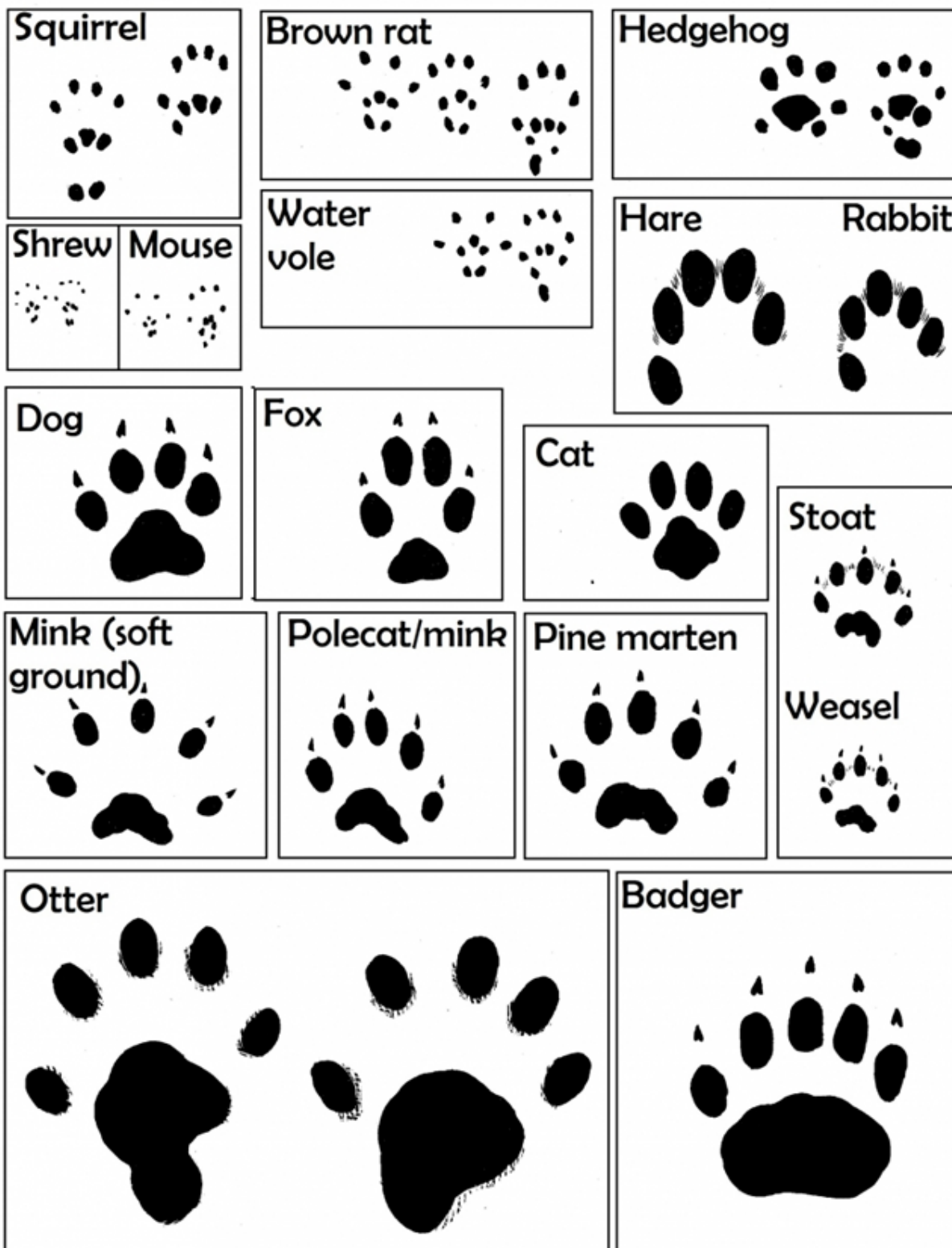


**Please remember to not leave the tunnel**  
**in an area where small children or pets can access it unaccompanied,**  
**as any small parts can be a choking hazard.**

**...and always remember to wash your hands after handling the tracking tunnel!**



# Identifying your small mammal footprints...



Mammal footprints, front (l) and rear (r), as most likely to be seen on tracking paper. Rear pads will show up less, if at all. For more info visit: [www.mammal.org.uk](http://www.mammal.org.uk)