

SCATS –DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE? ... Bill McKellar: Drawings by Kaye Traynor

We are writing about this topic with bush walkers in mind, hoping that the information help them identify the origins of scats that they may see along their journeys.

Scat, is a name given to the faeces of animals; it is a product of the food that the animal has eaten within 48 hours. Scats of different animals looks different, but sometimes, only in small ways. Each species of animal can be identified, and also animals within a group, by the DNA in their scats.

Generally, the larger the scat the larger the animal. Echidnas, which have large size scat compared to body mass, and fallow deer which have smaller scats are the local exceptions. Barbara Trigg suggests opening scat, as the contents help identification

Eastern Grey Kangaroo produce the scats most commonly found locally. Being selective herbivores, and eating only grass, the scat contains only fine, residual, grass material. The scats are black and shiny with mucus, when fresh, with a mild, fermenting odour. They are often in columns, and about 2 cm in both dimensions.

Swamp or Black Wallaby scats are not nearly as common. Wallabies are herbivores, but not selective, and eat bush plants of all sorts. The scats, although black and shiny, with mucus and a fermenting odour similar to that of the Eastern Grey Kangaroos, have much coarser residual material inside. They are also a little smaller – but so are the scats of small kangaroos.



Echidna

Echidnas are usually noticed because of their frequent blunt borrowings, and we will occasionally see a scat nearby. They are brown, about 2 cm wide 3–5 cm long, with a gentle curve. The surface is characteristic, with small remnants of insects sprinkled on the surface. Their odour is very mild.

Ring Tailed Possum In the digestion of the leaves, nuts and flowers of plants, mainly of the Myrtaceae family, these animals practise coprophagia. During the day, they produce in their nest, soft faeces, which they eat. This vastly improves the amount digested and absorbed. They also produce a hard scat at night, which has fine residues about 5 mm by 1.5 cm long.



Eastern Grey Kangaroo



Ring Tailed Possum

Red Fox and Wild Dog. These are carnivores but with moderate intake of in-season berries. Their faeces reflect this, being deformed by bones, fur and nuts, which when fresh, is odorous like dogs. The size mirrors the size of the animal. They may have a tapered end.



Red Fox

Fallow Deer. These animals are becoming a real pest. A small, pale spotted deer has an herbivorous diet and prefers the introduced grasses. Their scats are small, 1.2 cm wide and 2 cm long and black and shiny. Often scats are found in piles, with a point at one end and concave the other. Usually, only fine residual material is found inside.

I wish to acknowledge both Kaye Traynor for her beautiful drawings, and Barbara Trigg for her information. Her book, which is highly recommended is in our library.

Reference: Triggs, Barbara 2004, *Tracks, Scats, and Other Traces : A Field Guide to Australian Mammals*, rev edn Oxford University Press South Melbourne, Vic.



Fallow Deer

Copyright

Any article or information appearing in this *Newsletter* may be copied to further interest in the conservation of native flora and fauna or in environmental care, provided that the source and contributor(s) are acknowledged.