Keep on track

wildlife footprints of three countries

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This collections of shots out of three countries is to share our best moments in reading footprints of wildlife around.

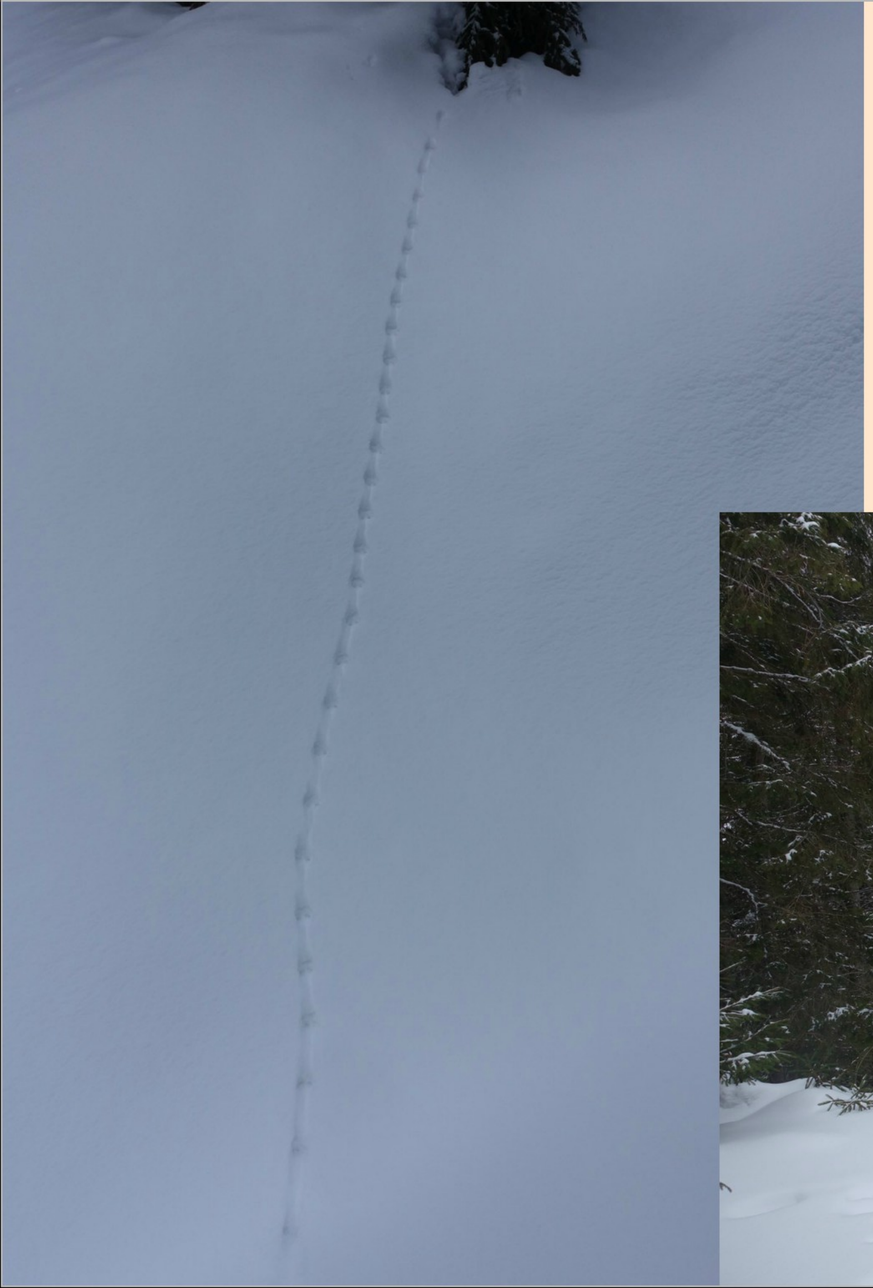
Sometimes it makes sense to go down on the ground to perceive details of tracks. Once you are down you are tempted to move like the animal to reconstruct gait patterns for a better understanding. \/

/\ Who might live in that hole? Moritz, Christine and Simone of EWM 2020 course tracking in Langerwisch near Potsdam.

<<Fox tracks in diagonal walker gait we saw most often in Romania.

René found those rather fresh brown bear foot-prints when staying in Sovata, Romania.
The gait shows a typical walker pattern in direct register, where the hind foot is set into the front foot. >>

<< Linde found that fantastic wolverine track with her group on a winter trip in the area around Grövelsjön/SE.
Wolverines are the biggest representatives of the marten family. Hunted almost to the extinct because of their fur in former times they have extended their territory to the south of Sweden.
The gait shows a more dynamic mode of locomo-tion with fore- and hind feet alternating and a very small aerial phase after each four tracks. That 4x4 Bound (Transverse) is a popular travel mode of wolverines.



<<This regular gait pattern with a short steplength coming out of nowhere remains a mystery. We did not have time to deal with it in depth on our way back from the Romanian mountains.

Nor did we have for that one on the right which we guess must have been a squirrel coming down from a tree. >>

We are quite sure however, that this is the path of another brown bear. We were told that he is having its den nearby. >>

<< Karoline and Gudrun found that beautiful single imprint in Schlaubetal.

Janina found that pacer walking pattern of raccoons in Roskow near the city of Brandenburg. >>

<< Simone came across that raccoon trail in the city of Brandenburg.

On a family walk in Kranepuhl (Fläming, one hour south of Potsdam) Moritz saw this nice gait pattern of a badger of which the right rear foot is magnified in the small picture below. >>

<< Simone has found badger footprints near Brandenburg city. The gait pattern suggests a galloping mode of locomotion. In the small picture above there is are left rear foot on the left and right front foot on the right.

Schlaubetal tracking D/RO/SE April 2022

<< After some reasoning we identified that footprint as the one of an otter. The left front foot with five droplike toes is almost complete.

woodpecker´s smithy >>

<< Otters "present" their scat on higher up marking places. We found two lying tree logs that were used for that. The poo contains remains of shells as well as fish scales.

<< To find beaver footprints was what we were secretly longing for. The left front foot with its bendy shape can be clearly distinguished.

<< Right hind foot suggests a direct register walk. Luckily the imprints were not destroyed by tail marks.

Kristin shot that beautiful wolf track in an area where she had had wolves on her camera trap for several times. It is south of Potsdam. She followed the track for 200 metres and could not realize a change in the gait pattern which looks like a typical sidetrot. Order of feet from bottom to top: left front/ left rear/right front/right rear.
The other pictures show a massive burrow which could have been dug out by a female wolf as well as scat containing hair and bones.

That red fox was in a hurry to get away from us. The four feet are coming down in a group interrupted by a longer aerial phase. >>

<<That fox was travelling in slower travel pace using direct register.

<< right front foot of a dog

4x4 lope, a special kind of gallop >>

<<Typical rotary gallop with the following order of steps: LF,RF,RH,LH.

another rotary gallop pattern>>

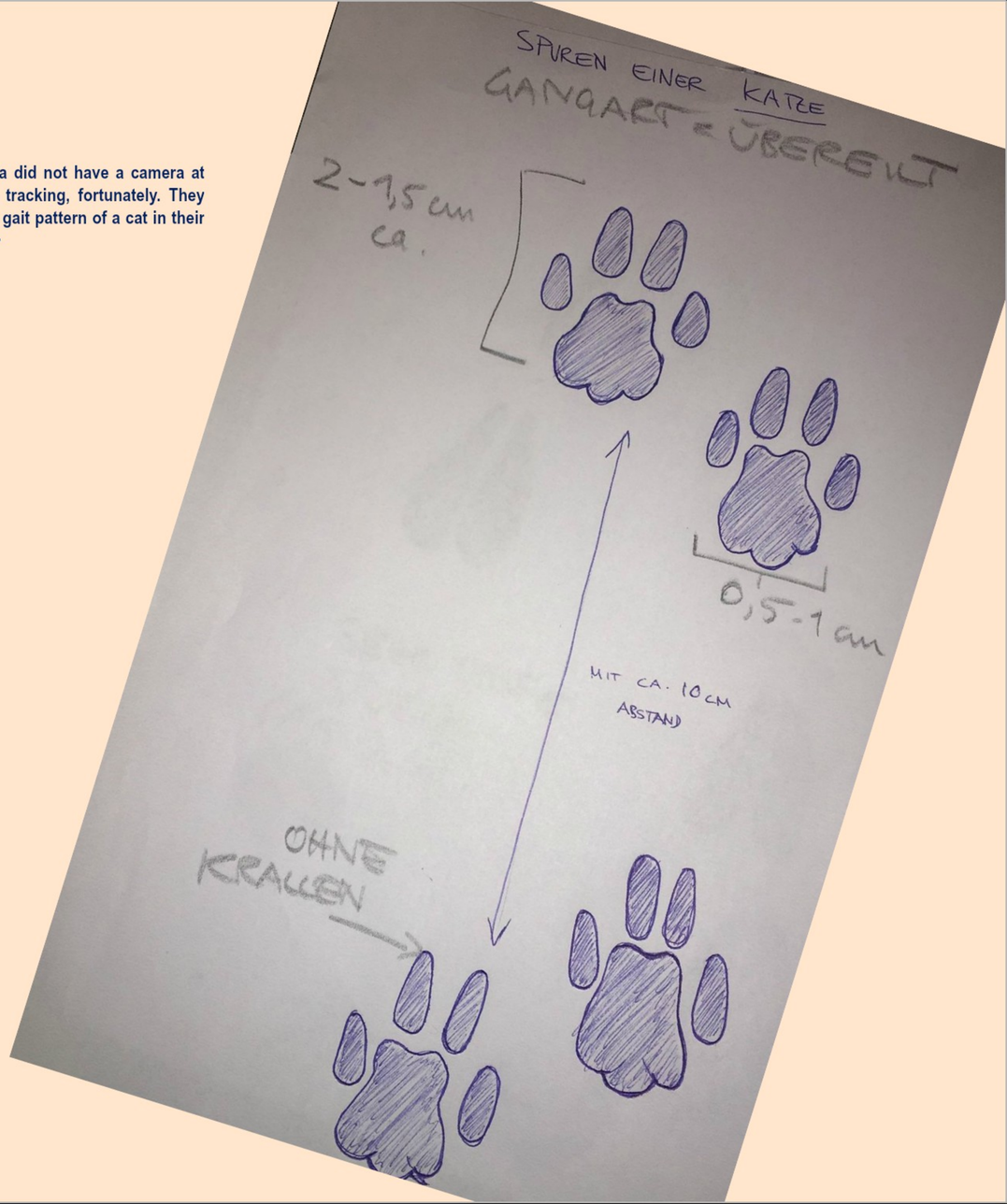
<< Andrés pic of a direct register canid track taken in Luckau.
The smaller rear foot is slightly overtaking the slightly bigger front foot which is hence called over-step walk.

<< Tracker´s paradise
Monika discovered that footprint hotspot in Görzke. It is most interesting to see which way the animals were taking.

Canid tracks in the sand. Anne Kathrins shot leaves room for speculation. Which footprints belong together? Is there a change in the gait pattern of one and the same animal or is it more than one animal? At least front and rear foot can be clearly distinguished. >>

Andrés pics of cat footprints taken in Luckau. Typical felid footprints that are broader and shorter as the ones of a dog. No claws to be imprimted.

Max and Lia did not have a camera at hand while tracking, fortunately. They copied that gait pattern of a cat in their journals. >>



Max and Lia handed in that wild boar footprint they found near Brandenburg city.

Those two smaller pictures were handed in by youngster tracker Bruno. The upper one shows a superb wild boar track with dew claws. The cleaves are slightly opened and the tips are rounded compared to other artiodactyles.

The lower picture shows wild boar scat that he found in Wildpark Potsdam.

Wild boar bath. Moritz has taken that picture where you even can see details of the fur as well as the ear of the animal imprinted. >>

Two nice pictures that show the difference between fallow deer and roe deer imprints. Fallow deer on the left (shot by Lara in Lüneburger Heide) shows much more tapered cleaves, roe deer on the right however more rounded cleaves towards the tip (taken by Max and Lia near Brandenburg city).

<< Deer in direct register was documented by youngster tracker Bruno here. He also found a deer sleeping place (picture below).

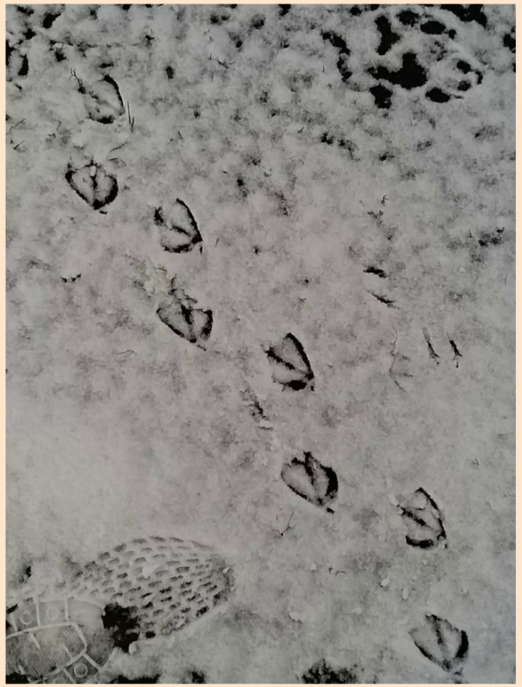
Kristins pictures sets us riddles again. At first glance it suggests a wild boar imprint due to visible dew claws. The cleaves at front however are so tapered which would only apply in case of a young animal. Those are much more typical for deer. The gait pattern suggests a faster gallopping walking mode, one of the rare occasions where deer dewclaws could aslo be imprinted. >>

Max and Lia spotted that crow bird footprint near Brandenburg city. >>

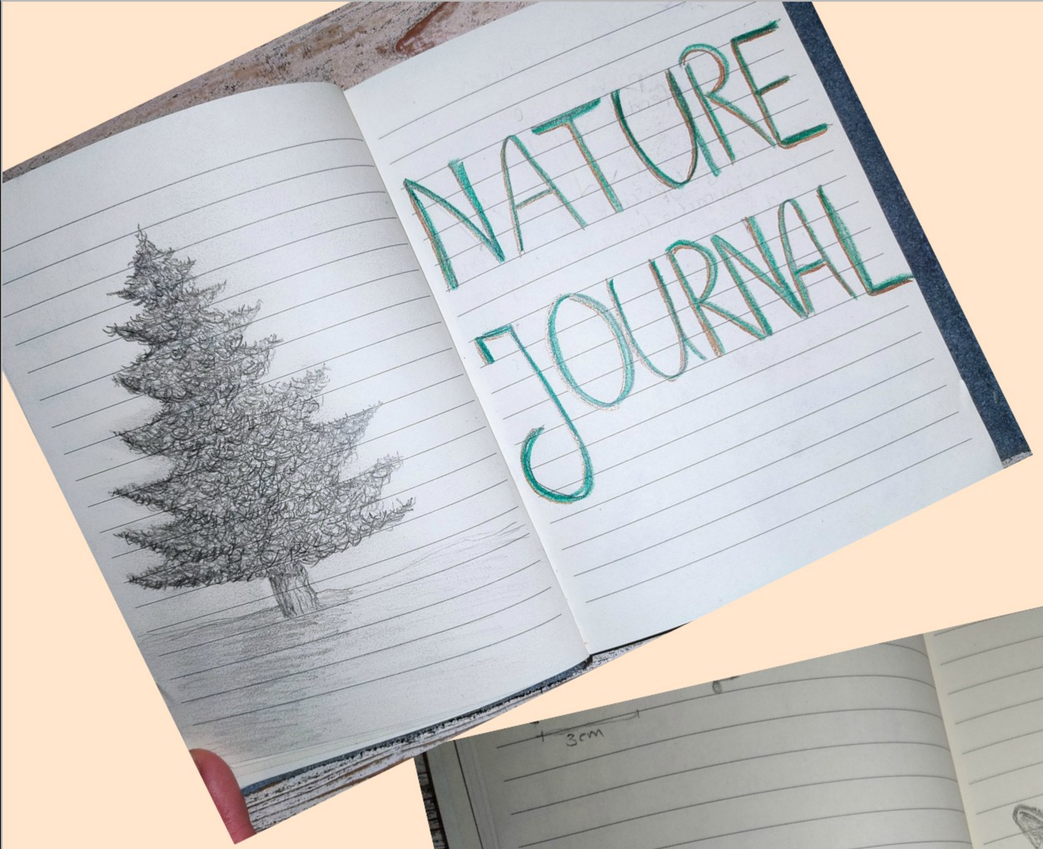
On the almost only day with snow in Potsdam Jouline found that walking pattern of a crow. The so called *hugging toe* is clearly visible.

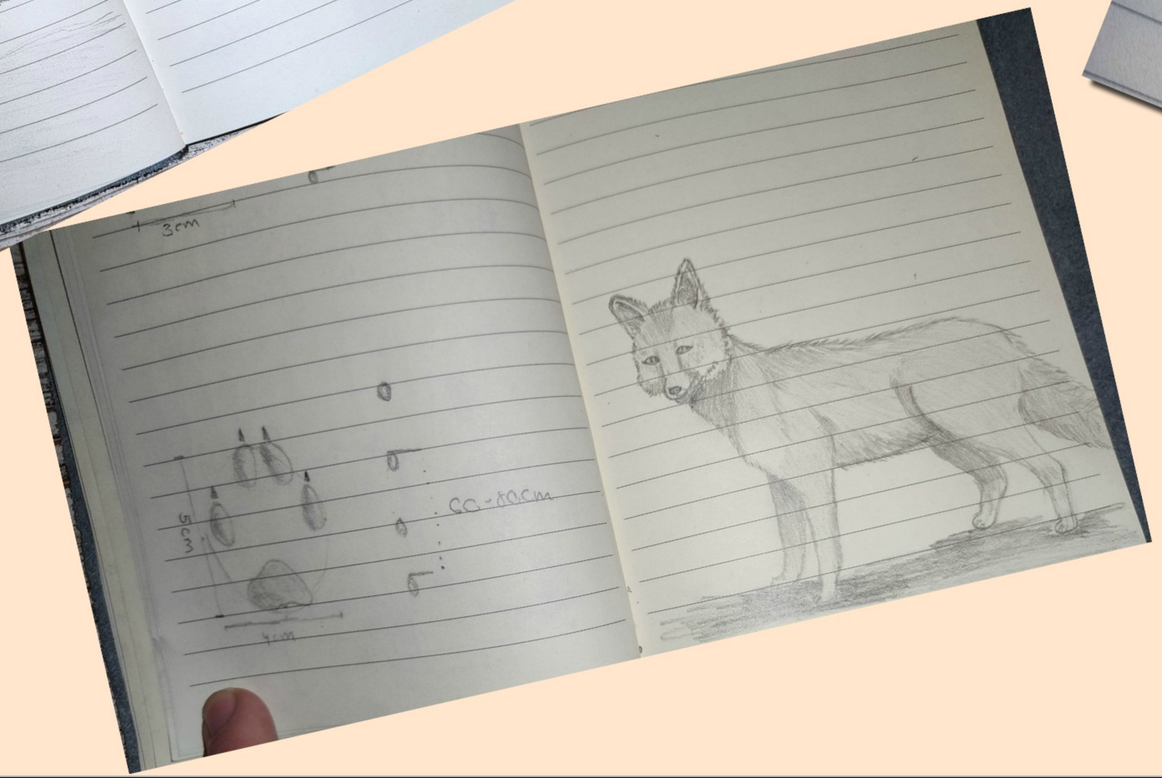
This bird in the bottom picture preferred hopping to get on. Might have been a common blackbrid.

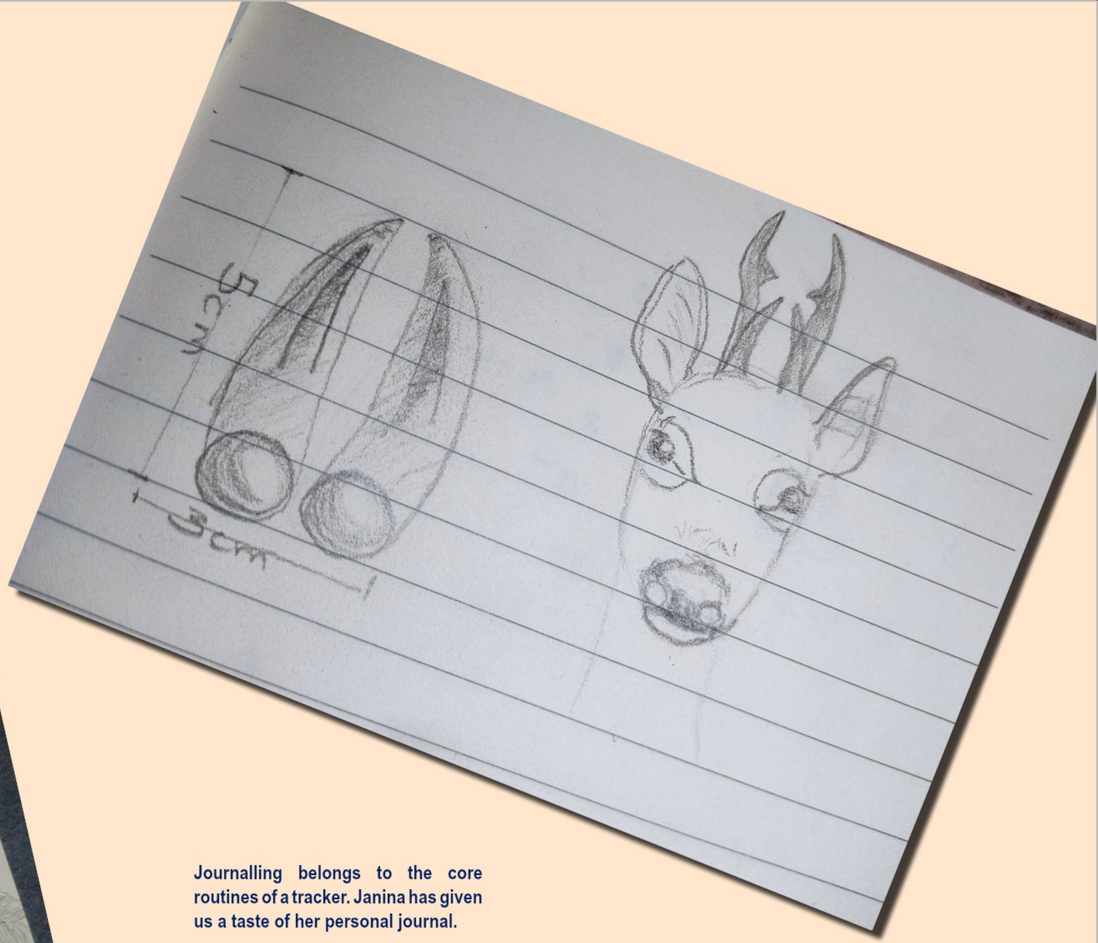
Wild goose imprint found by Max and Lia. >>



<<Yannic found that mallard duck walk pattern in Potsdam. Toe 2 and 4 are bent to the inside.







Journalling belongs to the core routines of a tracker. Janina has given us a taste of her personal journal.

Identification key for mammal footprints © André Preißler, wildnismentor.eu

1 footprint with complete toes -> go to 4
2 footprint with digital pads -> go to 5
3 footprint with cleaves -> go to 15
4a
-with complete toes and webbings throughout finger length -> beaver
-with complete toes and webbings along 2/3 of finger length -> nutria
-with complete toes and webbings along 1/3 of finger length -> musk
4b with complete toes and palms imprinted without webbings -> raccoon
5a digital pads and unclearly visible webbings -> otter
5b digital pads without webbings -> go to 6
6a four digital pads -> go to 7
6b five digital pads -> go to 8
7a with claws -> canids (dog family) -> go to 12
7b without claws -> felids (cat family) -> go to 14
8a unclearly visible digital pads -> rabbit, hare
8b clear digital pads -> go to 9
9a complete sole imprinted -> brown bear
9b incompletely imprinted sole -> go to 10
10a coherent interdigital pad in one part -> porcupine, badger, wolverine
10b digital pads composed of clear subparts -> polecat, squirrel, dormouse, ermine, gopher, rat, common hamster, mice or martens, in case of latter go to 11
11a clearly distinguished digital pads -> beech marten
11b less clearly dist. digital pads due to hair -> pine marten
12a clear digital pads -> go to 13
12b less clear rather blurred digital pads, compact interdigital pad with horizontal line -> red fox
13a clearly separated digital pads -> dog, wolf
13b at base joint middle digital pads -> raccoon dog
14a drop shaped digital pads -> lynx
14b oval to round digital pads -> cat
15a two cleaves = artiodactyles -> go to 16
15b one hoof = odd-toed ungulates -> horses
16a with dewclaws -> wild boar, reindeer
16b without dewclaws -> go to 17
17a even, almost parallel gap between cleaves

-red deer: broader cleaves, that get flatter towards the tip, toe 3 slightly smaller than toe 4; front: length 7,5-10,5 cm/width 5,2-8 cm, rear: length 7-9,5 cm/width 5-7,5 cm
-fallow deer: lean cleaves, tapered at the end, toe 3 slightly smaller than toe 4; front: length 5,5-7,5 cm/width 3,5-6,6 cm, rear: length 5-7 cm/width 3-6 cm
-roe deer: heart shaped, toe 3 slightly smaller than toe 4, front: length 3,1—6,2 cm/ width 2,5-5,5 cm, rear: length 3-6 cm/ width 2,4-5,2 cm

17b irregular gap between cleaves -> elk

The key focuses on the parts you can actually see in the imprint. However, not seeing parts in the imprint does not automatically suggest that those parts cannot be found anatomically. Some parts, for example digital pad nb. 5 in dog and cat family are often not imprinted due to their anatomic position at the foot.