

The Evaluation of Trackers

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Objectives

The art of tracking should be recognised as a specialised profession. Trackers can play an important role in research, monitoring, ecotourism, anti-poaching and crime prevention in nature reserves and national parks. Creating employment opportunities for trackers provides economic benefits to local communities. The employment of trackers will also help to retain traditional skills which may otherwise be lost in the near future.

Expert trackers can give valuable assistance to researchers studying animal behaviour. The employment of trackers in research requires the highest level of expertise in spoor interpretation. Tracker certificates will help to validate data collected by trackers by providing an objective test of observer reliability.

In order to develop the art of tracking as a modern profession very high standards are maintained. Trackers are graded in order to determine their level of expertise, so that they can be promoted according to different salary scales. This provides an incentive for trackers to develop their skills.



Master Tracker Wilson Masia (centre) and Senior Tracker Juan Pinto (right) evaluate Tracker Lucas Mthonsi in the Thornybush Nature Reserve, South Africa

Tracker Evaluation

An intensive evaluation covers the fundamental principles of tracking as well as the finer details and sophisticated aspects of tracking. This is done on an individual basis, depending on the level of each candidate. The evaluation is in the form of a practical field test. Rather than pointing out details, each individual is first asked to give his or her own interpretation. Mistakes are corrected and explained continuously throughout the duration of the course. This process identifies the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate in order to develop the potential of each individual in accordance to his or her level of skill.

The apprentice tracker is given a percentage obtained for the evaluation. The progress a tracker makes will depend to a large extent on his or her own incentive to practise on an ongoing basis. Someone who is not able to develop his or her own skills will never become an expert tracker. The evaluation is therefore intended to teach trackers how to develop their own skills.

Modules

When a tracker has developed the required level of expertise, he or she will be awarded a certificate. The **Tracker Evaluation** consists of two parallel sets of modules: **Track & Sign Interpretation** and **Trailing**.

The following levels will be recognised: Track & Sign, Levels I, II and III; Trailing, Levels I, II and III; Tracker, Levels I, II and III; Track & Sign Specialist; Trailing Specialist; Senior Tracker; Senior Tracker, Specialist; and Master Tracker. In addition three categories of Evaluators will be recognised: Assistant Evaluator, Evaluator and External Evaluator.

To qualify for Tracker Level I, the candidate must have both Track & Sign Level I and Trailing Level I. To qualify for Tracker Level II, the candidate must have both Track & Sign Level II and Trailing Level II. To qualify for Tracker Level III, the candidate must have both Track & Sign Level III and Trailing Level III. To qualify for Senior Tracker, the candidate must have both Track & Sign Specialist and Trailing Specialist. For example, if the candidate has Track & Sign Level III and Trailing Level I, he or she would qualify for Tracker Level I.

Track & Sign Interpretation

In the **Track & Sign Interpretation** evaluation the candidate is awarded 1+ point for correct interpretation of an easy spoor, or 3x points for a mistake on easy spoor. 2+ points are awarded for correct interpretation of a difficult spoor, or 2x points for a mistake on difficult spoor. 3+ points are awarded for correct interpretation of very difficult spoor, or 1x point for a mistake on very difficult spoor. The total number of correct (+) points are divided by the sum of all the correct (+) and wrong (x) points and expressed as a percentage. Not more than 20% of spoor tested may be easy spoor and not more than 20% may be very difficult spoor. The candidate may not be penalised for an unreasonably difficult spoor.

Easy Spoor is spoor of medium to large species that are clearly defined and therefore unmistakable. **Difficult Spoor** includes spoor of small species, such as mongoose species, and spoor that are partially obliterated or indistinct due to soft sand or hard substrate. Difficult spoor requires an ability to interpret the way the spoor was formed in difficult substrate and are therefore not easy to identify. **Very Difficult Spoor** includes fractions of footprints and very indistinct spoor that requires considerable experience to identify.

Some of the best trackers often get the very first question wrong due to nervousness, which is not a reflection on their knowledge. To give trackers the opportunity to gain confidence, the first three questions may be ignored.

Spoor interpretation can be infinitely complex – it is possible to find spoor that even the best trackers may not be able to interpret correctly. A spoor is **Unreasonably Difficult** if two Senior Trackers cannot agree on the interpretation. However, even if the evaluators agree on the interpretation, the External Evaluator may use his or her discretion to disallow any question that may be Unreasonably Difficult. If a dispute develops between the evaluator and the tracker being evaluated or the evaluator cannot explain and clearly justify the spoor to the candidate then the question may be ignored and not scored.

Tracker Evaluation

scored.

The External Evaluator may use his or her discretion to award **Credits** if a tracker correctly interprets an Unreasonably Difficult Spoor. If the tracker makes a mistake with a Very Difficult Spoor, then three correct Unreasonably Difficult Spoors may cancel one incorrect Very Difficult Spoor. An Easy Spoor or Difficult Spoor cannot be cancelled. A maximum of seven Unreasonably Difficult Spoor questions may be asked in an evaluation and a maximum of two Difficult Spoors may be cancelled. For a Senior Tracker evaluation, a tracker can therefore still get 100% if up to two mistakes with Very Difficult Spoor were made, provided that he or she can get three Unreasonable Difficult Spoors correct for every one incorrect Very Difficult Spoor.

The External Evaluator may also award **Credits** if a tracker can correctly interpret a track or sign that the Evaluators did not know, thereby making a novel contribution to the collective knowledge of tracks and signs. The External Evaluator may use his or her discretion to award up to ten bonus points for every novel contribution.

Trailing Evaluation

The **Trailing** evaluation is done in reasonably difficult terrain on a human spoor (for Tracker, Level I) or an animal which is not easy to follow (such as a hoofed animal, rhino or lion). Five aspects are evaluated.

(1) Spoor recognition is the ability of the tracker to recognise and follow spoor at a reasonably good rate. Indicators may include:

- Not looking down in front of feet, but looking for signs five to ten metres ahead.
- Moving at a steady rate, not in stop-start manner.
- Recognising signs in grass or hard substrate.
- Recognising when there are no signs when no longer on trail.
- Ability to recognise signs after losing spoor.

(2) Spoor anticipation is the ability of the tracker to anticipate where the animal was going and therefore where he or she will find the spoor further ahead. Indicators may include:

- Looking well ahead, reading the terrain to look for most probably route.
- Interpret behaviour from tracks.
- Using knowledge of terrain (water, dongas, clearings) to predict movements of animal.
- Not over cautious (too slow), but not too confident (too fast).
- Anticipate where to find tracks after losing spoor.

(3) Anticipation of dangerous situations is the ability of the tracker to read the terrain and be able to anticipate situations that may be dangerous. Indicators may include:

- Awareness of wind direction.
- Knowledge of behaviour, e.g. animals resting at mid-day.
- Animal behaviour indicating danger.
- Avoid danger by leaving the spoor and picking up the spoor further ahead.
- Determine the position of dangerous animals without putting him or herself at risk.

(4) Alertness is the ability of the tracker to spot animals before the animals spot him or her. Indicators may include:

- Looking well ahead for signs of danger.
- Stop to listen when necessary.
- Warning signs, alarm calls and smells.
- Signs of other animals.
- Seeing the animal before it sees the tracker.

Tracker Evaluation

(5) Stealth is the ability to approach animals without being detected by the animals. Indicators may include:

- Minimise noise levels (walking, talking vs hand signals, etc.).
- Low impact on other animals.
- Use of cover to approach animal and exit route.
- Appropriate proximity to animal (close enough to observe, but not too close).
- Animal unaware of tracker.

In each of these aspects the tracker will be given points from 0 to 10: Not Yet Competent (0 - 6 points); Fair (7 points); Good (8 points); Very Good (9 points); Excellent (10 points). The total number of points scored would be expressed as a percentage for Trailing. Depending on circumstances, some indicators may be not applicable (N/A). For example, if only 21 of the 25 indicators were scored, the total score would be multiplied by 25/21 to obtain a percentage.

Note on scoring points: To obtain Tracker Level I, the candidate must get 70%. To obtain Tracker Level II, the candidate must get 80%. To obtain Tracker Level III, the candidate must get 90%. To obtain Senior Tracker, the candidate must not lose any points. It is therefore easier to obtain realistic scores by deducting points for mistakes, rather than to 'give' points for level of skill. Points deducted would give the candidate an indication of how to improve his or her tracking skills.

Safety: If the candidate does anything that endangers his or her own life or the life of someone else, he or she will automatically fail, irrespective of the score achieved.

Track & Sign, Level I

The **Track & Sign, Level I** candidate must be able to interpret the spoor of medium to large animals and must have a fair knowledge of animal behaviour. To qualify for the **Track & Sign, Level I** certificate the candidate must obtain **70%** for the **Spoor Interpretation** evaluation for at least **35** signs. A minimum of **one year** experience is required. The **Track & Sign, Level I Evaluation** must be conducted by a Senior Tracker, Evaluator or a Master Tracker, Evaluator who is familiar with the evaluation standards.

Track & Sign, Level II

The **Track & Sign, Level II** candidate must be able to interpret the spoor of medium to large animals and must have a fair knowledge of animal behaviour. To qualify for the **Track & Sign, Level II** certificate the candidate must obtain **80%** for the **Spoor Interpretation** evaluation for at least **35** signs. A minimum of **two years** experience is required. The **Track & Sign, Level II Evaluation** must be conducted by a Senior Tracker, Evaluator or a Master Tracker, Evaluator who is familiar with the evaluation standards.

Track & Sign, Level III

The **Track & Sign, Level III** candidate must be able to interpret the spoor of medium to large animals and must have a fair knowledge of animal behaviour. To qualify for the **Track & Sign, Level III** certificate the candidate must obtain **90%** for the **Spoor Interpretation** evaluation for at least **35** signs. A minimum of **three years** experience is required. The **Track & Sign, Level III Evaluation** must be conducted by a Senior Tracker, Evaluator or a Master Tracker, Evaluator who is familiar with the evaluation standards.

Trailing, Level I

The **Trailing, Level I** candidate must be a fair systematic tracker and be able to track humans. He or she must have a fair ability to judge the age of spoor. To qualify for the **Trailing, Level I** certificate the candidate must obtain **70%** for the **Trailing** of a human spoor. A minimum of **one year** experience is required. The **Trailing, Level I Evaluation** must be conducted by a Senior Tracker, Evaluator or a

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To require the **Trailing, Level I Evaluation** must be conducted by a Senior Tracker, Evaluator or a Master Tracker, Evaluator who is familiar with the evaluation standards.

Trailing, Level II

The **Trailing, Level II** candidate must be a good systematic tracker and be able to track humans. He or she must have a fair ability to judge the age of spoor. To qualify for the **Trailing, Level II** certificate the candidate must obtain **80%** for the **Trailing** of a human spoor. A minimum of **two years** experience is required. The **Trailing, Level II Evaluation** must be conducted by a Senior Tracker, Evaluator or a Master Tracker, Evaluator who is familiar with the evaluation standards.

Trailing, Level III

The **Trailing, Level III** candidate must be a good systematic tracker and be able to track humans. He or she must have a fair ability to judge the age of spoor. To qualify for the **Trailing, Level III** certificate the candidate must obtain **90%** for the **Trailing** of a human spoor. A minimum of **three years** experience is required. The **Trailing, Level III Evaluation** must be conducted by a Senior Tracker, Evaluator or a Master Tracker, Evaluator who is familiar with the evaluation standards.

Tracker, Level I

The **Tracker, Level I** must be able to interpret the spoor of medium to large animals and must have a fair knowledge of animal behaviour. He or she must be a fair systematic tracker and be able to track humans. He or she must have a fair ability to judge the age of spoor. The Level 1 Tracker will be qualified to be employed in ecotourism and anti-poaching. To qualify for the **Tracker, Level I** certificate the candidate must obtain **70%** for the **Spoor Interpretation** evaluation for at least **35** signs and at least **70%** for the **Trailing** of a human spoor. A minimum of **one year** experience is required. The **Tracker, Level I Evaluation** must be conducted by a Senior Tracker, Evaluator or a Master Tracker, Evaluator who is familiar with the evaluation standards.

Tracker, Level II

The **Tracker, Level II** must be able to interpret the spoor of medium to large animals and must have a fair knowledge of animal behaviour. He or she must be able to make empirical inductive-deductive interpretation of spoor and be a good systematic tracker. He or she must be able to track humans and be able to overcome anti-tracking methods. He or she must have a fair ability to judge the age of spoor. The Tracker will be qualified to be employed in ecotourism and anti-poaching. To qualify for the **Tracker, Level II** certificate the candidate must obtain **80%** for the **Spoor Interpretation** evaluation for at least **35** signs and at least **80%** for the **Trailing** of a human spoor or an animal that is not easy to follow. A minimum of **two years** experience is required. The **Tracker, Level II Evaluation** must be conducted by a Senior Tracker, Evaluator or a Master Tracker, Evaluator who is familiar with the evaluation standards.

Tracker, Level III

The **Tracker, Level III** must be able to interpret the spoor of medium to large animals and must have a fair knowledge of animal behaviour. He or she must be able to make empirical inductive-deductive interpretation of spoor and be a good systematic tracker. He or she must be able to track humans and be able to overcome anti-tracking methods. He or she must have a fair ability to judge the age of spoor. The Tracker will be qualified to be employed in ecotourism and anti-poaching. To qualify for the **Tracker, Level III** certificate the candidate must obtain **90%** for the **Spoor Interpretation** evaluation for at least **35** signs and at least **90%** for the **Trailing** of a human spoor or an animal that is not easy to follow. A minimum of **three years** experience is required. The **Tracker, Level III Evaluation** must be conducted by a Senior Tracker, Evaluator or a Master Tracker, Evaluator who is familiar with the evaluation standards.

Track & Sign, Specialist

The **Track & Sign, Specialist** must be able to interpret the spoor of all animals, including small species, and be able to distinguish the spoor of male and female animals for larger species. He or she must have a very good knowledge of animal behaviour. He or she must be able to make hypothetico-deductive interpretations of spoor. The **Track & Sign, Specialist** must obtain **100%** for the **Spoor Interpretation** evaluation for at least **50** very difficult signs. The **External Evaluator** may use his/her discretion to disallow any question that may be unreasonably difficult, since it is possible to find spoor that even the best trackers may not be able to interpret correctly. The **Spoor Interpretation** evaluation for **Track & Sign, Specialist** should not only be more rigorous, but also put greater emphasis on interpretation of animal behaviour from tracks and signs. The **Track & Sign, Specialist** must also pass an oral test on animal behaviour, which will focus on his or her depth of knowledge. It is not possible to test the full extent of a tracker's knowledge, but indications of very specialised knowledge imply that the tracker has developed a depth of expertise. A minimum of **five years** experience is required, which in itself implies that the tracker probably has accumulated a fairly broad range of expertise. The **Track & Sign, Specialist Evaluation** must be conducted by an Evaluator who is familiar with the local terrain and an External Evaluator who is familiar with evaluation standards in other areas.

Trailing, Specialist

The **Trailing, Specialist** must be a good **Speculative Tracker**. This includes the ability to predict where spoor will be found beyond the immediate area, i.e. beyond the range of **Spoor anticipation** in the immediate vicinity ahead of the tracker. He or she must be good at judging the age of spoor and must be able to detect signs of stress or the location of carcasses from spoor. The **Trailing, Specialist** must obtain **100%** for the **Trailing** of a difficult animal spoor (such as a leopard or a lion spoor). The **Trailing, Specialist** must also pass an oral test on animal behaviour, which will focus on his or her depth of knowledge. It is not possible to test the full extent of a tracker's knowledge, but indications of very specialised knowledge imply that the tracker has developed a depth of expertise. A minimum of **five years** experience is required, which in itself implies that the tracker probably has accumulated a fairly broad range of expertise. The **Trailing, Specialist Evaluation** must be conducted by an Evaluator who is familiar with the local terrain and an External Evaluator who is familiar with evaluation standards in other areas.

Senior Tracker

The **Senior Tracker** must be able to interpret the spoor of all animals, including small species, and be able to distinguish the spoor of male and female animals for larger species. He or she must have a very good knowledge of animal behaviour. He or she must be able to make hypothetico-deductive interpretations of spoor and be a good speculative tracker. He or she must be good at judging the age of spoor and must be able to detect signs of stress or the location of carcasses from spoor. The Senior Tracker will be qualified to train new trackers and be employed to collect scientific spoor data.

The **Senior Tracker** must obtain **100%** for the **Spoor Interpretation** evaluation for at least **50** very difficult signs and **100%** for the **Trailing** of a difficult animal spoor (such as a leopard or a lion spoor). The **External Evaluator** may use his/her discretion to disallow any question that may be unreasonably difficult, since it is possible to find spoor that even the best trackers may not be able to interpret correctly. The **Spoor Interpretation** evaluation for **Senior Tracker** should not only be more rigorous, but also put greater emphasis on interpretation of animal behaviour from tracks and signs. In addition the **Senior Tracker** must also be a good **Speculative Tracker**. This includes the ability to predict where spoor will be found beyond the immediate area, i.e. beyond the range of **Spoor anticipation** in the immediate vicinity ahead of the tracker. The **Senior Tracker** must also pass an oral test on animal behaviour, which will focus on his or her depth of knowledge. It is not possible to test the full extent of a tracker's knowledge, but indications of very specialised knowledge imply that the tracker has developed a depth of expertise. A minimum of **five years** experience is required, which in itself implies that the tracker probably has accumulated a fairly broad range of expertise. The **Senior Tracker Evaluation** must be conducted by an Evaluator who is familiar with the local terrain and an External Evaluator who is familiar with evaluation standards in other areas.

Senior Tracker, Specialist

The **Senior Tracker, Specialist** may specialise in a particular species. For example, a tracker may develop a highly specialised knowledge of leopard or rhino behaviour, but may not necessarily have the same level of knowledge of other species. He or she may, for example, be awarded a certificate as a **Senior Tracker, Rhino Specialist**. The Senior Tracker, Specialist may be employed to collect scientific data on that particular animal.

Master Tracker

The **Master Tracker** must have an excellent knowledge of animal behaviour and be capable of a highly refined interpretation of spoor in difficult terrain. He or she must have originality and creative insight and must have well-developed intuitive abilities. The **Master Tracker** certificate will be awarded to **Senior Trackers** with at least **fifteen years** experience and who have demonstrated an ability to make **novel contributions** to our understanding of tracking and our scientific knowledge of animal behaviour. The **Master Tracker** certificate is an honorary award. It will be awarded by the Evaluation Standards Committee in consultation with other Evaluators. The award will recognise a level of exceptional skill and expertise that represent the highest standards in the art of tracking.

Evaluators

Initial Evaluator

The standards for the evaluation of trackers have been set by Louis Liebenberg, author of *The Art of Tracking: The Origin of Science*, and *A Field Guide to the Animal Tracks of Southern Africa*.

Evaluation Standards Committee

The Evaluation Standards Committee will maintain the standards for the evaluation of trackers. The Committee may from time to time revise the evaluation standards and criteria in order to refine and improve the evaluations. The Committee will, in consultation with other Evaluators, appoint new Evaluators and External Evaluators. The Committee may appoint Evaluators and/or External Evaluators to serve on the Evaluation Standards Committee. The Committee has the authority to suspend an Evaluator's accreditation if the Evaluator fails to update his or her understanding of revised evaluation criteria. The Committee has the authority to suspend an Evaluator's accreditation if the Evaluator did not conduct any evaluations for a period of three years or more. The Committee also has the authority to revoke an Evaluator's accreditation if the Evaluator fails to maintain the standards set by the Committee.

Assistant Evaluator

If a Senior Tracker or Master Tracker cannot read or write, he or she may be assisted in conducting an evaluation by an **Assistant Evaluator**. To qualify for the **Assistant Evaluator** certificate the candidate must obtain 90% for the **Spoor Interpretation** evaluation and at least 90% for the **Trailing** of a human spoor or an animal that is not easy to follow. A minimum of three years experience is required and he or she must be familiar with the evaluation standards. The **Assistant Evaluator** is not qualified to conduct a Tracker Evaluation and can only assist a Senior Tracker or Master Tracker to conduct an evaluation. The **Assistant Evaluator Evaluation** must be conducted by a Senior Tracker, Evaluator or a Master Tracker, Evaluator who is familiar with the evaluation standards.

Evaluator

The **Evaluator** must be a **Senior Tracker** or a **Master Tracker** and must have mastered the method of evaluation described in this document. He or she must have a clear understanding of the standards required in evaluating points on spoor interpretation and the various components of systematic tracking. He or she must have a highly specialised knowledge of the local terrain.

External Evaluator

The **External Evaluator** must be a **Senior Tracker** or a **Master Tracker** and must be familiar with evaluation standards in other areas. The role of the External Evaluator is to ensure that consistent standards and fairness are maintained in different areas and over time. This requires both an understanding of local tracking conditions and how standards would translate to different tracking conditions in other areas.

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