Module # 2 – Component # 1

Introduction

This group includes the Species and Groups:

- Lion
- Leopard
- Caracal
- Serval
- Golden cat
- Swamp cat
- African wild cat + Domestic cat
- Small spotted cat
- Genets

Each foot has a single large pad with two indentations on the posterior edge, which usually but not always show on the track. In the case of the genets these indentations rarely show.

Only four toes on each foot come into contact with the ground and they are clearly separated from the main pad. No claw marks are normally visible in the tracks as claws are held in sheaths during normal movement; they are unsheathed only to gain purchase when jumping, or for holding down prey.

The front feet (pugs) are larger than the hind feet.

The tracks in the following key are reproduced in the correct proportion to one another. RF = right front; RB = right back.
KEY TO PAWS WITHOUT CLAWS

RF

RB

LION

LEOPARD

CARACAL

SERVAL

GOLDEN CAT

RF

RF

RF

RF

RF

RF

SWAMP CAT

AFRICAN WILD CAT

DOMESTIC CAT

SMALL SPOTTED CAT

GENETS
Lion - *Panthera leo*

This is the **largest African cat** and the **massive tracks** (the hind tracks are narrower) are **unlikely to be mistaken** for those of any other species. Lions usually live in groups (prides) but tracks of lone individuals may be encountered.
Right front
Length: 90-120 mm
Width: 110-130 mm

Right back
Length: 120 mm

Lion
The feet of a lion from underneath: note the double indentation on the posterior edge of the main pad (arrows) and the large toe-pads. The two rounded pads higher up on the leg do not come into contact with the ground.
A view of the **front paw**, showing that only the main pad and the four toes touch the ground.
Clear imprints of lion pugs: the top track is of the hind foot and the lower is of the front foot. Note that the toe-pads of the front foot are more splayed than those of the hind foot. It is not often that one encounters an almost ‘perfect’ track like here.
The picture on the left clearly shows ‘registering’, the back track lies partly over the front. In the right image the animal stepped on the sharp stone, the track is obviously distorted.

Often you may only encounter a **single** clear track.
Practice looking at tracks from all angles to familiarize yourself with them.
More images of tracks of different individual lions in different substrates:
Leopard - *Panthera pardus*

The feet of this large cat are similar to those of the lion but smaller. There is considerable geographical variation in the size of leopards, and males are considerably larger than females. The normal walking stride is usually one metre, sometimes more, and the hind foot may be placed on the front foot track. Leopards are solitary animals, but females may be accompanied by one to three cubs.
Right front
Length: 70-90 mm
Width: 70-90 mm

Right back
Length: 80-110 mm
Width: 60-80 mm

Leopard
Front and back paw of leopard photographed from underneath.

Clear front track of a leopard; note its rounded appearance and the double indentation on the posterior edge of the main pad.
Very fresh leopard tracks in slightly damp sand.

Leopard tracks in muddy sand, notice how the toe pads are spread apart and also of course the lack of claw marks.
Caracal - *Caracal caracal*

Caracal tracks are **similar in shape and form to those of the leopard, but smaller, and front tracks are rounded.** The normal walking **stride is about 60-80 cm.** The hind foot is usually placed partly over the track left by the front foot. Usually a solitary animal.
Right front
Length: 50-55 mm
Width: 50-55 mm

Right back
Length: 45-50 mm
Width: 42-48 mm

Caracal
Feet of a caracal: the **double indentation** on the posterior edge of the main pad and the overall **rounded** appearance is typical of all cats. The hind foot of the caracal is **narrower** than the front foot.
Classic caracal tracks in mud, no claw marks are seen, there is no distortion.
Although during normal locomotion the cats keep the claws sheathed, they may leave visible **claw marks** when leaping at prey or trying to get a grip in soft substrate.

Always be aware that in **soft substrates** tracks may be distorted. The trilobe indentation on the left image is not visible but it is on the right hand cluster.
Serval - Leptailurus serval

Serval tracks are similar to those of the caracal but somewhat smaller and the hind print is more rounded. This species is a solitary wanderer, although pairs are not uncommonly observed.
Right front
Length: 40-50 mm

Right back
Length: 40-50 mm

Serval
The **front paw** of a serval. Note that the indentations on the posterior edge of the main pad are not as well developed as in the other cat species.
Serval tracks in lightly wind-blown sand.
Golden Cat - *Caracal aurata*

The golden cat is restricted to the equatorial forest belt and some montane forests in East Africa. Tracks are very rarely found.

The back foot of a golden cat on the left and on the right a **front track** in mud.
Right front
Length: 47 mm

Right back
Length: 43 mm

Golden cat
Swamp Cat - *Felis chaus*

The swamp cat in Africa only occurs in Egypt and closely tied to the Nile River and its delta.
Right front
Length: 38 mm

Right back
Length: 36 mm

Swamp cat
African Wild Cat and Domestic Cat *Felis silvestris* and *Felis catus*

The tracks left by the *African wild cat* and its *domestic* cousin are **identical in appearance** but those of the former are slightly larger and, in both cases, the hind track is slightly narrower than the front track. The normal walking stride is about 30 cm, increasing to 40 cm or more when the cat is trotting. These cats are predominantly solitary creatures.
The front and back paws of an African wild cat on the **left**, the front paw of a domestic cat on the **right**. The toe-pads are usually quite splayed when the cat is walking, particularly those of the front feet. Note the typical double indentation ('trilobe') on the posterior edge of the main pad and the **squared off anterior** edge. In both images the claws are retracted.
Tracks of a **domestic cat** in sand on the left and in snow on the right: note the trilobe on the posterior edge of the main pad, front paw track is on top of photograph.

Several **domestic cat** tracks in soft mud, in front of some of the toes claw marks are visible, the cat tried to get a good grip.
Small Spotted Cat - *Felis nigripes*

The **small spotted cat** is also known as the black-footed cat and is endemic to the central parts of southern Africa. The tracks of this cat are very rarely found and can easily be confused with the tracks of genets.
Right front
Length: 28 mm
Width: 25 mm

Right back
Length: 27 mm
Width: 24 mm

Small spotted cat
The front and back paws of the small spotted cat.
Genets - Genus Genetta

Common large-spotted genet

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Genetta maculata

It is not possible to identify the different genet species on tracks alone, although distribution maps may be of help in a process of elimination. Although each foot has five toes, only **four show in the tracks**; the claws are retracted; the **main pad has two indentations** like those of the cats, but these rarely show clearly on the track. The tracks are smaller than those of the African wild cat. The tracks left by the **front feet are slightly larger** than those left by the hind feet. In a walking trail the **similarity** between front and hind tracks are typical. Measurements are not known for the many other genet species occurring across Africa but most probably fall within these measurement parameters. Genets are solitary species. Despite the track similarities these animals are not members of the cat family.
Genetta thierryi

Hausa genet
Small-spotted genet

*Genetta genetta*
Right front
Length: 20-22 mm
Width: 22-24 mm

Right back
Length: 20-22 mm

South African large-spotted genet
Common large-spotted genet
Small-spotted genet
Miombo genet
The front and hind foot of a small-spotted genet; note the cat-like appearance. Only the main pad and toe-pads of the back foot come into contact with the ground.
**Left:** The front foot track of a small-spotted genet in dried silt; note the powdered silt that has blown into the track. **Right:** A walking trail of the same genet species, the arrow indicating the direction the animal was moving.

As stated earlier identification of genet tracks to species level is not possible just by the appearance of the track. The additional information of species distribution and preferred habitat will give you a clue of which species walked here.