

# Make a Footprint Tracking Tunnel

Lots of animals prefer to come out at night, or when we aren't looking. And sometimes we just don't know what small (or large) mammal may be using our garden or private outdoor space!

A footprint tracking tunnel allows us to record footprints—so that we can try and identify what animals may be using our yards, gardens and wild spaces.

If your tunnel picks up some footprints, use resources here to try and identify what animal they may belong to:

[https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/animaltracks\\_tcm9-133380.pdf](https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/animaltracks_tcm9-133380.pdf) and do more research online or using books if you need to!

You could also join the PTES Living with Mammals survey and input your results—<https://ptes.org/get-involved/surveys/garden/living-with-mammals/>

**This activity has been inspired by similar resources by PTES, BHPS and Natural History Museum.**

**Please only use your tracking tunnel in your private garden, and only elsewhere if you have got permission from the landowner.**



## JOHN MUIR DISCOVER AWARD Summer Holiday Family Challenge



## Resources and materials:

- Large piece of cardboard or A1 sheet of black Correx plastic. (or a similar light plastic)  
Cardboard is more readily available, and could be recycled after it has been used (as long as it is still relatively clean).  
However, a plastic like Correx will potentially be more robust and weatherproof, so could potentially be reused more times.  
Either works well!
- Paper
- Masking tape
- Twine or string
- something like a jar lid
- Paintbrush or sponge (clean or new)
- Carbon powder- IF YOU DON'T HAVE ANYTHING SUITABLE TO USE PLEASE GET IN TOUCH AND WE MAY BE ABLE TO PROVIDE YOU WITH SOME
- Vegetable oil  
These two materials (Vegetable oil and Carbon powder) together will make an ink which is animal friendly and non toxic (and any residue left on their feet will wear off really quickly). Please avoid using anything that include toxic ingredients (present in many ink pads and paints.) If you aren't sure, don't use it.  
You can purchase carbon powder online—and it is important to look for natural or food grade activated charcoal powder. Other versions, such as those used in BBQs or tooth whitening products, may contain more chemicals that are toxic to animals.  
You can also purchase ready-made, safe footprint tracking ink from [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com)  
If you are struggling to get hold of some carbon powder, please do let us know and we may be able to make a delivery to you of a small amount for you to use in your tunnel.
- Food suitable for hedgehogs and other mammals  
Because you aren't sure what animals you may attract to your tunnel, wet cat or dog food is a suitable bait food in this instance. You could also mix some seeds in there as well to attract a greater variety of wildlife. Please remember most wild animals can NOT eat milk or bread, so please do not put that out for them.



You may also want something to mix the vegetable oil and carbon powder in



## How to:

- Make your tunnel:  
If you are using cardboard, fold your large piece into 3 evenly sized pieces and then unfold the structure back out.  
If you are using plastic, carefully cut three pieces of equally sized pieces (ADULT SUPERVISION NEEDED). Use one piece for the time being.
- Cut two pieces of paper to fit the width of the middle section of your cardboard or plastic. Use masking tape to secure them at both ends of the cardboard or plastic. .
- Secure the jam jar lid to the centre of the tunnel (using the masking tape). Place the bait food in the lid.
- Fill the spaces between the paper and bait tray with masking tape strips. These will serve as ink pads. Effectively, you want the animal to enter the tracking tunnel from one side, walk to the bait, get some ink on their feet, eat some food and then leave via either end, walking over a piece of paper and leaving their footprints visible.
- In a small dish, combine one part carbon powder with one part vegetable oil and mix well. Paint the mixture liberally onto the masking tape between the bait tray and the sheets of paper. You can use a brush or a clean/new sponge. Careful because this bit can get messy!
- Fold up the sides of the cardboard to create a triangular structure. Make holes at the top of the cardboard flaps and use the twine to tie the tunnel together. If you are using plastic, pierce holes at the edge of each piece and thread twine/string through to hold it all together in a triangle shape.
- Put the tunnel in a sheltered spot outdoors and leave it in place for up to one week, checking for ink tracks on the paper every day.
- Identify your tracks! Take photos, and use the resources we have previously suggested.
- Reset your tunnel in a new location, replacing the paper and topping up the ink and bait tray.





# Tips for using a footprint tunnel

## Where to place your footprint tunnel:

Please only put your footprint tunnel out on your own private land (garden or yard) or on someone else's land IF YOU HAVE PERMISSION. Gardens are normally good places, because they are relatively secluded and private.

It is best to put it in a sheltered location, on a flat area. You may find that the type of animal you record may depend on the location you put your tunnel.

Avoid putting it near a road or a busy path, because that would cause too much disturbance and could be dangerous. If you have a hedge, fence or wall in your garden, place it alongside this structure.

## Reusing your tunnel

We would encourage reusing your tunnel as much as possible! After you have used it in your garden, why not ask family or friends if they would like to put it in their garden for a few nights?

If your tunnel is made out of cardboard, it may not be very weatherproof, so we would recommend only putting it out when the forecast is for dry weather—so that the tunnel doesn't collapse because it gets too wet and so that your footprints don't wash away! Even if your tunnel is made out of plastic, we would not recommend putting it out if rain is forecast, because the footprint tracking paper may get very wet, plus some animals might not come out in heavy rain.

The ink in the tunnel may last a while, however it will eventually dry out. If you have some spare ink, it is best to top up the supply whenever you move the tunnel to a new location. Make sure you always used the same ratio of 1 part carbon powder to 1 part vegetable oil.

When replacing your footprint paper, remove it super carefully by peeling off the tape. Each time you want to reuse the tunnel, don't forget to stick 2 more pieces of paper down. And we would always recommend topping up the bait tray! Or if the bait hasn't been eaten after a few days, please throw the old bait away and replace it.



### Health and Safety!

Make sure you protect yourselves from any bugs or diseases—and wash your hands as soon as you have handled or move the tracking tunnel. Or wear gloves!

And to help the animals stay safe and healthy, don't forget to regularly clean the bait tray and replace old food with fresh food.

### Other animals!

Even if you don't have any pets, you may get regular visits from neighbourhood cats (less so dogs!). We can try and do everything possible to prevent pets from accessing the tunnels, but sometimes it isn't possible.

To try and limit any interference with cats or dogs, it's best to place the tunnel in a place that it's harder for them to access, or only leave it out when your pets are indoors.

You may find that your tunnel may be damaged by larger wild mammals such as fox or badger—unfortunately there is nothing we can do about this—but potentially good findings!

# Picture Guide:

