

# Friends of the KAW



## Stories in the Sand: Observations of how animals use the Kansas River sandbars in their daily lives

[http://www.kansasriver.org/content/sandy\\_stories](http://www.kansasriver.org/content/sandy_stories)

This lesson was developed by Dr. Raymond Pierotti, Division of Biological Sciences, University of Kansas

**Overview:** Students will look over sandbars or sandy banks along the river. From what they find they will try and reconstruct who has been there and what might have happened.

**Suggested Grades:** 5-7 and 8-12

**Objective:** Get students to look at marks in the sand (tracks, scrapes, wet spots, shed feathers and fur, faeces, etc.) as ways of obtaining information about events and the community ecology of a location. Appropriate questions to ask the students include; what tracks can you find? Are these from mammals (including humans), birds, reptiles, amphibians, even vehicles? How many types of entity (being) are represented in one area? Which tracks seem oldest? Which are most fresh? How can you tell?

**Materials:** Eyes (binoculars if available), book (or page) of tracks, notebook and pencil (writing instrument should be something that will not run if the page gets damp). Plastic sandwich bags and rubber/surgical gloves, Plaster of Paris, Cookie Cutters or metal rings.

**Methods:** Walk along a sandbar or sandy shore looking for any sign (tracks, other marks, scat) of the presence of others (both human and nonhuman). Try to figure out what the individual who left the tracks or sign was doing. Have students collect feathers, etc. and place them in a plastic bag to show others. You can also have them make plaster casts of prints (a good set of instructions

can be found at [www.bear-tracker.com/plastertracks.html](http://www.bear-tracker.com/plastertracks.html)) Make sure that students can observe a fresh area not disturbed by other classmates (it may help to assign them to different areas in small groups). Please make sure that students understand safety precautions and can identify hazards they may encounter such as poison ivy. Instructors can find information about reptiles, amphibians, mussels, birds and mammals by going to the Species List and Critter Corner sections.

**Instructor will:** Give the students a couple of example scenarios. Show students examples of different types of tracks or other sign. Explain how to tell different types of tracks apart.

**Students will:** Find sign and write down their account of what they think happened. Make casts of tracks so they can show others what they found, or collect scat in plastic bags.

**Evaluation:** A “show and tell” format will be used to evaluate student knowledge.

**Students will demonstrate:** Knowledge of nature and basic animal behavior and ecology.

**Resources:** Lists of common species of mammals, amphibians and reptiles that can be encountered on sandbars are provided on our Teacher's Resources page.

**Classroom supplement:** The Friends of the Kaw *Critter Corner* can be used to supplement this lesson, especially the *Critter Sightings* page. You can find this material at [www.kansasriver.org/content/critter\\_corner](http://www.kansasriver.org/content/critter_corner) and [www.kansasriver.org/content/critter\\_sightings](http://www.kansasriver.org/content/critter_sightings) Make sure your browser accepts pop-up windows. The material in the Kansas Herpetological Society species accounts used in the *Critter Corner* is written at the college level, but some functions (such as the audio files for the frog species accounts) could be used for young students. Lists of common species of mammals, amphibians and reptiles can be found on our *Teacher's Resources* page [http://www.kansasriver.org/content/teachers\\_critter](http://www.kansasriver.org/content/teachers_critter) .

### Bibliography:

Halfpenny, James 1986. A field guide to mammal tracking. Johnson Books, Boulder

McDougall, Len. 1997. The Complete Tracker: The tracks signs and habits of North American Wildlife. MJF Books, NY, NY.



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