

Livestock injury and mortality investigations: predator signs to look for

The goal of this fact sheet is to outline how to evaluate suspected depredation sites so that depredation may be documented efficiently. Below, we describe key characteristics of common predators—use this as a guide to help determine what agency to call for help. When you find a suspected depredation, contact both your county Wildlife Specialist (trapper) and CDFW staff immediately to ensure an investigation takes place ASAP—see [3 Steps to Take When Finding a Livestock Predator Kill](#) for how to protect the scene, contact information for the appropriate investigator, and how to report the incident. It is important to report all suspected depredations so agencies can monitor the impact of specific predators (and individual animals) on livestock.

When you first arrive at a kill, carefully check for the following without disturbing the scene—take care to not walk on tracks or handle the carcass.

Wounds primarily on upper front half of carcass

- Little to no evidence that animal was chased.
- Evidence that carcass may have been dragged or carried some distance from kill site.
- Carcass may be covered with leaves, brush, or other debris.
- Carcass remains concentrated in a single location or over a very small area.

Black Bears

- Bites along spine between shoulder blades and/or to the head or neck.
- Possible lacerations from claws to chest and shoulders.
- Hide inverted and may be pulled over skull (on an older carcass).
- Tracks, scat, and hair found in area.
- Possible significant damage to livestock enclosure

Cats

- Bite to the head, neck, throat, or skull.
- Knife-like lacerations to sides, back, and/or shoulders.
- Hair removed by shearing or plucking.
- “Clean-cut” edges where feeding.
- Rumen removed intact.
- Primary consumption of carcass underneath or near to ribcage

Mountain Lion

- Long scrape marks (≥ 24 ”).

Bobcat

- Short scrape marks (≥ 16 ”).

Wounds primarily on upper back half of carcass

- Most obvious severe wounds may be concentrated around the hindquarters.
- Wounds may also be observed on front half of carcass (around armpit, throat, or ears).
- Bite marks and some other wounds may only be evident after skinning the carcass.
- Evidence of chase and struggle.
- Ragged or frayed wounds and lacerations.
- Consumption of carcass at or very near kill site; rumen often opened.
- Carcass remains scattered around kill site (especially if carcass is older).

Wolf

- Damaged or missing tail.
- Large bones cracked open and marrow consumed (on older carcass).
- Calves/ small ruminants more likely to be killed than larger livestock.

Coyote

- Often multiple bites to throat.
- Smaller bones may be broken and chewed (on older carcass).
- Small ruminants and newborn calves are typical prey.

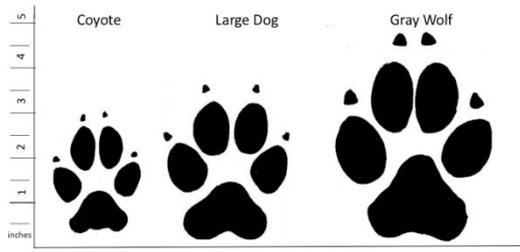
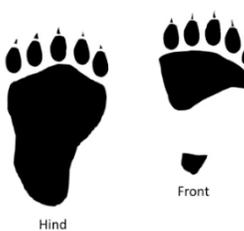
Domestic Dog

- Relatively indiscriminate in attack location—wounds may be all over carcass.
- Bites may be repositioned multiple times—dogs are inefficient killers.
- Seldom feed on carcass.

In addition to personal communication, the following documents were used to compile the information presented above.

Please refer to them for details: [Ranchers Guide to Predator Attacks on Livestock, Alberta Gov.](#) & [Livestock Injury and Mortality Investigations: A Reference Guide for Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife](#)

*NOTE: all measurements described below are approximate. Source for images: <https://www.wildlifeillinois.org/gallery/animal-sign/>

	Bite Marks	Tracks	Scat
Wolf	Distance between canines: 1.5"- 2". Bites cause distinctive hemorrhaging—may be noticeable once animal is skinned during investigation.	Tracks are 4" wide and 4.5" long. 	.5" – 2" diameter, 6-17" long. Sometimes accompanied by scrapes from both back feet. Shape varies by diet. Often tapers to a point at one end.
Coyote	Distance between canines: 1"- 1.5". Ragged/messy wounds.	Tracks are smaller (2.5" x 2.5") and often look more oval-shaped than other canine tracks. 	.5"-1.5" diameter, 5-13" long. Shape varies by diet. Smooth and shiny with tapered point on one end.
Dog	Distance between canines: varies based on breed. Lots of bites.	Tracks are approximately 3"x 3". <i>This diagram of a large dog track highlights key characteristics of all canine tracks: claw marks, even center toes, and a heel with 1 lobe at the top and 2 lobes at the bottom.</i>	Consistent in size and shape due to uniformity of dog food. May lack a tapered end.
Mtn. Lion	Typically, 1.25"-1.75" between upper canines and around 1"-1.5" between lower canines.	Adult tracks are approximately 3.5 in. wide and 3 in. long. 	.75" – 1.5" diameter, 6.5"-17" long. Long tubular ropes placed on scrapes, may be covered.
Bobcat	Typically, .75"-1" between canines. Bites often placed around throat and jaw.	Adult tracks are approximately 2"x 2". <i>This diagram of a cougar track highlights key characteristics of all feline tracks: no claw marks, uneven center toes, and a heel with 2 lobes at the top and 3 lobes at the bottom.</i>	1" diameter, 3"-9" long tubular ropes. Often left uncovered but placed in a scrape.
Black Bear	Distance between canines: Typically, 1.5"-2.5" between upper or lower canines	Distinct tracks, the heel/mid-portion of front tracks often does not register ¹ . 	1.25"- 2.5" diameter, 5"-12" long. Often in obvious places along travel routes. Shape varies based on diet.

Questions? Contact CDFW Wildlife Specialist _____, ***_***_****

