

Edward L Rose Conservancy



# Conservancy Currents

Winter 2024-2025



Winter at Highpoint Preserve, Silver Lake, PA



## A Striking Bird in Our Woods

Pileated Woodpeckers are alive and well in our Conservancy preserves. They are forest birds that require large, standing dead trees and downed wood. Because the trees in our preserves are not being logged, we have more large trees than most area forests. And, right now, due to emerald ash borer and beech bark disease, there is an abundance of large dead and dying trees in our forests.

Evidence of their work is easily observable as you hike through the trails of the Highpoint Preserve. The large rectangular holes that you see in the trees and the piles of chips at the base are hard to miss. The woodpeckers are excavating the cavities to find insects year-round.


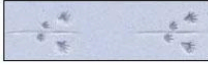















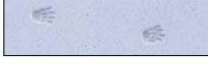

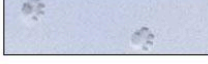



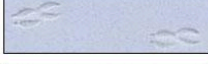

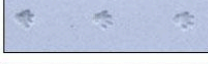

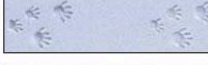




Pileated Woodpeckers are mostly black with white stripes on the face and neck and a flaming-red crest. Males have a red stripe on the cheek. The Pileated Woodpecker is a very large woodpecker, about 16-19 inches long, with a long neck and a triangular crest that sweeps off the back of the head. The bill is long and chisel-like. As with all woodpeckers, the pileated in flight doesn't beat its wings continuously, but rather in bursts, swooping through the forest between bursts.

Pileated woodpeckers don't just excavate holes for food. They also build their large nests in the cavities of dead trees. Woodpeckers make such large holes in dead trees that the holes can cause a small tree to break in half. The roost of a pileated woodpecker usually has multiple entrance holes. In April, the hole made by the male attracts a female for mating and raising their young. Once the brood is raised, the birds abandon the hole and do not use it the next year. When abandoned, these holes (made similarly though smaller by all woodpeckers) provide good homes in future years for many forest songbirds and a wide variety of other animals.



## Animal Tracks

Paintings by Erick Ingraham  
Tracks are not to scale.

White-footed Mouse		
Long-tailed Weasel		
Common Porcupine		
Gray Squirrel		
Eastern Chipmunk		
Moose		
Black Bear		
American Beaver		
Gray Wolf		
Lynx		
Striped Skunk		
White-tailed Deer		
Red Fox		
Red Squirrel		
Common Raccoon		
Snowshoe Hare		

## Tracking Woodland Animals in Winter Snow: A Guide for Enjoying our Preserves in Winter

It's cold, and getting around outdoors can be a chore. But winter in the northeastern United States can transform the landscape into a snow-covered wonderland, making it the perfect time to track woodland animals. Snow provides a natural canvas where animal movements and behaviors are recorded, offering a unique opportunity to observe creatures that might otherwise go unnoticed.

### Understanding Tracks and Gaits

Each species leaves behind distinct footprints or tracks. Learning to identify these prints can help determine the type of animal, its size, and even its behavior. Some key characteristics to look for include:

- Toe shape and count** – Deer have two hooves, canines and felines have four toes with claw marks (dog tracks show more blunt claws while cat tracks often lack visible claws), and rabbits have four toes with elongated rear footprints.
- Stride and straddle** – The distance between tracks can indicate whether an animal was walking, trotting, or running.
- Track pattern** – Animals have different movement patterns: bounders like weasels leave a series of closely spaced prints, while pacers like raccoons leave side-by-side tracks.
- Size**– Fox and coyote prints may be similar in appearance, but size will help determine the species.



February 05, 2025 3:11 PM

## Identifying Common Woodland Animals

1. **White-tailed Deer** – Large, heart-shaped prints with pointed toes. They travel in straight lines and often follow well-worn trails.



2. **Eastern Cottontail Rabbit** – Hind feet are much longer than front feet, leaving a distinctive “T” shape in bounding tracks.

3. **Red Fox** – Oval, four-toed prints with a direct register (hind foot lands in front print), often traveling in a straight line.

4. **Raccoon** – Hand-like prints with five toes, resembling small human hands.

5. **Wild Turkey** – Three forward-facing toes and one backward-facing toe, leaving large, bird-like prints in a zigzag pattern.

### Other Clues in the Snow

- **Scat** – Animal droppings can help confirm the species and provide insight into its diet.
- **Tail Drag Marks** – Some animals, like otters or dragging-tailed mice, leave telltale marks alongside their footprints.
- **Disturbed Vegetation** – Look for nibbled twigs, stripped bark, or dug-up snow, indicating feeding activity.



Sometimes the tracks tell interesting stories about the lives of these animals. Winter tracking offers an immersive and rewarding way to connect with nature, even in the quietest months of the year. The photo on the left reveals a deadly tale.

*An owl strike in the Woodbourne Preserve*

## **Annual Members Meeting Scheduled**

This year's Annual Members Meeting is scheduled for July 19, 2025. Please mark your calendar and save the date. This year's meeting and social gathering will be held at the Susquehanna County Conservation District (SCCD) pavilion, located on the east side of Route 29, 1.5 miles south of downtown Montrose. The event will begin at 11:00AM. There will be a short business meeting, and



representatives from the SCCD will provide a brief presentation regarding the many services available from the agency. Come and enjoy a light brunch with us, meet your fellow members and help us continue to fulfill our mission to protect our local environment.

This is also a great opportunity to explore the Conservancy's newest acquisition, the Woodbourne Forest Preserve, a mere 4 miles away. A short guided hike to the beautiful wetlands and old-growth forest in the Preserve will be available after the meeting.

## **Support Your Conservancy**

Becoming a member or making a donation are easier than ever. Recent changes to our website better clarify the differences between one time donations and membership. A category for joint memberships and two email addresses has been included. Best of all, you can easily sign up for automatic renewal.

Your membership is critical to our success. We need and appreciate our volunteers. Maintaining over a thousand acres of protected lands in our Preserves is hard work, but it's fun work. Be looking for invitations to participate in work days. Your ideas are also appreciated. It is our members that make us strong. We are an all-volunteer board, but with your help we can meet the Conservancy's goals and obligations as we work to protect our natural environment.

## Food for Thought-Take This with A Grain of Salt

The Pennsylvania Constitution confers on all people “a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment”. The mission of the E. L. Rose Conservancy is to protect natural resources through the conservation of land, water and soil. Highpoint Preserve exists within the boundaries of the Silver Creek watershed which was awarded Exceptional Value status on November 15, 2010. Perhaps surprisingly, these lofty pursuits are threatened by road salt.

PennDOT doesn't have records for when they started putting salt on our state roads. But most northeastern states began using it in the 1940s. PennDOT has stated that for the last five years, the average amount per year has been 754 pounds



per mile. Road salt is relatively cheap, and it is effective. And with the first flush of spring, it “disappears”. And because there has been no widespread pushback by the public, the amount of salt used each year has increased even as the climate continues to warm. The accompanying photo shows excess piles of salt dumped along Rt 167 adjacent to Silver Lake.

Road salt creates a threat to all living things within the watershed. It is toxic to wildlife once it gets above 230 mg/L and can be incredibly persistent because nothing naturally breaks down chloride in the environment. Once introduced into the environment, salt does not go away. Since the 1940s it has been accumulating, contaminating both surface and ground waters and poisoning the soil.

Except for carcinogens, the PADEP limits for toxic substances assume that, if toxic input is terminated, its adverse effects will also stop. This is not the case with dissolved road salt. Because lakes and streams are always at a lower elevation than adjacent roadways, as gravity continues to operate, decades of accumulated salt will continue to flow down gradient for generations yet to come. While some dissipation downstream will occur, it will not be enough to overcome the increasing concentrations upstream.

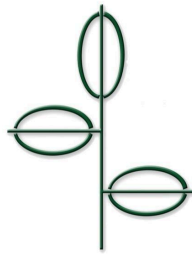
Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring* in September of 1962. Ten years later the EPA banned DDT. The ozone layer reached a maximum in 1972, but the Montreal Protocol to phase out CFCs wasn't signed until 1987. Acid rain was recognized as an emergent problem in the 1960s, but the Clean Air Act wasn't passed until 1990. Scientists observed that PFAS were persistent in the 1960s. It wasn't until 2023 that the EPA proposed enforceable drinking water standards. There is always a time lag between scientific recognition of an emergent problem and sufficient public awareness to prompt legislation. Unfortunately, the things that make life convenient are often toxic. It always takes a crisis.

Here are two papers worth reading: "*Effects of Road Salt Applications on Human and Ecological Health*", Authors: Sujay S. Kaushal, et.al. and "*A Fresh Look at Road Salt: Aquatic Toxicity and Water-Quality Impacts on Local, Regional, and National Scales*", Authors: Steven R. Corsi, et.al.

Bill Fischer

ELRC Board Member

More info at [ELROSE.ORG](https://www.elrose.org)



The Edward L. Rose Conservancy  
PO Box 8, Montrose, PA 18801