

Tracking and Trapping: Snow is Your Friend... and so is Mud

I was standing outside on my back patio admiring my newly built planter, which consequently is now covered in snow...

It was at this point that I decided to turn and see what the dog was up to. It wasn't a great surprise when I saw the little mongrel with her head down in the snow attempting to track rabbits.



Dogs are different than humans. I know this. You know this. They, as with most predators, track primarily with their noses. Some folks say that there are those among us that can track with their nose, but I have yet to meet any of them. Regardless, both species track to a certain extent with their ears, but again, a predator's sense of hearing is far superior to that of humans. There are quite a few that use highly attuned hearing to zero in on prey.

But wait, aren't we predators too?

Why yes, yes we are, but we've been dealt a different skill set. So, given these limitations, what is a hungry human to do?

Track with your eyes silly!

Now, I *know* where the rabbits are making their home, but the dog seems to forget every day and is always surprised when she flushes them out! I'm going to pretend I'm the dog and attempt to 'splain how you can find their home (burrow) when you don't know this information. This is step one of tracking.

Look for the Signs

A sign can be any number of things. You can see either the:

- Tracks
- Droppings (scat)
- Hear the animal, or the
- Animal itself

After you've found evidence, you need to:

Follow the Signs

Following the signs is tracking and allows you to discern the path the animals are taking consistently. This is called a game trail. Game trails are where you'll set up your traps and snares. Usually a game trail is a line from the burrow to a water source or a food source. Be careful though. Game trails are favored hunting spots for larger predators with bigger teeth and sharper nails than you! However, that's not something I need to worry about in my backyard.





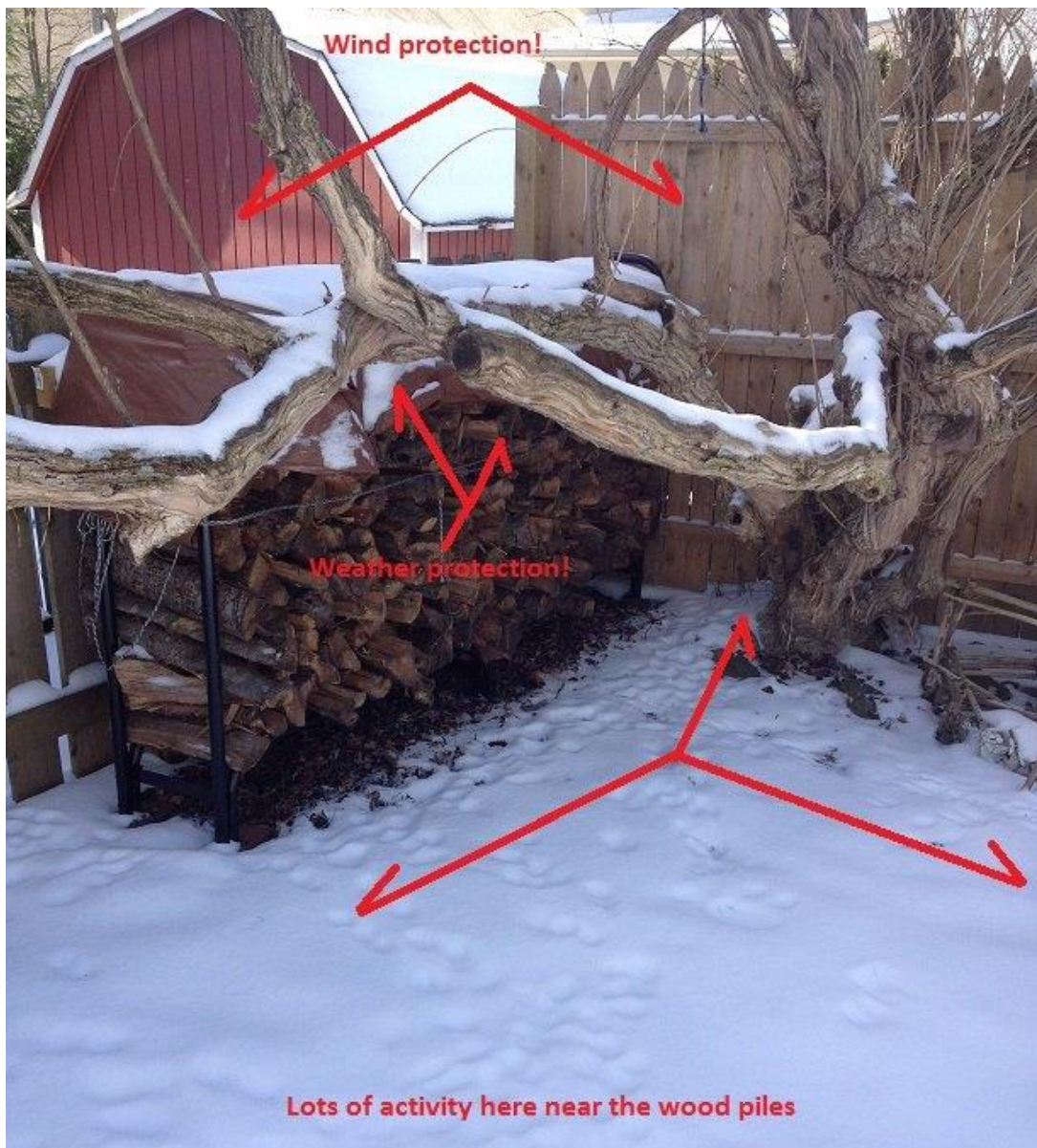
I spy rabbit tracks!! Now, you need to find that burrow and identify some better than average spots to place snares and traps. I took some pictures and added captions on each to help narrate...

Understanding Your Prey

Part of “Following the Signs” is also understanding your prey. What are their preferences, likes and dislikes, needs, etc.? Knowing this information will allow you to make predictability decisions when you are tracking. For example, rabbits don’t like being out in the weather any more than you do. Therefore, I know to look for cover and wind breaks. As a result, I am unsurprised when I see their highly visible tracks taking me to both in and around my backyard.



Scanning to my right I come across one of the two wood piles. This is a heavily trafficked area by the rabbits.



The fence line I've made note of in the picture is the western boundary. Most of our wind and weather comes from the west. To the south (behind the wood pile) is the neighbors' detached garage... another windbreak. The tarp on top of the woodpile prohibits rain water from working its way through the wood. If the rabbits were smart, they'd make their burrow there. They also have a means of escape from the dog through the fence behind.

Following the tracks to the north (my right) I see that nature has naturally narrowed their traffic severely.



Choke points make excellent spots for traps and snares. You can find natural ones or construct your own.



All of the rabbit traffic is funneled down into a six inch wide path naturally by the tree.

Notice the rabbit fence along the bottom of the fence? It was added for the dog but serves as a trap for the rabbits along the western edge of the property

Stay the course and continue to follow the game trail. In the “wild”, a game trail will go over and under everything so don’t be surprised if you find yourself climbing over and crawling under felled trees and zigzagging your way through dense shrubbery.



Following the tracks beyond the narrow path leads me to a continuation of the path around the girls trampoline. The rabbits do not diverge from the path after the tree so I know I'm on the right path....

TA DA!!!



Fee-fi-fo-fum... I smell the blood of an Englishman! Err, umm, where oh where could those rabbits be?

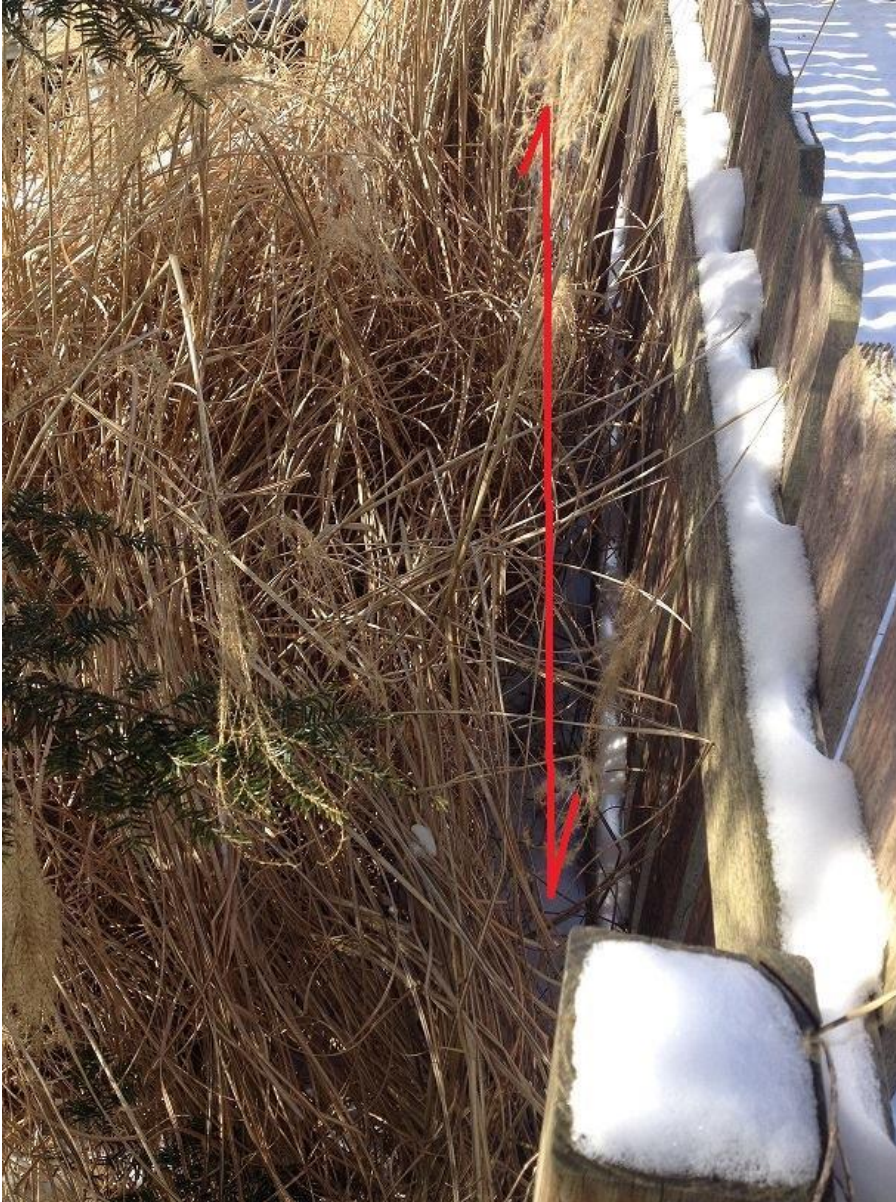






A closer look at the "door" on the left

I wasn't able to get a good picture of this but what you can't see is that the rabbits are entering and exiting from the back. These "doors" on the front were made as the rabbits fled from our dog once she found them.



There are a lot of tracks in there that are difficult to see on my picture, but trust me, they're there. Also unseen due to a lack of photographic evidence are the tracks through the neighbors back yard that lead to the back of the grasses.

In summary, use the signs that are presented as a means to discover the game trails they are using to satisfy two of their three primal urges: food and water. Once you find their primary means of navigation, you'll never go hungry again.

Oh, and as an added bonus.... if you're tracking small game, as I mentioned earlier, chances are that large predators are doing the same. You can use these tracking opportunities to get information on larger game as well as the larger predators with which you are now competing.

The wife may think I'm a colossal dork for being interested in this stuff and making time to write it all down for others, but this knowledge and this dork are gonna keep her and the girls fed. Hopefully it'll keep you and yours fed as well when the time comes.