

Nature Notes

Deer Mouse



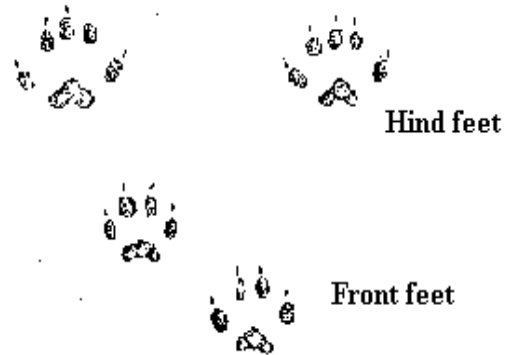
The deer mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*) with its intense black eyes, large naked ears, long tail and pointed nose is a common mammal at home in many habitats across most of North America including alpine, desert, grassland and woodland ecosystems. But



being a source of food for many predators such as coyotes, wolves, hawks and owls, the deer mouse is ever watchful and does not stay exposed to danger for long and so is not often seen. The easiest way to detect this small, active creature is through its tracks. In the Kimberley Nature Park, signs of deer mouse

activity are easiest to see during winter as the 10 to 24 gram creature easily moves across the surface of the snow. This small brown/grey mouse with white belly and legs dashes from nest to food source, leaving its tracks on the surface and giving us a glimpse of its routes.

The tracks of the deer mouse are very similar to, although smaller than those of the squirrel with the larger back prints



showing in front of the smaller front footprints in the familiar four-print pattern.



While the hind foot has 5 toes, 3 palm pads and 3 heel pads and the front foot has 4 toes, 3 palm pads, 2 heel pads and a vestigial thumb, these features are not always visible in all tracks. More

commonly, the repetitive pattern of the four footprints followed by a space before another cluster of prints is seen winding across the snow surface, showing us where the deer mouse finds its food and its shelter.



Photo of Deer Mouse by Dr. Lloyd Glenn Ingles

Photos of Tracks by Laura Duncan

Drawing from: <http://www.bear-tracker.com/deermous.html>

Visit www.rockies.net/kimberley/naturepark for a hard copy or more information about Nature Park events.