

Southwest Wildlife Online Tracking Training

(<https://www.swott.net>)

Seven Block Course in Wildlife Track & Sign Identification

Southwest Wildlife Online Tracking Training is a distance learning wildlife track and sign identification training resource. Its mission is to teach track & sign identification to beginning students in a way that assists them in achieving Cybertracker certification (<https://trackercertification.com>) within one year of completing the course.

The ideal student is someone who intends to apply track & sign identification to some aspect of wildlife conservation and who has limited access to other tracking education resources. The requirement for admission is past or current involvement in wildlife conservation or an explanation of how one will apply track & sign identification to wildlife conservation. Examples of such involvement include but are not limited to the following:

- biological research
- wildlife monitoring
- public outreach
- education
- habitat restoration or cleanup
- contributing observations or identifications to iNaturalist
- assisting with administration in a conservation organization

The Southwest Wildlife Online Tracking Training Track & Sign Identification course consists of a sequence of seven blocks. These are the topics covered in each block.

TS1 - Track observation and measurement, track patterns, and gaits.

TS2 – Track & sign identification of Canidae, Felidae, Leporidae, Procyonidae, and Didelphidae.

TS3 – Track & sign identification of Mephitidae, Mustelidae, Soricidae, Talpidae, Ursidae, Equidae, and ungulates.

TS4 – Track & sign identification of Rodentia.

TS5 – Mammal Skull Identification.

TS6 - Track & sign identification of Birds, Herptiles, and Invertebrates.

TS7 – Comprehensive exercises.

The course offered by Southwest Wildlife Online Tracking Training focus on species from San Diego County because the principal author of the course materials has thousands of animal track and sign photos from that region. The course teaches a particular analytical approach to track and sign identification that has been used successfully on Cybertracker track & sign evaluations. The approach can be applied equally well to species from any region.

Southwest Wildlife Online Tracking Training has used Facebook as the teaching platform in the past but a new website, specially designed for its students, is under development and will be deployed prior to the next course offering.

Each block includes five to seven online exercises, due weekly, and one field exercise. Each online exercise consists of a set of questions, typically asking the student to interpret a track or sign from a photo. Most questions require short essay answers of a few sentences in length. The instructors may submit follow-up questions to the student even if they agree with the answer the student has posted. This is where the real learning takes place.

It is anticipated that students will give wrong answers to many of the exercise questions but they must attempt to answer all questions, must respond to all instructor follow-up questions, and must complete any field exercises. Completion certificates will be awarded to students who meet these requirements.

The student must have or acquire at least one resource that provides mammal track measurements. There is a reasonably comprehensive list of tracking field guides for North America at “Nature Tracking” (<http://www.naturetracking.com/books/>). The *iTrack Naturalist* mobile phone app also has mammal track measurements and it has the advantage of being accessible on a smart phone. *All other reference materials required for the course will be provided to the student.*

Cost

The primary cost to students in this course is the time that they will devote to wildlife conservation. The monetary cost to the student for the entire course of study is \$40. This is the cost to defray the expenses of the server and the “swott.net” domain name. No refunds can be given after two weeks prior to the start of the course because of the difficulty in finding replacements. *No student will be denied admission because of financial hardship.*

Our Team

Bob Ollerton, Founder and Instructor – Certified as a Specialist in Track & Sign for the desert biome by Cybertracker Conservation.

Kim Cabrera, Instructor – Certified as a Specialist in Track & Sign for the desert biome and woodland biome by Cybertracker Conservation. Kim is also the creator and administrator of the “Animals Don’t Cover Their Tracks” and “Cybertracker Specialist Evaluation Study Buddies” Facebook groups. Kim’s website is <https://www.bear-tracker.com/>.

Kersey Lawrence Ph.D., Instructor – Kersey is currently the first and only woman tracker in the world to earn a Senior Tracker qualification, which required her to achieve a Track & Sign Specialist (2011, South Africa) and a Trailing Specialist qualification (2016, USA). Kersey is a Track & Sign Evaluator in Africa where she has been assessing trackers since 2014, and a Trailing Evaluator in North America. She is a qualified guide on the FGASA (the Field Guides Association of Southern Africa). Kersey received her Ph.D. from U. Conn. in 2020 on trackers and tracking in Southern Africa. Kersey is also the owner of Original Wisdom (<https://www.originalwisdom.com/>).

Jonathan Poppele, Instructor – Jon is a naturalist, author and educator who works to help people connect more deeply to themselves, to others, and to the natural world. He earned a master’s degree in Conservation Biology from the University of Minnesota studying citizen science and ways to cultivate a

personal relationship with nature and taught at the U of M for many years before leaving to focus on his own projects. Jon is the founder and director of the Minnesota Wildlife Tracking Project and the author of *Animal Tracks of the Midwest*, now in its second edition. Jon is also Head Instructor of the Minnesota Ki Society in Saint Paul, MN, where he teaches meditation, mindfulness, and the peaceful martial art of Ki-Aikido.