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## Tracking and Observing Wildlife in the Southern Berkshires

Much of scientific inquiry is based on forming hypotheses and conducting experiments, but there is also a world of value and potential discovery to be found in simple awareness and observation. Information about the natural world that is thus gathered serves as a foundation for those who would explore further via experimentation, as well as having value and immediate application in its own right. I am interested in searching out and observing the local wildlife and writing a narrative based on my findings and supplemented with outside sources.

The main objective of this project is to produce a finished piece of writing which meets the following guidelines: that it sharpens a reader's interest in the natural world by presenting a record of my search for animals in an engaging and accessible manner; that it educates the reader by providing information about the biology and ecology of a variety of species; and that it enables the aspiring naturalist to make their own observations by detailing techniques of wildlife study. Similar works from which I am drawing inspiration are Bill Bryson's *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, Michael Tougias' *There's a Porcupine in My Outhouse*, and Douglas Adams' *Last Chance to See*.



I would like to begin the wildlife-search and observation part of the project by attempting to find -or find evidence of- several species and groups which are of particular interest to me. These include the Bobcat (*Felis rufus*), American Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*), Red (*Vulpes vulpes*) and Gray (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) foxes, Coyote (*Canis latrans*), members of the Mustelid family, Northern Raven (*Corvus corax*), Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), Red-Tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), other raptors, reptiles, and amphibians. In addition to these animals which I am deliberately searching for, I hope to find and include a variety of other species while in the field. With the specified animals in mind, however, I will begin by exploring likely habitats looking for tracks, trails, scat, and other indications of their presence and activity. Following the discovery of signs that a certain animal frequents an area, I will either return for a longer -and stealthier- attempt at observation or set up automated photography equipment to monitor the area.

For each scouting or observation session, I will keep journal entries recording date, time of day, weather, and indications or observations of presence and behavior of animals of interest. These entries will later be interpreted and placed in context using guide books, scientific papers and other sources with information pertaining to specific species, and interviews with wildlife professionals. I will then bring my observations and this supplemental research together in a narrative on discovering the local wildlife.

As a synthesis of science and creative nature writing, this project will draw upon my experience as both an artist and biologist to form a work uniting these interests. I anticipate that certain aspects of researching and writing this narrative will also be beneficial in preparing for a career in veterinary medicine; behavioral observation and public education, both integral to the project, are essential skills when working in a clinical practice. The wildlife searches will also require the development and practice of field techniques which are useful in population or wildlife medicine. The process of researching and writing this book will serve as a bridge between my past coursework and future pursuits, and I intend the finished product to be a resource which encourages members of the community to a greater interest in, and understanding of, the natural world.