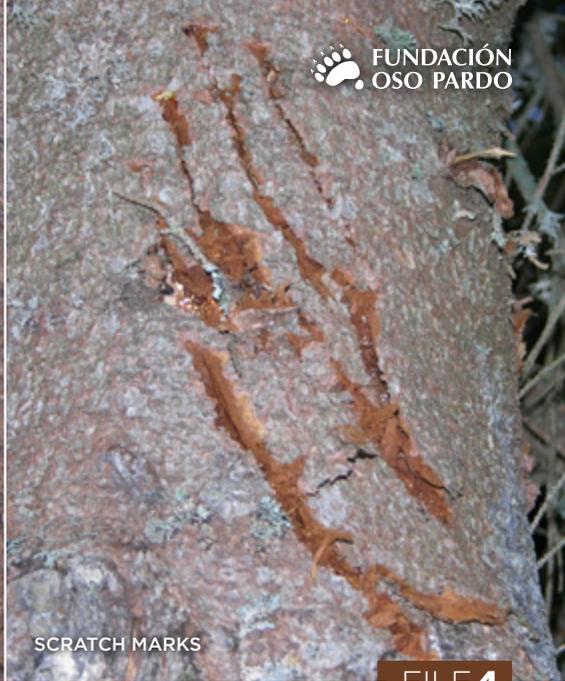




REAR FOOTPRINT



SCRATCH MARKS

FILE 4

# Tracks and signs

## Footprints

Brown bears are plantigrades, leaving large and unmistakable prints with the five toes and claws well marked.

The rear feet are longer and narrower than the forepaws. The usual measurement taken on a print is the distance between the centres of the inner and outer toes (i.e. toes one and five). On average, adult females leave prints 105 mm wide on the forepaws and 98 mm wide on the hind feet, while males' forepaws leave marks 120-130 mm wide, and occasionally over 140 mm.

The footprints are similar to those of a Eurasian badger, but even those of cubs recently emerged in April or May (from 60 to 65 mm for the forepaw) are larger than those of the mustelid (45 mm wide). As they move, bears exert more pressure on the outer part of the hand and the forepaws are turned inwards, as if they were pigeon-toed, while the hind feet leave more or less parallel imprints to the walking direction.





## Excrement

Brown bear droppings are large and difficult to confuse with other species, and they allow us to study the bear's diet in detail, as they usually contain plenty of identifiable remains of the food consumed. Except after eating the carrion of dead animals, they do not smell bad. The form and colour of the droppings also vary depending on the food ingested.

In spring, fresh grass usually gives them a greenish colour, in summer seeds and semi-digested remains of berries and other fleshy fruits, the remains of insects and hair from wild or domestic animals appear, while in autumn and winter the skins of drier fruits and nuts, such as acorns, beech mast or sweet chestnuts prevail.

## Marks on trees

During the spring, when the mating season occurs, male bears bite and scratch tree trunks in order to signal to other bears both their presence and their intentions. Females and young bears also scratch and rub themselves against trunks throughout the year. Broken branches are further evidence of bears having climbed trees to feed, such as oaks and cherries.

## Other signs

On barbed wire fences surrounding meadows and cultivated fields, on the trunks of trees where they scratch to leave their odour, and in the vegetation where they den down, bears leave characteristic hairs which are slightly wavy and soft to the touch. These hairs, apart from confirming the presence of bears are used to extract DNA samples from their roots. Breeding lairs and hibernating dens are typically located in areas with difficult access and it is neither convenient nor recommended to try and approach them. Signs of feeding activity, such as overturned rocks and boulders and ant nests which have been dug out (signs which are similar to wild boar activity as well) or damaged beehives also indicate the presence of bears.

