

## Scavenger Hunt Items on Nature Trail April 2021

Category	Item	Description
<b>Mammals</b>	Porcupine	Porcupines are fairly common on Woodson Ranch. These conspicuous members of the rodent family are covered in sharp quills. They do not have much speed, so you can get fairly close to them, but don't get too close because they can swing their tail like a spiked club and this will result in quills embedding themselves in you...or, your dog if it is not careful. The name "Porcupine" comes from the Latin "porcus" meaning "pig", and "spina", meaning quill. In some parts of the US, they are referred to as "quill pigs".
	Whitetailed Deer	Whitetailed deer are common not just on Woodson Ranch, but all up and down the Ruby Valley. We estimate a population of about 300 on the ranch at any given time. Recently, a prion disease called Chronic Wasting Disease was discovered in Montana and in the Ruby Valley. Our hunting program, a necessary activity to keep the herd size from getting too big, encourages and facilitates tests on each animal harvested during hunting season.
	Moose	Moose are the largest species of deer in the world. They have open-hand-shaped antlers, unlike the branching types of whitetailed and mule deer. Unlike the other species of deer found in the valley, moose tend to be solitary. While generally slow-moving, they can become aggressive, especially if it is a female with a calf. So, be careful and give them a wide berth!
	Coyote	Coyotes are among the more adaptable species of mammals on the planet, being found everywhere from the deepest wilderness to the sidewalk streets of major urban areas. Opportunistic, they will eat everything from small rodents and mammals like rabbits, to road-killed deer or fawns they take down themselves. Listen at dawn and dusk for their musical yipping and singing.
	Fox	Fox, like coyotes, are a member of the Canidae family. They are smaller than coyotes, though, and have bushier tails. There are 12 species of fox, but the one most often seen on Woodson Ranch—usually in the spring before the grass is too tall to see them—is the Red Fox.
	Feral cat	Feral cats are descendants of housecats that got away. They are generally very shy, and are exceptionally good hunters of small creatures like voles, mice, and packrats. They are also the scourge of songbirds everywhere. It is

		<p>estimated that the cats in the US—both domestic and feral—kill as many as 3.7 Billion (yes, with a “B”) birds every year. For this reason, it is recommended that all domesticated cats be spayed or neutered.</p>
	Raccoon	<p>Raccoons are the largest member of the Procyonidae family of carnivores, a family that includes ringtails, cacomistles, coatis, kinkajous, olingos, and oliguitos. Like coyotes, raccoons are very adaptable and live both in wild areas and places heavily populated by people. With 2-5 “kits” being born each year, you can see that they are prolific—some estimate that there is at least one raccoon per person in the US. And if you’ve ever seen one getting into your garbage can, you will understand why they are often called “trash pandas.”</p>
<b>Birds</b>	Turkey	<p>Woodson Ranch has been home to a fairly stable population of between 80 and 120 turkeys. These large birds are a variety of wild turkey called “Merriam”. It was named in 1900 after C. Hart Merriam, the first chief biologist of the U.S. Biological Survey. A relative newcomer to the US, it is now found in 15 states. Their mating season is in the spring and you may be fortunate enough to see a male “fanning” his feathers in display as he tries to impress the hens.</p>
	Hawk-type Birds of prey	<p>Hawks can be divided into several groups: Buteos (aka, buzzard hawks), Accipiters (true hawk), Harriers (slim birds with slim wings and slim tails), Kites (these are falcon shaped, but spend more time gliding than actual falcons), and Falcons (like kites, they have long pointed wings and tails). Among the types you might spot on Woodson Ranch include:</p> <p>Buteos: Red-tailed hawks, Swainson’s hawk, Rough-legged hawk, Ferruginous hawks</p> <p>Accipiters (aka bird hawks): Sharp-shinned, Cooper’s, Goshawk</p> <p>Harriers: Northern Harrier</p> <p>Falcon: American kestrel, Prairie falcon</p>
	Eagles	<p>Woodson Ranch is a great place for eagles to hunt. In recent years, we have seen eagles that have captured both fish and ducks in their strong talons. We have seen numerous bald eagles, as well as the occasional golden eagle.</p>

Osprey	Ospreys, often called “fish hawks”, are often spotted on Woodson Ranch and we even put up a platform on the east side of the ranch to provide a nesting spot.
Owls	Although there may be other owls that use Woodson Ranch, the one we see most often is the Great Horned Owl, known for the distinctive tufts on its head which look like (but are not) ears.
Turkey vulture	Nature’s cleaning service, turkey vultures have featherless heads, likely an evolution that helps them keep clean. These birds are often among the first birds to find a carcass such as a dead deer. Magpies and then ravens are probably the first, but vultures come in soon thereafter and help break down the unexpected feast. Often spotted high in the air soaring, these birds have been known to regurgitate their meal of carrion in self-defense, so don’t get too close!
Sparrow	These numerous birds are often spotted in wooded parts of Woodson Ranch, and there are lots of species. They are small birds, brown in color, with a pretty song so you might hear them before you see them!
Red-winged and yellow-headed blackbirds	These two species of birds are both spotted on the Woodson Ranch. The red-winged blackbird is very common in the marshy-wetland areas of the ranch, frequently using cattails as a perch. It is almost always the first bird to return during spring migration (end of February or beginning of March). The yellow-headed blackbird arrives a couple months later and, if you thought the red-winged variety had a squawky voice, wait till you hear the yellow-headed one!
American robin	The harbinger of spring, these ubiquitous birds are often seen in the junipers on the ranch eating the tree’s blue-grey berries. Pay attention to their song as they have very specific sounds depending on what they are trying to communicate. They have a song warning other robins of danger, one used in the mornings to help convey territorial boundaries, and one at night which sounds just like a lullaby.
Ducks	Spotting a duck on Woodson Ranch is not difficult, but spotting the ducks before their keen eyes spot you is a challenge. Among the species you might see here are mallards, coots, mergansers, goldeneye, wood duck, and cinnamon teal.
Geese	We have one type of goose common on Woodson Ranch and that is the Canada Goose. These big, noisy birds use the ranch for nesting and eating. In the latter part of the year, they are often found in large numbers in the fields.

	Sandhill Cranes	So beloved to us is the sandhill crane that they became the symbol of Woodson Ranch. These birds migrate south to New Mexico (Bosque del Apache reserve) in September and October, and return in March. We typically find a few nests in April and May. The mating displays look just like the birds are enjoying a dance together, with bowing, leaping, and various expressions of amour. This is another species you may hear before you see it as their distinctive song can be heard from miles away!
<b>Reptiles</b>	Garter Snakes	We don't see many snakes on Woodson Ranch, but garter snakes are fairly common. They often lay as straight as a stick on the ranch roads to warm up, so watch out for them there. These snakes are harmless to people and spend their time basking in the sun or eating insects, slugs, worms, spiders, and small rodents and birds.
	Painted turtle	Relatively rare, turtles can be seen in some of the wetlands on the ranch. These amphibians are a welcome and cherished sight!
<b>Stand in one place for 30 seconds and just listen for...</b>	Sandhill Cranes	So beloved to us is the sandhill crane that they became the symbol of Woodson Ranch. These birds migrate south to New Mexico (Bosque del Apache reserve) in September and October, and return in March. We typically find a few nests in April and May. The mating displays look just like the birds are enjoying a dance together, with bowing, leaping, and various expressions of amour. This is another species you may hear before you see it as their distinctive song can be heard from miles away!
	Running water	Water is very important to all the living things on Woodson Ranch, and you may hear it in Clear Creek, the Ruby River, our spring creek system and Alder Creek. It's a great sound to remember as you try to fall asleep at night!
	Rustling leaves	Silence is a great relaxer. It's rare to stand in one spot and not hear the sounds of other people, but it's possible. And one thing you might hear as you strive for inner silence, is rustling leaves. Savor this.
	Distant cattle	The Ruby Valley, like much of Montana, is focused on agriculture. Numerous ranches that raise both hay and cattle bring a sense of common purpose to the valley. It's possible, in almost any spot in the valley, to hear the pastoral sound of lowing cattle!
	What does the fox say?	A few years ago, this question became a meme when someone wrote a song about it. Perhaps you'll be fortunate enough to see a fox on the ranch and then you can answer the question!

<b>Signs</b>	Feathers	With so many birds on Woodson Ranch, it's no surprise that you may find a feather laying on the ground. Birds naturally lose feathers, sometimes "moulting", which means they lose a lot of feathers in a short period of time, only to replace them with new feathers. They are fun to find because they are a sign that the birds were there before you!
	Bones	Woodson Ranch is 1100 acres, and in a space that large, it's normal to find that things have died. Sometimes, deer die on the ranch and provide food for turkey vultures and other scavenging animals. You may also find bones from small mammals like rabbits and gophers. If you find some, see if you can identify what animal they came from.
	Tracks	One of the most fun things to discover is a set of animal tracks. Looking closely at the tracks, can you tell what animal made them?
	Eggshells	In springtime, baby birds of all varieties hatch into the world. Often, the shells of the eggs from which they hatched are pushed out of the nest to make room for the babies. See if you can guess what kind of bird hatched from the shells you find. You may find tiny song-bird shells, or big turkey or geese shells.
	Poop	Yup...everybody poops. Animals are rather indiscriminate in their choice of pooping places, so you might find poop anywhere on Woodson Ranch. Deer, moose, rabbits, raccoon and beaver are among the more commonly discovered poop piles.
	Dead things	Winter in Montana can be a harsh place for animals, and sometimes they die. You may discover a recently passed animal, or its bones if it died a while ago. Don't touch the dead things as they can carry pathogens, but see if you can identify what died.
	Seasonal shifts	It can be fun to watch how things change throughout the season. Each season seems to have a dominant color and certain species of wildlife are more common at certain times of year. See if you can find something that indicates the season is changing.