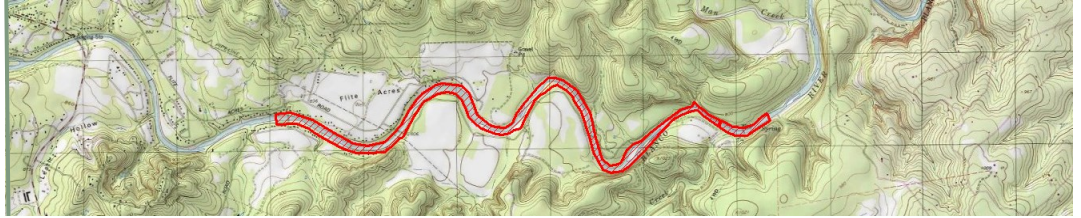


The TXNDD Report



Data Highlight: Mason Mountain WMA

By Michael Warriner, Nongame and Rare Species Program Supervisor

This past May, staff from the Wildlife Diversity Program and all four Wildlife Division Regions assembled at Mason Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA) to discuss species pending federal listing and develop State Wildlife Grant (SWG) priorities for those species. Several dozen species are currently pending review under the U.S. Endangered Species Act in Texas. A key component of federal review is current information on the distribution and status of proposed species. Many of the species currently in the federal queue have been little studied in the state so not much is known regarding how many of these species are faring. The basic need for most species is simply status surveys to assess presence/absence to better define current distributions.

The aim of the Mason Mountain meeting was to whittle down the list of 50+ species pending federal action to a subset of species that actions could be taken on over Fiscal Year 2015. In particular, attention was paid to developing species priorities to guide work funded through Wildlife Division's SWG funds. Staff rotated through taxa specific groups (amphibians, birds, invertebrates, etc.) and discussed the feasibility and practicality of conducting survey work on species in that particular group.

District	Species Epithet	Common Name
1, 4, 7-8	<i>Anthus spragueii</i>	Sprague's Pipit
7-8	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	Red Knot
8	<i>Crotaphytus reticulatus</i>	Reticulate Collared Lizard
3-7	<i>Deirocheilus reticularia miaria</i>	Western Chicken Turtle
3	<i>Dipodomys elator</i>	Texas Kangaroo Rat
4	<i>Eurycea latitans</i>	Cascade Caverns Salamander
4	<i>Eurycea neotenes</i>	Texas Salamander
4	<i>Eurycea robusta</i>	Blanco Blind Salamander
4	<i>Eurycea tridentifera</i>	Comal Blind Salamander
4	<i>Haideoporus texanus</i>	Edwards Aquifer Diving Beetle
1, 3-4	<i>Holbrookia lacerata</i>	Spot-tailed Earless Lizard
4	<i>Lirceolus smithii</i>	Texas Troglotic Water Slater
8	<i>Notophthalmus meridionalis</i>	Black-spotted Newt
4	<i>Phreatodrobia imitata</i>	Mimic Cavesnail
6	<i>Pituophis ruthveni</i>	Louisiana Pine Snake
1, 4, 8	<i>Pseudemys gorzugi</i>	Rio Grande Cooter
1-2, 8	<i>Sistrurus catenatus edwardsii</i>	Desert Massasauga
1-8	<i>Spilogale putorius interrupta</i>	Plains Spotted Skunk
6-7	<i>Vermivora chrysoptera</i>	Golden-winged Warbler

Priority Species Ranking for Regions

The result of these discussions was a list of ten individual species along with work plans containing discrete action items to be performed by Wildlife Diversity Program and Regional staff. These actions will occur over the coming year with the goal of obtaining much needed information to better inform federal listing decisions.

Species Targets: Black-spotted Newt, Chicken Turtle, Frio Pocket Gopher, Louisiana Pine Snake, Massasauga, Plains Spotted Skunk, Reticulate Collared Lizard, Rio Grande Cooter, Spot-tailed Earless Lizard, and Texas Kangaroo Rat

For more detailed information on SWG priorities for each species, the work plan action items, the priority species list, or other information contact Michael Warriner: Michael.Warriner@tpwd.texas.gov : 512-389-8759

Species Highlight: Plains Spotted Skunk (*Spilogale putorius interrupta*)

By Stephanie Shelton, TXNDD Manager

Spotted skunks (*Spilogale spp.*) are part of the Mephitidae Family, though once considered in the family Mustelidae, before molecular studies upgraded these animals (Schmidly 2004). It is the smallest skunk, and fairly slender and weasel-like with males normally less than two pounds and females at around one pound (Crabb 1941; Davis 1945). The eastern spotted skunk (*Spilogale putorius*) - as distinguished from the western spotted skunk (*Spilogale gracilis*) - species epithet is derived from the combination of the Greek words "spilos", and "gale" meaning spot, and weasel, respectively; the Latin word "putor" means foul odor (Edmonds 1974). Another distinguishing characteristic of these two sub-species is that *Spilogale putorius* is found in the eastern half of Texas, including the eastern portion of the Panhandle (Davis 1945, 1974; Schmidly 1988, 2004).

Spilogale putorius is distinguished from the striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) by a white spot on the forehead and one in front of each ear. On its ventral side, it presents six stripes on the anterior of the body, and a pair of interrupted white stripes on the posterior along with paired spots on the rump and base of the tail. The tail itself is mostly black with a small tuft of white hairs on the end that trappers once plucked to raise trading prices (Schmidly 2004; Van Gelder 1959). These general striping and spotting patterns are highly variable (Edmonds 1974). A subspecies, the plains spotted skunk (*Spilogale putorius interrupta*), is further distinguished with their stripes broken up into a smaller pattern of spots and a noticeably reduced amount of white markings of any in the *Spilogale* genus (Howell 1906; Van Gelder 1959). Another distinguishing feature is that this animal is found in prairie habitats. This skunk species is the only one found in the Great Plains, preferring a warm, and somewhat arid climate (DeSanty 2001; Van Gelder 1959).

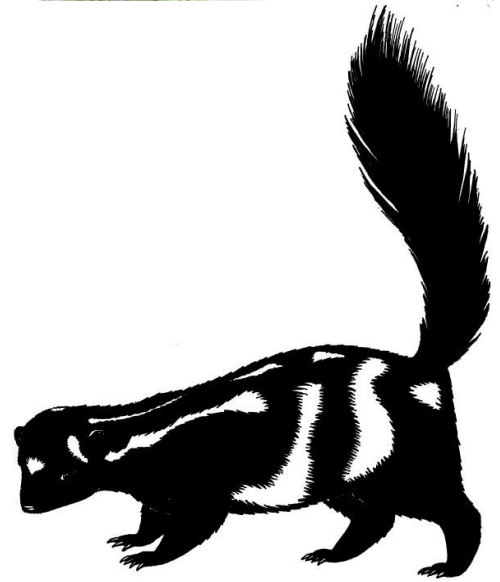


FIG. 10. Color pattern of *Spilogale putorius interrupta*. Drawn from an adult male, A.M.N.H. No. 143824, from Hamilton, Greenwood County, Kansas. Not to scale.

Graphic by Richard G. Van Gelder

According to North American harvest records *Spilogale spp.* trappings declined significantly after 1940 with numbers starting at 248,286 animals in 1935 (Novak et al. 1987; Schwartz and Schwartz 1981). One plausible explanation of this population fluctuation follows the timing of when pioneers drained the tall grass prairie, culminating in 1920, which may have artificially increased spotted skunk populations until 1940 when other stressors such as reduction in agricultural lands, removal of hedge rows, an increase in predators, and DDT usage occurred (Choate et al. 1974; McCullough 1983; Schwartz and Schwartz 1981). The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (1998) began a campaign called "Wanted: Sightings of Spotted Skunks (AKA: Civet Cats)" to document any live or dead animals from 1994-1998. Other states, including Minnesota, Missouri, and Texas also have, or have had, "Wanted" spotted skunk programs seeking information from citizen scientists, and trappers, to determine the species status within their respective state. Presently, there are only 13 EOs for *Spilogale putorius interrupta* in the TXNDD; hence, the priority for gathering more *Spilogale* population data in the state.



Photo by Alberto Halpern

TXNDD Profile: Jonah Evans



Jonah Evans is the Mammalogist for Texas Parks and Wildlife. He is responsible for coordinating conservation and research on nongame, rare, and at-risk mammals in Texas. Jonah is currently working on gathering data on plains spotted skunks, Texas kangaroo rats, and other at-risk mammals for the TXNDD. He also coordinates TPWD activities regarding mountain lions and black bears, and works to support monitoring of Texas bats for white-nose syndrome. Jonah frequently leads trainings on animal track identification for TPWD and the public and is passionate about using this skill to gather location data on mammals.

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