NORTHEAST WILDLIFE TRACKERS

2026 Session Descriptions

Friday

6:30–8:00 p.m. • Wildlife Tracking Trivia Night!

Gather for an evening of wildlife tracking trivia, shared curiosity, and friendly fun.

8:00–10:00 p.m. • Evening Activities

Campfire Camaraderie, Flyers Walk, Stargazing, and Trackers Lounge offer ways to connect and enjoy the evening. Some activities are weather dependent.

Saturday

7:00–7:30 a.m. • Morning Awareness Program

As dawn unfolds across the landscape, we gather to walk in silence and presence. This simple practice reconnects body and breath with the rhythms of the wild—awakening our awareness before a full day of learning and connection.

8:45–10:00 a.m. • Keynote Presentation

Kareem A. Dieng — Passion on Purpose: Following the Trail Toward Something Greater Than Ourselves

Wildlife tracking often begins as a passion, born from a fascination with animals, nature, and the stories painted across the landscape. Along the path, curiosity trots toward proficiency and wonder walks into accurate interpretation. But tracking has always been more than a technical discipline or personal pursuit, offering a way of seeing, knowing, and moving through the world.

What becomes possible when passion connects us to purpose, and purpose sets us on a path in service to something greater than ourselves? Inspired by CyberTracker Conservation's founding vision and tracking traditions carried across human cultures and through time, Kareem A. Dieng traces his journey from curious beginner to professional wildlife tracker, outdoor educator, and conservation leader. Grounded in his work in Maine and West Africa, he explores how tracking can serve conservation, ecological monitoring, education, cultural connection, community development, and the living world.

Tracking is both systematic and speculative, demanding fidelity to evidence while at the same time asking us to recognize patterns and project beyond the story at our feet. Kareem considers whether this way of knowing offers a path beyond lives measured from track to track, certification to certification, or accomplishment to accomplishment, toward professional contentment, personal fulfillment, and service to the greater good. He invites us to look beyond the immediate evidence and consider where this web of trails leads. Perhaps when we

tug at the string, at the end of the line, there is purpose not yet visible. Our quarry resting in the shade, huddled beneath The Acacia out of the heat of the midday sun.

10:15–11:45 a.m. • On-Site Field Session 1

A. Scott Semmens — Trailing

Join Scott for a hands-on introduction to the art of animal trailing. Explore foundational skills such as identifying and following trails, interpreting subtle signs, and understanding how trails age over time. Expect to lose the trail now and then—it's part of the learning—and practice the essential skill of re-finding it. Along the way, we'll cultivate quiet movement, sharpen our attention to detail, and deepen our awareness of the landscape. If fresh animal trails prove elusive, we'll shift into collaborative practice by tracking human trails and refining our stealth and observational techniques together.

B. David Boynton — Track Aging

Explore how weather, substrate, and disturbance change the appearance of tracks over time. Learn how to practice and hone your skills to read the stories and timelines in the forest.

C. Ana Maria Arroyo — Mock Certification

Practice observing and interpreting tracks and sign in a mock evaluation setting. Compare your answers, discuss the evidence behind different interpretations, and identify skills to develop through further field practice.

D. Amy Shamansky — Nature Journaling

Deepen your connection with the natural world through sketching and writing. Sketching is a way of learning, seeing our subject with its detail and nuance. Writing captures our noticings, questions, and associations. All of this creates more awe and reverence for our natural world. See what this process can do to enhance your tracking senses.

E. Amy Martinez-Beal — Connection through Process: Processing Animal Skulls

Deepen your understanding of how the animals we track make their way in the world. Discover unique characteristics of a variety of animal skulls as we remove layers of tissue with techniques and tools you can replicate in your own nature study. Materials provided but feel welcome to bring any specimens who have been lingering in your freezer!

1:45–3:15 p.m. • Concurrent Session 1

A. Bob Etzweiler — Turkey Time

A look at Wild Turkey biology, lifecycle, behavior, and related tracks and sign - in photos and stories. There will be room to tailor the discussion to the interest of attendees.

B. Wendi Wu — Accessing Urban Nature: Philadelphia Wildlife Research

The Accessing Urban Nature Initiative (AUNI), led by Penn Vet at the University of Pennsylvania as part of the Urban Wildlife Information Network (UWIN), is building a trail camera network across Philadelphia to better understand the wildlife living alongside us in the city. Working with parks, environmental centers, and community partners, the project studies how animals move through different urban landscapes. Alongside these efforts, the Philly Wildlife Tracking Club brings a community-based approach through track and sign

observation, public walks, and shared learning about urban wildlife. This presentation briefly shares what the Philly tracking community has been exploring and how local observation can support larger urban ecology research efforts.

C. Ben Wymer — Camera Trapping

This workshop will introduce you to professional camera trapping, which is the practice of using a DSLR or mirrorless camera, flashes, and an infrared sensor to capture high resolution images of wildlife. You will be introduced to the equipment involved and how to use it, and you will receive tips about predicting animal behavior in order to capture aesthetically pleasing and in-focus photos of wildlife. Camera trapping blends your skills of wildlife tracking, photography, and wildlife ecology and behavior that no other practice can.

D. Winston Antoine — From the Hood to the Woods: Journey to Food Sovereignty

How I went from a boy in the city to a man on the water, in the fields and in the woods. How one can become less dependent on the capitalist food system. How to get your foot into the outdoors for hunting/fishing/gardening and general food acquisition.

E. Chase Bernier — Wildlife Monitoring of Highway Underpasses in Massachusetts

Since the early 2000s, multiple wildlife underpasses of different sizes, settings, and configurations have been constructed along the Route 2 highway corridor in Concord, Massachusetts. This workshop will review the methods utilized to monitor wildlife utilization of these underpasses which included remote camera traps, track beds, snow tracking, and road mortality surveys. The talk will also discuss the effectiveness of different monitoring strategies as well as wildlife underpass concepts such as siting, design, permitting, and monitoring protocols.

3:30–4:45 p.m. • Plenary Session

Emily Carrollo — Returning Cougars (Puma concolor) to the Northeastern United States

This presentation will cover three topics regarding cougar restoration in the northeast. The first topic will be about the history of cougars (also known as pumas, mountain lions, catamounts, panthers, and many other names) in the region, and what led to their extirpation in eastern North America. The second topic will cover basic cougar ecology and life history, and what that could infer about cougars returning to this region. Lastly, this talk will cover the Cougar Research Collaborative's research regarding the possibility of human assisted recovery of cougars to the northeast region.

6:30–8:15 p.m. • Trail Cam Show & Tell: How This Technology Can Up Your Tracking Game

Trail cameras open a window into the secret lives of wildlife. Join this interactive session to see real footage from trackers across the region and learn how to use trail cams to enhance your field awareness, pattern recognition, and ecological storytelling. Submit your own clips or curiosities to share!

8:30–10:00 p.m. • Evening Activities

Campfire Camaraderie, Flyers Walk, Stargazing, and Trackers Lounge offer ways to connect and enjoy the evening. Some activities are weather dependent.

Sunday

7:00–7:30 a.m. • Morning Mindfulness Program

Settle into the living soundscape of morning. Listen as the birds awaken the forest—each call, trill, and rustle offering clues to the unfolding life of the land. This quiet practice invites attention, presence, and a sense of belonging.

8:45–9:45 a.m. • Annual Community Meeting

Gather with the Northeast Wildlife Trackers community for the annual "town hall" meeting. Let's build the future of tracking and connection in the Northeast together!

9:45–11:15 a.m. • On-Site Field Session 2

A. David Boynton and Becca Houghton — Tracking for Beginners

Begin exploring the stories animals leave behind. We'll have hands-on track casts, skulls and bones, nests, nuts, and more. We'll discuss best practices for remembering the tracker you were born as.

B. Fred McCagg — Engaging Young Trackers: Track Casting & Nature-Based Learning

Explore how making casts of animal tracks can spark curiosity and support learning outdoors. Consider ways to invite young trackers to observe closely, ask questions, and share their discoveries.

C. Kelly Klingler and Kai Pratt — Skulls and Deer Jaw Aging

Examine the clues held in animal skulls and teeth. Explore how skull features relate to diet and behavior, and how tooth development and wear can help estimate a deer's age.

D. Will Close — Nature Journaling

In this workshop you will be given the tools and tips to deepen your curiosity of the natural world through the time-tested practice of nature journaling. We will venture out on the land for a crash course in everything from warm up exercises, a step-by-step demo and one-on-one coaching. Test your observational skills, deepen your awareness, and walk away with a renewed appreciation and curiosity for the world around you. All levels of experience are welcome!

E. Collaborative Field Walk

Join fellow trackers for a shared exploration in the field, where curiosity and conversation guide the way. This walk invites participants to exchange insights, compare interpretations, and deepen observation skills together. A dynamic, peer-to-peer learning experience that celebrates the collective wisdom of the tracking community.

11:30 a.m.–1:00 p.m. • Concurrent Session 2

A. David Boynton, Wendi Wu, and Bryan DiFabio — Tracking Clubs Best Practices

Share and learn ideas for starting, sustaining, and strengthening a tracking club. Discuss welcoming participants, organizing field outings, supporting shared learning, and building a community where trackers of different experience levels can contribute and learn.

B. Jessica Kagle and Kelly Klingler — Curriculum Design to Integrate Trail Cameras & Tracking

Predators, including hawks, owls, coyotes, bobcats, and fishers, are essential to every healthy ecosystem, yet so much fear surrounds them. Learn Kestrel's approach, which involves students in collecting field data using tracking and trail cameras to glimpse how predators use the spaces near their schools. Through these methods, they develop understanding of how predators are connected to the whole ecosystem, from specific types of plants that feed prey, to the prey they keep in check. Field data is incorporated into videos, maps, and other projects shared with the community to promote awareness and conservation.

C. Emma Tutein — Tracking and Navigation

Exploring wildlife track and sign often has us navigating off-trail. This session will provide an introduction to using a map and compass together to navigate across the landscape. You will learn how to use maps to find places that are likely to be rich with wildlife tracks and/or sign, and how to use a compass to navigate to those locations (and return back to your car) safely! If you have an orienteering compass feel free to bring it, but we will have plenty of extras for those that may not.

D. Kai Pratt — Gaits and Track Patterns

Explore how an animal's movement shapes the pattern of tracks it leaves behind. Compare foot placement, spacing, and trail patterns to develop interpretations of gait and behavior.