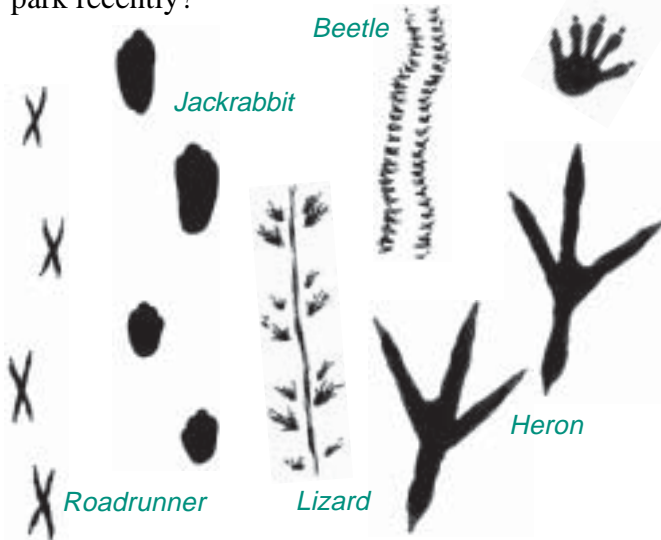






Tracks and Signs

In the dirt and mud, animals make footprints. Can you tell who's been walking around the park recently?



Besides their tracks, animals leave behind many other signs of activity:

-  Tooth marks on the bark of trees and shrubs or sticks on the ground.
-  Holes in leaves, branches, tornillo beans, on the banks of the stream or in the ground.
-  Nests and webs. Check carefully if they're occupied – do not disturb the residents!
-  Droppings. Scat gives clues about who's living at the park and what they've been eating.

Muskrat

Wetlands and Uplands

As you move closer to the wetter areas of the park, do you notice changes in the kinds of plants and animals you see?

Most plants are adapted to a specific water supply. Some, like cattails, grow with their roots submerged under water several inches deep. Others, like cottonwood trees, prefer damp soils on the banks of ponds and streams. The most drought-tolerant species thrive in the upland sections of the park, higher ground that receives water only from rainfall.

Animals also occupy different habitat types depending on their own adaptations. Ducks, for example, spend most of their time on the water, dabbling or diving for food. Beavers, strong swimmers but awkward on dry land, also stay near the wetlands. Other animals, like Gambel's Quail and horned lizards, get along fine in the dry uplands. You're much more likely to encounter them there.

All plants and animals require water to live: some more, some less. As you explore the Rio Bosque, think about how different creatures go about meeting this universal need, and how the abundance or scarcity of water creates a mixture of habitat types.

Closely watch the creatures you encounter to see what they do and where they go.



Darkling Beetle

Wetlands and riverside forests once graced the banks of the Rio Grande in the Paso del Norte region. They were the area's most productive natural habitats, but today they are virtually gone. At Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, the environment is still changing, but in a new way. Here, a diverse partnership is working to bring back meaningful examples of the unique and valuable ecosystems once found in our river valley.

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Owl Pellets

Look carefully on the ground and you might spot a grayish, furry-looking lump that easily fits in the palm of your hand. This is an owl pellet, the regurgitated mass of indigestible parts from an owl's meal.

The most common owls at Rio Bosque are Burrowing Owls who nest in holes on the sides of dirt mounds throughout the park. More rare are Barn Owls; they roost in the thicker woods in the southern part of the park. By dissecting an owl pellet you can get a good idea of what the bird has eaten. Owls generally swallow small prey whole, so bones, skulls, fur and insect pieces in the pellets can be recognized easily. Owl pellets are clean, odorless and safe to handle.



Educational programs of the Texas Forest Service are open to all people without regard to race, color,

EXPLORING the RIO BOSQUE a Guide for Young Naturalists

Rio Bosque
Wetlands
Park

El Paso, Texas



A Page from Nature's Infinite Book

Have you ever watched a team of hawks chase down a jackrabbit? Or heard a bullfrog call out for a mate?

Rio Bosque Wetlands Park is a great place to observe many kinds of wild animals going about their daily business: searching for food, building their homes, attracting a mate, raising a family. With some patience and practice, you can discover all sorts of interesting creatures, find out how they live and watch them interact with other inhabitants of the park.

Tips for sharpening your observational skills

👉 Use all your senses

Sight Look up in the air, down on the ground, in the leaves of trees and on the surface of the water. Change your focus from close by to far away.

Sound Go quietly and listen. Many animals can be recognized by their calls – you may never see them, but you'll know they're there.

Smell Plants, especially, give off different scents you may be able to detect.

Touch Take time to feel the foliage.

Taste *Be very careful!* Some plants are edible, but never put anything in your mouth without first checking with a responsible adult.

👉 **Come to the Park Several Times** Visit the park at different times of day and different seasons of the year. You'll get a better idea of changes in activity from dawn to dusk, spring to winter.

👉 **Be Prepared** Some simple tools can help: a **camera**; a **binocular**; a **magnifying glass**; a **small jar** for holding insects (*be sure to release them when you're done looking*); a **notebook and pencil** for making notes and drawings.

👉 **Enjoy Yourself** Every now and then take a break from observing and just enjoy the beauty of the Rio Bosque. Let your mind relax and your imagination take wing – who knows where it will lead you?

What is the weather like? Is it sunny or cloudy? Note the time of year.

Are there any birds perched in distant trees? Scan the horizon and sky above for flying birds.

Are water birds swimming nearby?

Scan the distant landscape and nearby bushes for animals that may run away when you get closer.

Look at nearby plants. Do they have flowers or fruit? Can you find seed pods in the branches or on the ground? What season is it? Are there any insects crawling through the leaves or buzzing around the flowers?

Can you identify these plants?

What kind of soil are you standing on? Is it sandy, muddy or dry with cracks?

Examine areas under plants or along the banks of waterways. Are any animals taking cover here? Is there any evidence of animal activity?

Who made the tracks on the ground?

Are there ripples or bubbles on the water? Can you see anyone come up for air? What are the flying insects doing here?

