

National Wildlife Federation®

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For Kids
7 and Up



January 2005

Meet the
WEIRDEST
Mammals



Meet a woman who can turn a stroll in the woods



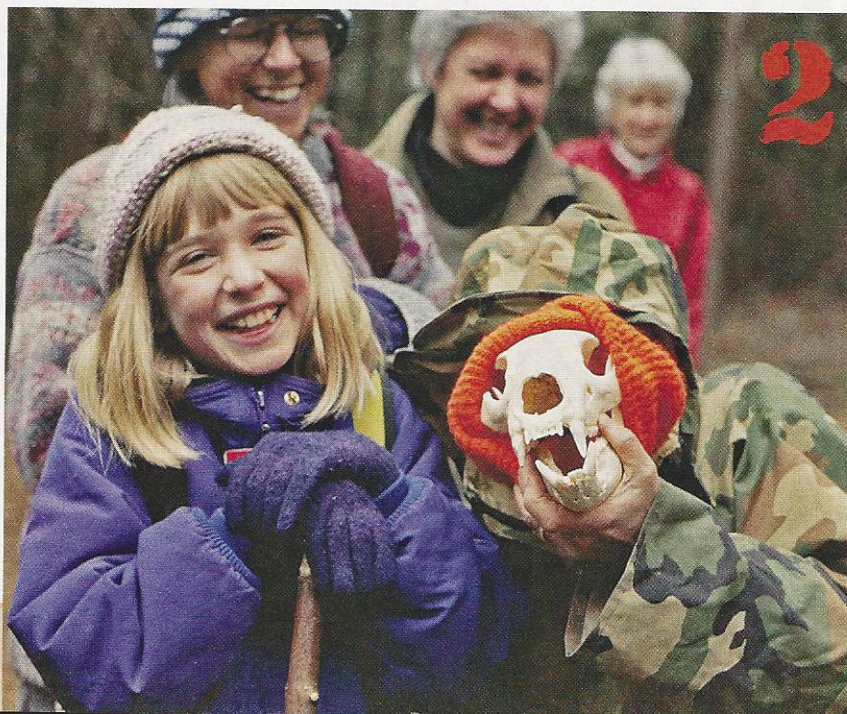
'TRACKER SUE

BY ELIZABETH SCHLEICHERT

What are the kids you see here up to? They're in a Vermont woods, discovering some of its hidden secrets. Their guide is a woman named Sue Morse.

Sue is a tracker. Long after an animal has passed by, she can identify it—and tell you where it went and what it was up to. How? By studying clues, such as claw marks and tracks.

Sue has lived next to this forest for 30 years. So she knows her wild



STEPHEN R. SWINBURNE (1, 2, & 4); SUE MORSE (3)

nto a true adventure!



neighbors well! And she loves introducing them—or traces of them—to others.

First stop on a Sue hike: A tree trunk raked by huge claws (**photo 1**). Octave smiles as Laura touches the marks. *Cool!*

Octave and Laura guess what made those marks. But a different group of kids (**2**) are stumped by claw and bite marks on another tree. Dounia leans on a stick and says, “Sue showed us a skull from a creature nicknamed Yorick. She helped us guess who Yorick was—a black bear!

Dounia continues, “Then Sue told us how a black bear stands up to hug, scratch, and bite a tree (**3**). Afterward, Sue let us take turns feeling the bear’s claw marks” (**4**).

Why does a bear mark trees? It may be a way to tell other bears, *I’m here—leave me alone!* Or it may be bear-speak for, *I’m looking for a mate.*

With that, Sue takes the group deeper into the woods—reminding people, “Please don’t disturb the residents!”



SEEING WITH NEW EYES

Sue teaches kids to *really* see the woods with detective eyes. She asks Octave and Laura to study the ground (1). “Look for patterns of prints, not just single tracks,” she says “Patterns can tell you who has chased whom, who won, and that sort of thing.”

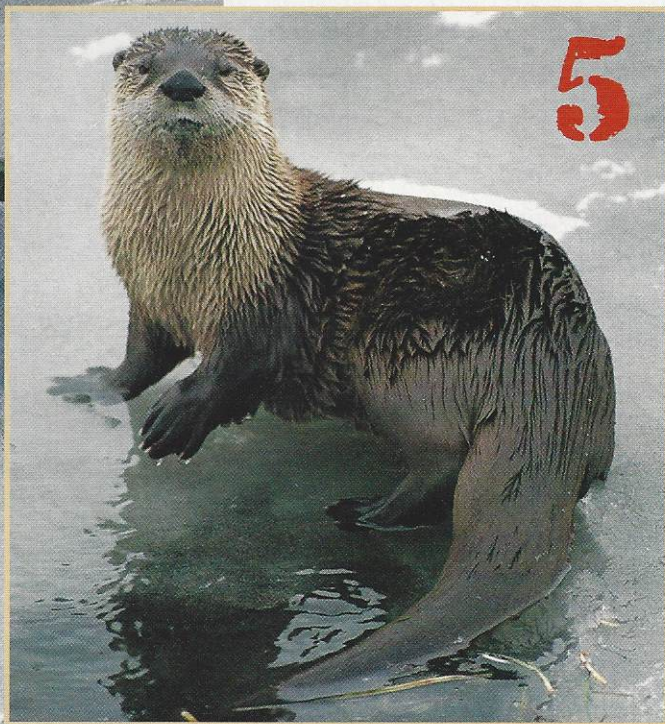
IT’S WILD OUT THERE

A little farther along, she stops again. “Aha! Bobette’s been by,” Sue says. She lays her pocket



knife and ruler next to some tracks to show the size (2). Bobette, it seems, is a female bobcat (3). Sue recognizes this cat’s tracks immediately. Bobette, a long-time resident, has a den in the nearby cliffs. Sue knows the cat’s tracks—as well as those of other “locals”—by heart.

For more about Sue Morse and the group she founded, go to this Web address: Keepingtrack.org For tracking tips, go to nwf.org/gowild.



WE “OTTER” PLAY!

“Oh, wonderful!” Sue says. She points to toboggan-like tracks on a frozen river (4). “Those are slides made by river otters” (5).

Otter slides are places where otters have flopped down and skidded across the snow. Why? It may be just for fun. Or it may have a more serious purpose. Otters have short legs. So, when they travel through snow, it may be easier to belly-slide than walk the whole way.

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

At the end of a tracking expedition, Sue always asks people, “Did you guys like it?”

They always answer, “Of course!” After all, what’s *not* to like about discovering the ways of *real* wild things—from a *real* tracking expert? 🦦