



Upgrade your woody walk

Whether it's on a stretch of the Bruce Trail or in the woods on your own back 40, gather up the little ones, slip on some hikers (consider cleats if it's icy), and set out on a different kind of hike, this one attuned to wildlife.

Don Scallen, In The Hills' resident nature expert, created this thoughtful challenge for us. You'll need to take along a measuring tape, pencil and notebook for older kids.

1

Watch for tracks in the snow and keep your eyes and ears open for birds in the forest. The woods are full of blue jays, cardinals and other birds that overwinter.

2

Find the distinctive tracks of a cottontail rabbit (see inset photo).

3

Follow the tracks to discover what the rabbit was up to. See if you can find where the rabbit rested. This shallow depression is called a form.

4

Look for its droppings. They might remind you of Cocoa Puffs cereal, says Don.

5

Examine branches along the rabbit's path. Branches are rabbit food, at least in winter. Any cut on a sharp 45-degree angle has probably been bitten by the rabbit you're tracking.

6

With a measuring tape, see how far apart the tracks are. This distance is called the stride. A 20–30 cm stride (about 8–12 in.) probably means your rabbit was calm and unhurried. An 80–100 cm stride (about 31–40 in.) means your rabbit was really stressed out. It may have been on the run from a predator such as a coyote or red fox.

7

See if you can piece together a story about a day in the life of "your" rabbit.

If you'd like to find your footing with a regular hiking group or just sample new bunny-worthy trails, consider going on an introductory hike with the [Dufferin Hi-Land](#) or [Caledon Bruce Trail Club](#). Both groups offer organized hikes of varying lengths and levels of difficulty.