

**Course- WL 703, Principles of Wildlife
Management**

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5th Lecture

**Developing Wildlife Identification
Skills**

Developing wildlife identification skills is a basic requirement for hunters. Knowing the key characteristics of animals will help you distinguish between similar species and between the male and female of the same species. Mistakes in identification can lead to illegal harvest of game or non-game animals. To identify game properly, you must learn to recognize key characteristics of the animal you're hunting.

Identifying animals accurately is a skill that improves with experience. It can be difficult, especially when you must observe quickly or when the differences between animals are subtle. Sometimes the difference between animals in the same species is only the size of their ears or distinctive coloring. Scat and tracks provide additional clues for identifying species.

Many resources are available for learning about wildlife. Good sources are books, television shows featuring hunting and nature topics, and websites such as that of the [U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#) and the [Alaska Department of Fish and Game](#).



Bald Eagle

It is common to categorize wild animals into groups that are similar in some way; for example:

- Large mammals
- Small mammals
- Upland birds
- Waterfowl and wetland birds
- Birds of prey



Spectacled Eider

Within each of the groups above, species may be “threatened” or “endangered.”

- Some species are protected from hunting because their numbers are small and they produce no surplus to harvest. The bald eagle and spectacled eider are examples of protected species.
- Animals that are labeled “threatened” or “endangered” are protected by law.

Large Mammals

The large mammal group typically includes horned animals, antlered animals, bears, and large members of the wild cat or wild dog families.

Horned or antlered animals have these key characteristics.

- Horns are hollow and are not shed. Wild sheep and goats have horns.

- Antlers are solid bone and are shed annually. Members of the deer family have antlers and rub their antlers on trees.
- Horned and antlered animals are cloven-hoofed (their hooves have two parts).
- Horned and antlered animals are ruminants (they chew cud). A ruminant digests its food in two steps. First they eat food and regurgitate it (cud), and then they eat it a second time. Ruminants do not have upper teeth. Instead they have a hard upper pad that they use to mash their food.

Characteristics of Mammals

- Mammals are warm-blooded animals with hair. Young are nourished with milk from the mother.
- Mammals can be carnivorous (meat eating), herbivorous (plant eating), or omnivorous (meat and plant eating).
- Mammals seek to regulate their temperature. Mammals in cold climates must keep warm, and mammals in hot climates must keep cool.
- Small mammals live shorter lives than large mammals, in general.
- Mammals vary in social behavior—some species live in groups, and other species are solitary except when mating or raising offspring.

Some Large Mammals and Their Tracks



**Black
Bear**



Caribou



Small Mammals

The hare is one of the most common small game animals. By studying these animals, you can learn to recognize their tracks.

Some small mammals that are sought after primarily for their pelts are called furbearers. Two popular breeds are fox and mink.

Some Small Mammals and Their Tracks





**American
Beaver**



**Snowshoe
Hare**





Red Fox



Mink

Upland Birds

Popular upland birds that are found in Alaska include grouse and ptarmigan. The term “upland” refers to where they are often found.

The basic shape of upland birds is similar to chickens. They also have short, rounded wings that are good for short flights and strong legs that are good for running.

Most male upland birds have more colorful feathers than the females. The female's plain feathers help her provide camouflage cover for her nest.



Spruce Grouse



Blue Grouse



Ptarmigan

Waterfowl

Waterfowl are warm-blooded animals that live on or near water, and include diving ducks and puddle ducks.



Puddle Duck

Puddle ducks are found primarily on the shallows of lakes, rivers, and freshwater marshes. Puddle ducks prefer to feed on or near the water's surface. They launch themselves directly upward when taking off.



Diving Duck

Diving ducks inhabit large deep lakes and rivers, coastal bays, and inlets. Diving ducks obtain most of their food by diving. They must run across the water to build up speed to take off.



Canada Goose



Wood Duck

Wetland Birds

Wetland birds live close to water in marshy and coastal areas. Examples are sandhill cranes and trumpeter swans.



Sandhill Crane



Trumpeter Swan

Birds of Prey

Birds of prey feed on other birds or mammals. Examples are eagles, falcons, and owls. Birds of prey are found throughout North America. All of these birds are protected.



Burrowing Owl



Peregrine Falcon



Osprey

Remember...

As a responsible hunter, you should educate yourself about wildlife prior to your hunt. The ability to accurately identify species will make you a better hunter and will increase the enjoyment of your hunting experience.