

Paws for Reading

What is a paw? Is it a foot/hand of an animal? Can a paw be a foot, and can a foot be a paw?

A paw is the lower part attached to the leg of an animal. It is usually furry, ovoid (egg shaped) with soft pads on the bottom and claws. Paws could be the fore foot or hind foot of an animal. Feet are elongated, not very hairy and have nails not claws. A paw can be a foot, but a foot cannot be a paw. People do not have paws, but raccoons do.

So, what animals have paws? Cats, dogs, raccoons, bears, weasels, mice (rodents), fox, wolves.

How many toes do they have? They will have either four toes or five toes. Four toed animals are the cat, dog, fox, wolf, and coyotes (they also have a dewclaw, it is like our thumb). Rabbits have paws with four toes and a dewclaw but no pad on the bottom. It is furry. Other four toes animals are big cats like the cougar and lion. Five toed animals are weasels, skunks, otters, and bears. Plus, many more.

Sometimes a cat or dog is born with extra toes. This cat/dog would be called a Polydactyl cat/dog. Polydactyl is Greek for many digits.

Have you seen tracks in the dust or mud and wondered what animal made those? Some tracks are easy to identify, other are much harder. Size is a clue to identifying certain tracks.

Number of toes is another clue. Does it have claws showing in the track? Are the front tracks inline with the back track or are they off set?

Can an animal use its paws for other things besides walking/running? Yes, many animals use their paws to hit or swipe at another animal. They can dig in the dirt. By digging they can get something or bury something. An otter can use its paws to use makeshift tools. Such as taking a rock to hammer on a shellfish, so it can be opened to eat.

Racoons wet their paws to make them more sensitive. This can help them determine what they are eating or attempting to eat. A racoon's front paws look a bit like a hand.

Who has the biggest paw? A Polar Bear has a paw that can be 12 inches across. This helps the bear to spread out its body weight over snow and ice.

Who has the smallest paw? The Eurasian pygmy shrew. This little shrew is only 4.5 cm long. Its paw would be measured in millimetres.

Most mammals have four legs but only some of those have paws. Are the mammals with no legs or feet/paws? At least in the traditional way we tend to think of legs.

Clue: think water. So, there is an idea to investigate for the future.