

Willowell Foundation-hosted Keeping Track Monitoring Course, 2007-2008



Overview:

Congratulations on your interest in Keeping Track with the Willowell Foundation! Volunteers in over 90 communities in the northeastern U.S. and Quebec have been trained to participate in Keeping Track Monitoring Programs (KTMPs). Land trusts, conservation commissions, and watershed associations are discovering the value of a wildlife habitat-monitoring program established and maintained by citizen volunteers. Now, for the first time, the Willowell Foundation is working with Keeping Track to offer a program that trains teachers and community members to monitor wildlife with students and youth groups.



Training:

Willowell's Keeping Track Monitoring Course includes:

- Six full-day training workshops in the field and two evening classroom sessions over a seven-month period.
- A team may consist of up to 20 participants, at least half of whom are educators.
- Each day may involve three to five miles of walking or snowshoeing through rough, untracked terrain in all kinds of weather.
- Comprehensive training materials are provided and participants receive an extensive list of suggested supplemental reading.

You Will Learn:

- Detection and interpretation of tracks and sign of agreed upon focal species for your region
- Tracks and sign of additional species that may be confused with those of the focal species
- Conservation biology as it relates to data collection and resulting land protection
- Forest ecology and plant identification as they relate to mammal uses of habitat
- 'Search imaging'-Sue Morse's technique for predictably looking in the right places and finding sign
- An introduction to science-based field studies, including the Keeping Track Project and Data Management Protocol and data collection forms.

- Specific preparation for the ‘Super Map Session’ and the creation of transects are the responsibility of each team. Keeping Track staff may be retained to assist with these activities at an additional cost.
- This is not a tracking class! Unlike other tracking courses, we will not learn about track morphology and gaits.

Monitoring

- Prior to establishing transects, KTMPs conduct reconnaissance for six months to a year. Reconnaissance involves an extensive informal exploration of quality habitat and possible linkage zones looking for suitable transect locations.
- Volunteers establish transects, i.e. specific linear sampling units that are monitored annually. The number of transects depends on the local group’s goals and team size.
- Each transect is surveyed by a team of volunteers, including students, four times a year (once in each season).
- Consistency and rigor in data collection are critical in order for the information to be credible.
- KTMPs share their information with other participating teachers and schools, neighboring KTMPs, their Regional Planning Commission, and the state Fish and Wildlife Department.
- Your data may be used to inform local and regional planning, create new students and community projects, and/or form the basis for local land conservation initiatives.
- Keeping Track’s houses a copy of all KTMP data in a central database. In this capacity, Keeping Track performs a quality control function and we anticipate that regional data sets will be increasingly important in the years to come.
- KTMPs who wish to get further training in areas such as photography, GPS mapping, map reading and UTM coordinates, transect design, or data management (including GIS) should gather a sufficient number of volunteers together to make a workshop economical and contact Keeping Track to schedule the workshop.

Scheduling

- Three of six training workshops are scheduled to take place at Keeping Track’s outdoor training facility in Jericho, Vermont (‘Wolfrun’)
- The other three workshops as well as the classroom sessions take place in the 5-Town/Vergennes area, at least one on the Willowell Land in Monkton.
- Two evening trainings are scheduled for Friday nights, and will take place in the 5-Town/Vergennes area.
- Workshops may be postponed due to weather, tracking conditions or road conditions, and the group must work together to reschedule.
- Individuals can make up a missed workshop with another group, although every effort should be made to attend originally scheduled classes!

Field Workshops: What and Where

At 'Wolfrun', where Keeping Track has its field training facility (in Jericho, VT):

Moose Wallows - October 13, 2007

- Tracks and sign of black bear, bobcat, moose (also otter, fisher, mink as encountered)
- Tree and shrub identification as it relates to habitat quality and specific resources wildlife need and use
- Topographical features of the landscape as they relate to habitat quality
- Natural disturbance regimes and forest management - agents of change in the forest environment
- Introduction to wildlife foraging and cover requirements
- Search imaging - introduction and practice

Witness Draw (including the 'Babysitter Swamp') - March 24, 2008

- Bear sign, fisher tracks and sign; also possible tracks and sign of otter, bobcat and mink
- Protocol terminology - 'core habitat', 'corridor', 'linkage zone,' 'transect', 'focal species'
- Search imaging - continued practice

Bobby Knob - March 3, 2008

- Focus on bobcat: the importance of cliffy refugia, including dens, lays, thermal and security habitat
- Continued practice with track and sign identification and search imaging (bear, fisher, moose, as well as other non-focal species, including coyote and red fox)

NOTE: In the event of snow or rain, the Bobby Knob class may be switched with the Witness Draw Class. Class members should consult their coordinators to determine the status of this class.

Local Field Trips

In addition to the three workshops at Wolfrun, there will be three field trips scheduled to take place in the 5-Town/Vergennes area.

- Focus on one or more of the focal species, with emphasis on otter, mink and other species of local interest
- Later workshops allow for practice with data forms, photo-documentation, and identification of tracks and sign of focal species

Evening Classes

These classes occur in the 5-Town/Vergennes area, from 5:30-9:15pm on two Fridays.

Class 1: Friday January 25, 2008

- Foot morphology as it relates to accurate track identification: inspection of and discussion about Sue's collection of freeze-dried mammal feet

Class 2: Friday April 25, 2008

- Intro to next steps after training: Super Map Session and field reconnaissance
- Slide show with comprehensive coverage of all species, including four Threatened and Endangered species

Readings and 'Dirt Time'

As part of the course, we expect participants to read the following materials:

- Keeping Track Tracker's Packet (containing articles on each species and conservation biology topics)
- Keeping Track Project and Data Management Protocol
- Keeping Track Guide to Photographing Animal Tracks and Sign

Keeping Track recommends these resources on tracking:

Paul Rezendes. 1999. Tracking and the Art of Seeing. 2nd Edition. Harper Perennial.

James Halfpenny. 1998. Scats and Tracks of the Northeast. Falcon Press.

Lynn Levine and Martha Mitchell. 2001. Mammal Tracks: Life-Size Tracking Guide. Heartwood Press.

Diane Gibbons. 2003. Mammal Tracks and Sign of the Northeast. University of New England Press.

Mark Elbroch. 2003. Mammal Tracks and Sign: A Guide to North American Species. Stackpole Press.

We recommend that participants create the opportunity while taking our course to get in additional 'dirt time', practicing your newfound skills in track and sign identification, search imaging, photography, and data collection with other trackers.