

USING TRACK AND SCAT REPLICAS

Questions and Answers from Acorn Naturalists

- 1. How can I attach track replicas to wooden or other materials?** Many individuals use track replicas to make tracks in sand boxes and other displays. Since Acorn Naturalists' replicas are made with a nontoxic vinyl material, any glue used for gluing vinyl should work. To increase effectiveness, we suggest first washing the track with soap to remove oils and then roughen the flat side of the track with medium sandpaper. We also suggest sanding the surface on which the track will be glued. Apply vinyl glue according to manufacturer directions. Some tracks have crevices and folds, making adherence a challenge. For these we suggest nailing a small carpet tack through the track and into the wood. This, combined with the vinyl glue, makes a bond that should last forever.
- 2. Where can I get vinyl adhesives?** Vinyl adhesives generally come in metal tubes and are advertised for use "repairing pool liners, spa covers, rafts, and similar materials." Locally, hardware stores offer a compound called *VynaBond*, but we also have seen similar compounds under a number of different trade names. Because these compounds are flammable, shipping can be extremely expensive. As a result, Acorn Naturalists does not carry vinyl adhesives.
- 3. With respect to the negatives (molds), what kinds of material can I use to fill in the mold to make my track replica?** The mold material we use is extremely resilient - you can use just about anything in it. We have experimented with both plaster of Paris and PerfectCast (similar to but stronger than plaster of Paris and available from Acorn Naturalists). Other materials can be used as well. In all cases, once the material has set up, remove the cast and wash out the mold.
- 4. I want to make track impressions in concrete along a pathway. Can I use the tracks to do this?** This is something of an art form, and we strongly recommend that you experiment before laying your final path. Different batches of concrete set up at different times, and if you press in the track too early, it will be "mushy" and lose definition. If you press it in too late, you will not be able to make a good impression. Also be sure to not put deep track marks right where people walk as you might create a trip hazard. You might also want to try making positives out of plaster or concrete (using the molds) and using these to press into the concrete, as they would provide a firmer impression than the vinyl tracks. Again, experimentation is key - mix up several different batches and experiment until you have a final product you are pleased with.
- 5. Are the replicas durable enough for outside use?** The replicas we offer won't be damaged by rain, mud, or even freezing weather. Naturalists often "seed" trails with our scat replicas and then have students look for and identify the scat during hikes. Because naturally occurring scat can contain pathogens, most naturalists recommend not handling real specimens - one can pull it apart with sticks if one is trying to determine diet.
- 6. I need track/scat/fish replicas of animals that you don't list. Can you manufacture custom replicas?** Developing a "master mold" that can be used for production is a costly process. The replicas we manufacture are cooked at a high temperature, so the master mold material needs to be both flexible and resistant to heat. The raw material alone for these master molds is expensive. So the answer is, yes, we can make custom molds, but the "start-up" costs are high (\$400 and up, depending on the size and complexity of the cast). Unless one needs a professional quality mold, we recommend experimenting with simple plaster casts or using our inexpensive Mold-it (#T-6236) mold making kits.



ACORN  NATURALISTS

155 El Camino Real, Tustin, CA 92780
(800) 422-8886 ♦ www.acorunnaturalists.com

copyright© 2003 Acorn Naturalists