

WHOSE SCAT IS THAT?

Activity prepared by Landcare Education – ph 9296 4727

VELS Links: Domains and Levels: Science (3,4)

Background information

In Australia many animals are seldom seen, so clues left by the animals become very important in identifying their presence in an area. Footprints left on a muddy track, scats deposited in amongst tussock grass or bones scattered on the forest floor are just some of the clues left by some of our shy Australian mammals.

Scats are among the more characteristic signs left by an animal, and they are the ones most likely to be found. Scats can give scientists information about what species of animal, when they where in the area, and what they had been eating. The scat can also tell scientists what size and weight the animal was, approximate age and at times they can even tell whether the animal was male or female.

Scats are some times used as territorial makers - many animals particularly males will deposit their scats in prominent places as a sign of territory ownership eg wombats.

* Information extracted from - Triggs, B (1999) Tracks, Scats and other Traces. Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, Victoria).

Activity

This activity is focused on the SCATS of three mammals common to central Victoria. Many Australian mammals are shy and often active at night so we don't often have an opportunity to see them, and that is why we rely on the clues they leave behind such as scats.

Definition - Scats are the solid waste material produced by mammals and is known by a variety of names - dung, droppings faeces. There are some less impolite terms used as well!

Materials

- Rulers
- Clay
- Bark and leaf material
- Score card
- Information cards

Method

Student will read about the different scats and then will create the scat of one of the species.

* Students need to consider the size, shape, and the type of material that the animal eats when constructing their scats.

Once students have created their scats each student will have the opportunity to observe one of their classmate's creations, they will need to identify which scat their classmate has created and give it a score.

Evaluation Card

Which scat has been created?

Koala

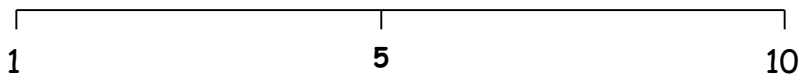
Wallaby

Rabbit

What rating would you give?

1 - doesn't look very similar to scat

10 - is very close to what the scat look like



What are your reasons for giving it the score you did?

Scat Information



Koala

Koala scats contain fairly coarse fragments of leaf, mainly from Eucalypts, their main food. Fresh scats smell of eucalyptus oil, but when dry they have little smell.

The color of their scat varies, but usually it is brown

89



Swamp Wallaby

Scats of wallabies are usually deposited as separate pellets in groups of four to eight. The pellets are oval - square in shape.

The Swamp Wallabies scats are usually brown and have coarse material through them such as woody plant material as well as grasses.

Fresh scats have a strong odour, similar to plant humus. Dry scats have little smell.

Approximately 2.5cm in length and width

121



Rabbits

Even though rabbits are **introduced** animals they are very common in our area and their scats are commonly seen across farm land and near the bush.

Rabbit scats are round, slightly flattened and usually round.

Rabbit scats contain fine particles of plant material

Rabbits generally deposit their scats on 'hills', which may be slightly elevated patches of ground, ant hills or rocks.

Many scats will often be deposited in the one spot. These scat are usually less than 1cm wide.