

# Observing Backyard Wildlife Using Trail Cameras

## *What Do You See When You Walk in the Woods?*

We have all experienced the peacefulness of taking a walk in the forest. The wind in the trees, the smell of the leaves – all of these things are things that we fondly remember from our journeys.

But what about the things we did not see? Sometimes we may catch a hint of a bird, or a squirrel, but often we leave our journey wondering what else did we not see?

As part of our summer camp, we decided to answer that question. We set up trail cameras, along a mountain stream in the North Carolina mountains. Our cameras take a burst of two photos, both day and night, every time something enters into the field of view.



Each week one of our interns goes out to the cameras and retrieves the camera card. We then have ecologists look at the photos to see what we have found.

**So... what did we see????**

Some of the most frequent animals captured on our trail cameras are **deer**. The most common species of deer in North Carolina is the white-tailed or whitetail deer. They have brown coats and white markings on their faces, bellies, and the underside of their tails. Young white-tailed deer have white spots on their backs and sides. Deer are herbivorous (plant-eating) and feed mostly on grass and leaves. They are seen most commonly at night, early morning, or late evening.



**Squirrels** are another common sight. Five species of squirrels can be found in North Carolina, but the most common is the Eastern gray squirrel, which is also the state mammal. Though a squirrel's natural habitat is in the woods, they can often be found in towns or cities as well. Their diet is mostly nuts, such as acorns, but they will also eat fruit, seeds, and occasionally insects.

**Opossums** are nocturnal, meaning they are mainly seen at night. As marsupials, they carry their young in pouches, just like kangaroos. Opossums are the only marsupials native to North America! They are gray in color with long snouts and hairless tails. Opossums are omnivores, meaning they can eat both plants and meat, just like humans.



**Raccoons** are mammals identified by their gray fur, ringed tails, and black mask-like markings. Like opossums, raccoons are mostly nocturnal, though they can sometimes be seen during the day. They can often be found in forests and around water, and will “fish” for aquatic insects, crayfish, and even frogs. They also eat berries, nuts, and insects.



This **skunk** is one of our rarer visitors. Striped skunks are black with white stripes running down their backs and tails. Skunks are most known for their ability to spray a smelly chemical when threatened; it's wise to leave one alone if encountered in the wild! Skunks are also omnivores and eat a variety of foods such as acorns, berries, insects, and bird eggs



There are two species of **foxes** found in North Carolina; the gray fox and the red fox, with only the gray fox being native to the area. Despite their names, gray foxes can be reddish in color, with “salt and pepper” fur on their faces and sides. Foxes hunt for small animals such as rodents, rabbits, and birds, but will also eat berries and fruit, making them omnivores.



**Birds** are very hard to catch on a trailcam, especially in the forest! Usually we get photos of birds flying through, but every once in a while they stop for a picture!



Which of these animals do you see around your house? To answer that question, find a quiet location in the backyard or forest to observe nature – best times are just before dark and early morning. Sit in one place, and look around. It may take some time for you to notice, but you see of tracks, marks on trees or eaten vegetation. Maybe even a feather? If so, then record these in your journal, or send us a photo!



[inspire-edventures.com/virtual-summer-camp/](https://inspire-edventures.com/virtual-summer-camp/)

Copyright 2020 Inspire EdVentures LLC – all rights reserved  
All photos are from the property of Cove Creek Elementary School in Vilas NC  
- site used by permission