

# Large carnivore identification



A basic  
guide



# Lion

- Largest African cat
- Light brown coat, can sometimes see light brown spots on belly
- Adult males have manes on their necks - juveniles and females do not
- Live in large family groups
- Often seen in groups, which can be all males, all females, or mixed-sex
- Mainly active at night
- Often steal and scavenge kills from other predators
- Do not often climb trees
- Can be dangerous to people



# Lion

Adult male lion



Adult female lion



Juvenile lion

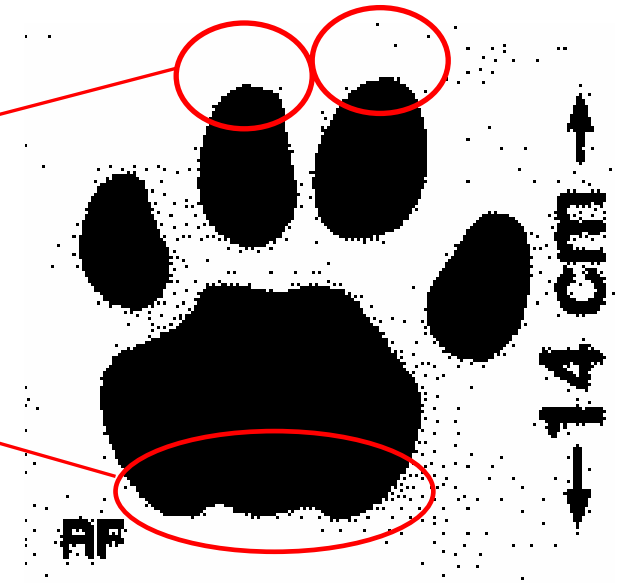


Lion cubs



# Lion spoor

- Large footprint
- No claw marks visible
- 'W' shaped at back of pad
- Similar to leopard, but larger in size
- Front foot size:
  - 13 – 15 cm long
  - 11 – 13 cm wide
- Rear foot size:
  - 12 - 14 cm long
  - 10 - 12 cm wide



1cm 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

# Lion scat

- Large, segmented scat
- Usually over 4cm in diameter but varies substantially
- Hair and bone fragments usually visible
- Looks like hyaena scat but often darker, and not accumulated in latrines



1cm 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

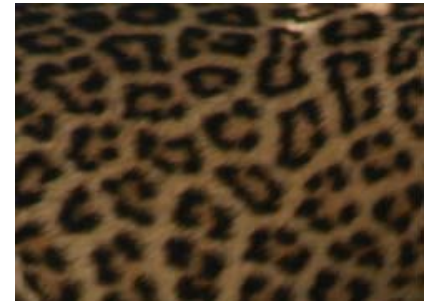
# Signs of a lion kill

- Can take all livestock types
- Usually kills at night, but can kill in day
- Kills stock both in boma & bush
- Bite usually on throat
- Often claw marks on belly
- Stomach can be fully eaten, or discarded and buried
- Bite width around 75mm (4 fingers)
- Can break long bones
- Causes massive damage



# Leopard

- Spotted cat – spots are rings of smaller spots, not solid
- Males are slightly bigger than females, but it is hard to tell sexes apart
- Usually live alone, apart from females with cubs
- Tend to hunt alone, at night
- Hunt using sudden ambushes rather than chases
- Good climbers - may take kills up trees, and often rest in trees
- Sometimes dangerous to people



# Leopard

Adult male leopard



Adult female leopard



Juvenile leopard

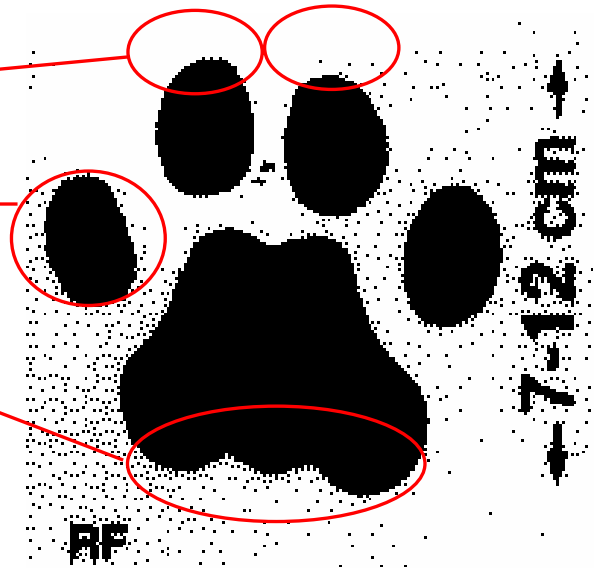


Leopard cub



# Leopard spoor

- No claw marks visible
- Rounded toes
- 'W' shaped at back of pad
- Similar to lion, but smaller in size
- Front foot size:
  - 7 - 12 cm long
  - 7 - 10 cm wide
- Rear foot size:
  - 8 – 10 cm long
  - 6 – 8 cm wide



1cm 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

# Leopard scat

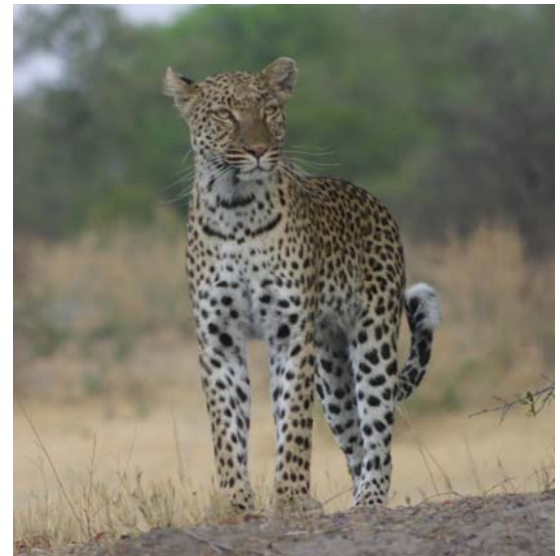
- Segmented scats
- Usually 2-4cm diameter, but vary widely
- Hair and bone fragments often visible
- Similar to lion scats but smaller
- May find several leopard scats together where trails cross



1cm 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

# Signs of a leopard kill

- Tends to leave kill up a tree, in grass or in hole
- May drag kill away, leaving drag marks away from kill site
- May leave many short claw marks
- Bite on back of neck or throat
- Leaves stomach intact, often discarded and buried
- Bite width around 40-46mm (about 3 finger widths)
- Rib ends chewed off
- Long bones not broken
- Fur & wool pulled out & scattered



# Cheetah

- Spotted cat – spots are small solid spots, rather than rings of spots
- Sexes are quite similar in size and appearance
- Adult males live in groups or alone, adult females are alone or with cubs
- Usually hunt in the day rather than night
- Hunt using very fast, short chases
- Can climb trees but do not take kills up trees
- Almost never steal or scavenge kills
- Not dangerous to people in the wild



# Cheetah

Adult male cheetah



Adult female cheetah



Juvenile cheetahs



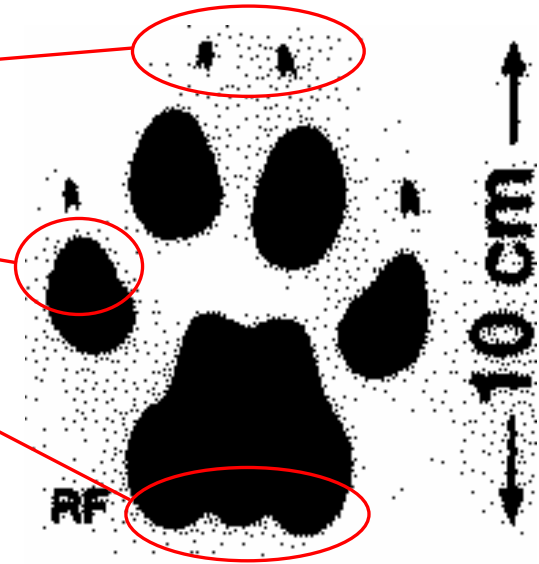
Cheetah cubs



# Cheetah spoor

- Claw marks usually visible
- Quite pointed toes
- 'W' shaped at back of pad
- Similar to African wild dog, but back of pad is clear 'W' shape

- Front foot size:
  - 8 - 10 cm long
  - 7 - 8 cm wide
- Rear foot size:
  - 8 - 10 cm long
  - 6 - 7 cm wide



1cm 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

# Cheetah scat

- Segmented scats
- Diameter usually around 25-35mm
- Sometimes found in trees or on rocks
- Hair usually visible, and sometimes small bone fragments



1cm 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

# Signs of a cheetah kill

- Leaves kill under bush or in grass
- 1 long claw mark
- Stomach intact, separate from carcass
- Small puncture wounds on throat
- Bite width 36-39mm (3 fingers)
- Rib ends chewed off
- Large bones not broken
- Does not eat skin or guts



# Cheetah or leopard?

- Cheetahs are thinner and slightly taller than leopards
- Cheetahs hunt using very fast, short chases, usually in the day
- Cheetahs have small, solid spots
- Cheetahs have black 'tearmarks' on their faces
- Adult male cheetahs sometimes live in groups together
- Cheetahs kill with a throat hold and do not take kills into trees
- Cheetahs do not attack people in the wild



- Leopards are heavier and slightly shorter than cheetahs
- Leopards hunt using ambush attacks, usually at night
- Leopards have spots arranged in rings to form 'rosettes'
- Leopards have no 'tearmarks' on their faces
- Adult leopards live alone
- Leopards kill with a neck bite and sometimes take kills up into trees
- Leopards can sometimes attack people

# African wild dog

- Live in packs of up to 40 dogs
- Coat is a mixture of brown, black and white patches, usually with some white on tail
- Hunt in groups, using long chases to catch prey
- Usually hunt in early morning or late afternoon
- Do not tend to scavenge
- Do not climb trees
- Not dangerous to people in the wild



# African wild dog

Adult male wild dog



Adult female wild dog



Juvenile wild dog

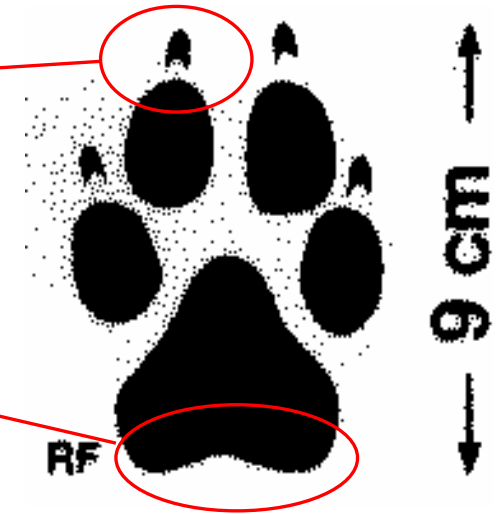


Wild dog puppies



# African wild dog spoor

- Claw marks visible
- Quite pointed toes
- Back of pad straighter than in cats: more triangular pad with no 'W' shape



- Front foot size:
  - 7 - 9 cm long
  - 5 - 7 cm wide
- Rear foot size:
  - 6 - 8 cm long
  - 4 - 6 cm wide



1cm 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25



# African wild dog scat

- Scat often less clearly segmented than for cats
- Dark greenish-brown colour, pales with age
- Around 3cm diameter but can vary
- Hair and sometimes bone fragments visible
- Many scats often left close to one other due to pack size



1cm 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

# Signs of an African wild dog kill

- Very little of the prey usually remains unless it is large – may find scattered fur and some remains scattered around
- Remains, if any, are left in grass near kill site
- Bite marks all over body
- Bite width usually around thumb length
- Stomach usually eaten



# Spotted hyaena

- Light brown coat with small dark spots
- Males and females look extremely similar and are hard to tell apart
- Usually live in large female-led groups of up to 80 animals
- Tend to hunt in groups
- Usually hunt at night
- Often steal and scavenge kills from other predators
- Do not climb trees
- Mainly active at night
- Sometimes dangerous to people



# Spotted hyaena

Adult male  
hyaena



Adult female  
hyaena



Juvenile hyaena



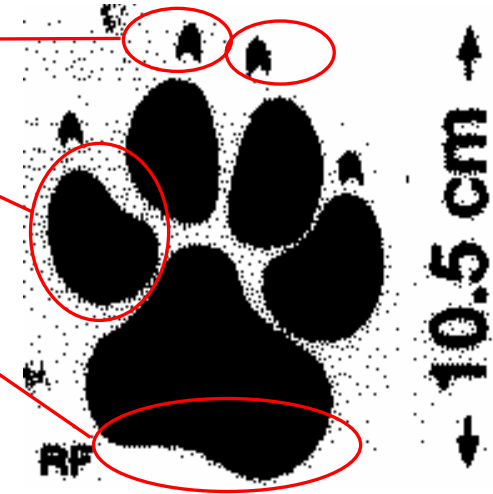
Hyaena cubs



# Spotted hyaena spoor

- Claw marks visible
- Side toes curved: appear 'banana-shaped'
- Back of pad is angled and does not have a 'W' shape
- Quite similar to African wild dog but larger, and pad is more angled

- Front foot size:
  - 9 - 11 cm long
  - 7 - 10 cm wide
- Rear foot size:
  - 8 - 10 cm long
  - 6 - 7 cm wide



1cm 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

# Spotted hyaena scat

- Quite large, segmented scats, often pointed at one end
- Usually very white when dry
- Often found with many other hyaena scats in communal latrines, often near roads



1cm 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

# Signs of a spotted hyaena kill

- Leaves prey at kill site, in grass
- No claw marks
- Stomach partly eaten
- Can have random bites over body
- Bite width around 4 fingers
- Usually messy, with fur and remains scattered around the area
- Very little of the carcass may remain if there were many hyaenas
- Long bones crushed or eaten



# Killed or scavenged?

- Predators are sometimes blamed for killing animals which were already dead when the predator found them, due to disease, snakebite etc
- To investigate whether an animal was killed or just scavenged by predators, find the bite marks and carefully skin the area
- If there is bruising and bleeding under the skin, the animal was probably killed by the predator – if not, it was probably already dead and just scavenged by a predator



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- **Sources consulted:**
  - Schumann, M. 2004. Integrated Livestock and Predator Management: A Farmer's Guide. Cheetah Conservation Fund, Otjiwarongo, Namibia.
  - Stuart, C & Stuart, T. 2000. A Field Guide to the Tracks and Signs of Southern and East African Wildlife. Struik Publishers, Cape Town, South Africa.
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