

Syllabus for Southwest Wildlife Online Tracking Training (swott.net)

Introduction to Desert Wildlife Track & Sign Identification

Southwest Wildlife Online Tracking Training offers a distance-learning resource focused on Track and Sign Identification for wildlife. The program aims to teach beginning and intermediate students how to identify animal tracks and signs, ultimately helping them achieve Cybertracker certification (available at <https://trackercertification.com>) within one year of completing the course sequence

The curriculum emphasizes species found in San Diego County, as the principal author has a vast collection of animal Track & Sign photographs from this region. The course employs an analytical approach to Track and Sign identification, which has been effectively used in Cybertracker evaluations. This method can also be adapted for species from other areas.

The ideal student is someone who intends to apply Track and Sign Identification to wildlife conservation efforts and may have limited access to other educational resources on tracking. Admission requires either prior or current involvement in wildlife conservation or a clear explanation of how the applicant plans to use Track and Sign Identification in conservation initiatives.

Examples of such involvement include the following:

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

Course Structure

The Southwest Wildlife Online Tracking Training Track & Sign Identification course comprises 7 blocks.

TS1 - Track observation and measurement, Track Patterns, Gaits, and Multi-factor Analysis.

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, Reptiles, and Invertebrates.

TS7 – Comprehensive tests.

Study materials have been created for each block. The exercises in each block are intended to assess the student's understanding of the study materials. These exercises are thorough. Here are the study materials for the exercises in each block.

B1-SDTSN.pdf - "Basic Information, Track Patterns, and Gaits"

B2-SDTSN.pdf - "Canidae and Felidae"

B3-SDTSN.pdf - "Procyonidae, Didelphidae, Leporidae, Ungulates, Mustelidae, Mephitidae, and Soricomorpha"

B4-SDTSN.pdf - "Rodentia"

B5-SDTSN.pdf - "Mammal Skulls"

B6-SDTSN.pdf - "Birds, Herps, and Invertebrates"

Each of the first six blocks of the course includes three or four online exercises and a test. Each online exercise consists of four to ten questions that often ask students to interpret a track or sign from a provided photo. The questions may be multiple-choice, require filling out forms, or include short essay responses of just a few sentences. Instructors may follow up with additional questions, even when they agree with the student's posted answer, as this is where real learning occurs.

Students are required to answer all questions, respond to all instructor follow-up questions, and complete the tests. Completion certificates will be awarded to students who score at least 60% on one test in the comprehensive test block by the end of the course offering. Achieving a score of 60% is not necessarily easy. Students who receive a certificate are eligible to serve as observers in future course offerings.

Students must have or obtain at least one resource, such as a tracking field guide, which provides measurements of tracks and track patterns. A comprehensive list of tracking field guides for North America is available at "Nature Tracking" (<http://www.naturetracking.com/books/>). Additionally, the iTrack Naturalist mobile app includes measurements of mammal tracks accessible on smartphones. All other reference materials needed for the course will be provided to the students.

Students are expected to base their answers to course questions on the provided study materials, rather than on external sources. The only exception to this guideline is for measurements of tracks and track patterns.

IMPORTANT! How to Answer Online Exercise Questions

Please be clear and concise in your responses. Avoid including nonessential information in your answers and replies. We must use the instructor's time efficiently to attract and retain high-quality faculty.

The SWOTT instructors can commit to SWOTT long-term if each instructor's weekly time demand is limited to 1 hour. Each instructor addresses the questions for a class of about 8 students, typically responding to 2 questions per week. This means they must address 16 answers in one hour, allowing only an average of 4 minutes per student's answer. This time may need to be divided among several replies, highlighting the importance of brevity in answering questions.

Students may request video conference meetings with the director during each block to discuss test results or any other course content. If the director determines that a student's needs exceed what the course was intended to provide, the student may request additional consulting time via videoconference with the director. The director's consultation fee is \$100/hour, with a half-hour minimum.

Tests

There is one multiple-choice test in each block. These are time-limited and may be difficult to complete within the allotted time. Tests will be scored in a way that discourages guessing. For example, a correct answer is worth one point, while an incorrect answer results in a deduction of 0.5 points. A skipped answer earns 0 points. Test scores, except for the T&S7 block tests, are inconsequential.

Getting Started

Login information will be emailed to all students before the start of the class.