Identification of the Field Signs of British Ungulates

Target species and sign
The target species include all wild ungulates commonly found within the UK, Wild boar, Red deer, Sika deer, Fallow deer, Roe deer, Chinese water deer and muntjak. Reindeer have been omitted as they are only found in very restricted areas and are semi or fully domesticated. Sign will include, tracks, dropping, digs including scrapes and wallows, resting areas, antler rubs, feeding sign and discards such as hair, antlers, skulls and bones.

Confusing sign
Candidates will also be expected to be able to identify sign which is left by animals other than native/naturalised ungulates and could be confused leading to misidentification. These include tracks of domestic animals such as cows, sheep and goats and signs of other wild mammals and birds such as squirrels and badgers who may damage trees for example or scrape and dig at the ground. Skulls and bones will also become part of the expected knowledge and may be brought in from other locations to insure a wide range of assessment criteria

Target group
The perceived target group is primarily deer managers, deer stalkers and land mangers especially foresters. The first two interest groups will find a good knowledge of field sign useful in devising cull ratios when information ranging from simple presence and absence of a species to roughly estimating population size can be calculated (high density/low density across acreage). Land managers and especially foresters have real need to mitigate damage to forest trees and new plantations and being able to accurately assess the species causing the damage makes accurate control of damage more effective.

It is hoped this may also be of interest to naturalists in general and anyone else with an interest in deer.

Rational
Making accurate decisions on land and wildlife management should only be based on sound data gathering. This evaluation can be used to train and assesses those responsible for gathering such data to better insure its accuracy.

Evaluation and training
The evaluation covers 30-35 questions over one day and will be scored using exactly the same complexity level criteria as the standard and specialist CyberTracker evaluations. The candidate is awarded one point for the correct interpretation of easy sign, or three marks against for a mistake. Examples of this may include recognition of a full grown red deer stag track which should be unmistakable due to its size alone or a clear wild boar track. Two points are awarded for the correct interpretation of complex sign, or two marks against for a mistake. Examples of this may be the track of a fallow deer versus a roe or clear wild boar feeding versus a badger dig or rabbit scrape. Three points are awarded for the correct interpretation of very complex sign, or one point against for a mistake. Examples of this may include sign that is not in the native ungulate target group such as squirrel striping, obscure or partial ungulate tracks and sign, or questions that require an interpretation/evaluation of behavior. The participant's final score is a percentage calculated by dividing the total number of correct points by the sum of the correct and incorrect points.
The process is an open to all, no formal training is required although a prior training course is available in the form of a two day workshop is available and would be beneficial for complete beginners to cover the majority of UK ungulate sign. In this instant there will be a consolidation period of a least two weeks before training and assessment to insure the evaluation is not based upon memory.

Venue
Venues is carefully selected to give as much possibility of encountering the maximum number of signs possible from a wide range of species, although inevitably this may not always be possible.

Parameters

Below is a table giving examples of the types of sign likely to be found and the species making it. *This is not an exhaustive list and is meant as a guide only.*

Type of damage	Possible cause,
Damage to trees and bark	- Incisor scraping, target species and confusable species - Boar tusks - Badger claws - Various Species Antler rubs - Various species Body rubs - Striping by squirrels - Nest gathering by squirrels - Various species Rodent feeding - Woodpecker sign - Mechanical/human damage
Damage to the ground	- Deer scrapes - Boar feeding - Badger feeding - Rabbit scrapes - Boar liars - Deer beds/couches
Tracks	- All six deer species - Wild boar - Sheep - Goats - Cows - Unlikely/unusual Alpaca etc
Scat	- All six deer species summer scats pellets and clumps - Domestic animals scat as above - Lagomorphs
Feeding	- Classic ungulate browse - Classic lagomorph browse - Vole feeding - Feeding on a verity of plants and trees - Insect damage and feeding resembling ungulate browse but only recognised as insect as opposed to specific species.
Hair	- Sheep - Deer species all species - Wild boar - Badger - Rabbit - Anything likely to be confused with deer e.g. anything found in a scrap/bed or on a tree
Skulls/bones	- Sheep versus deer/boar etc - Obvious deer species separation by size and/or shape - Basic recognition of herbivore/carnivore/ insectivore/rodent
Antlers	- Separating species - Ageing where possible