



NEWS FROM THE VERMONT TREE FARM COMMITTEE: BOOK REVIEW

Book Displays Scientific Method at Work in the Field

by Allen Yale, *landowner and Tree Farmer*



Morse, Susan C., *Wildlife and Habitats: A Collection of Natural History Essays with Photographs*. Richmond, VT: Keeping Track, Inc. 2021, 300 pp, \$45.

Here is a book that is a must for anyone who spends a lot of time in the outdoors in the Northeast, but especially hunters, natural resources professionals and landowner-naturalists interested in what animals frequent their property. It is to wildlife signs what Tom Wessell's *Reading the Forested Landscape* is to disturbances on the land.

Written by renowned tracker Susan Morse, the book consists of 108 essays,

each between two and three pages, with some longer exceptions. Most had appeared earlier as Morse's regular "Tracking Tips" column in *Northern Woodlands* magazine.

The subtitle includes the phrase "with photographs." This may be an understatement as I counted 936 photos, averaging approximately eight photos per two page article. These photographs greatly enhance an already great book as they illustrate the points made in the article.

The book starts with a general section on tracking, and a section on botany as it relates to wildlife with three great articles on soft mast, cones and seeds commonly eaten by wildlife. The rest of the book is organized alphabetically by species. The more glamorous species getting more coverage than the lesser ones. The black bear has 16 entries, moose and white-tailed deer nine each, while hare and woodchuck only get one each.

The main thrust of the book is interpreting signs wildlife leave on the landscape. In fact, a more appropriate title might have been "Reading Wildlife Signs in the Landscape." In general, the signs left by wildlife fall into three categories: scat, which is a product of the digestive process but may often have communication value, scent marking that is usually evident to humans only

if it includes a visual component, and visual marking. I was amazed by the number of scent glands some species had. For example, a white-tail buck has scent glands on its forehead, the inside corner of the eye, the nose and mouth, and three glands on the leg, the tarsal gland, the metatarsal glands and a scent gland between its toes.

Many wildlife signs are unavailable to humans because of the total inadequacy of our noses to detect them. Having grown up on a farm with sheep, I noticed rams smelling the urine of ewes to determine whether they were in estrus. These signs are means of communication of several sorts to others of that species: territoriality, dominance, pairing availability, etc.

Because these articles were written over 20 years, and Morse returned to similar topics throughout the years, there is some redundancy of content, but I found, as a former educator, that some redundancy assists learning.

While many of you may have read some of these articles when they first appeared in *Northern Woodland Magazine*, having them collected and categorized provides a useful resource easily accessible on your bookshelf. I hope I get my own copy for Christmas.