

As a new park, Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic site

I. Introduction

Feline detection efforts at specific sites.

II. Cats

Searching for the Jaguarundi (There are four subspecies of jaguarundi of which two have existed in the present United States: ~~*felis jaguarundi cacomitli*~~ is found in southern Texas and *tolteca* in southern Arizona.) and the ocelot (*felis pardalis*). The ocelot and jaguarundi still occur in Texas. The ocelot once roamed eastern, central, and southern portions of Texas, but was uncommon even during the late 1800s. Today, it exists mainly in the southern Texas brushland. The jaguarundi was generally considered to inhabit extreme South Texas. the jaguarundi may presently range further up the Gulf Coast than previously thought. Most jaguarundi specimens collected from extreme South Texas.

Sightings of Jaguarundi and ocelots are relatively frequent in the Valley however their substantiation is more infrequent. A resident population of approximately thirty ocelots resides in Laguna Atascosa and they likely range over a wider area.

III. Habitat, PAAL habitat

-PAAL is an ideal study area, within its 3,400 acres. It is a transition zone between Tamaulipan brush and coastal floodplain. Although the region is very rural, development is impinging around it. About five miles to the east one can see the grain towers of the Port of Brownsville, and at night the hotels of South Padre Island can be seen on the northeastern horizon. To the north, the town of Los Fresnos and to the south the rapidly expanding city of Brownsville.

Although only one small section on the park's northwest boundary is actively farmed, the park has had a number of disrupting influences that have altered its original ecology. Principal are heavy cattle grazing and extensive draining of the heavy clay soils. Both have tended to lessen the density of the brush, making the habitat less likely for ocelots and jaguarundi. The most likely areas for cats is along a resaca, an abandoned meander of the Rio Grande, where the Tamaulipan brush is most dense in the park. The area is in the upper northeastern section of the park. The brush is about 3-400 yds wide and maybe a mile long.

If cats were found here raised questions about their presence. Are they resident or did they wander occasionally onto the property from the refuge to the north. USFWS has tracked refuge cats as far south as route 100, about four miles north of Palo Alto. There is little heavy brush habitat immediately south of route 100, making a migration corridor for cats to Palo Alto unlikely. On the other hand, the property on Palo Alto is rather

limited so it was a real question of whether cats could live permanently on palo alto.

IV. Procedure

Cat trapping session part of an ongoing program of the US Fish and Wildlife program and the Texas department of parks and wildlife to monitor and investigate the existence of endangered felines in the lower rio grande wildlife corridor.

-received necessary approval from Jerry McCrea who checked all rules and regulations.

-Linda Laach from Laguna Atascosa wildlife refuge, has trapping permit that covers most of Southwesst Texas.

-planned to begin in early November but frequeth rains made access to park difficult.

-Using Tomahawk live traps, these are wire-cage live traps. most are about 5 feet long with a chicken in a square cage a thte end of the trap. The chickens are never touched by the animal. The chickens are ed every other day. Once the traps are placed then we are committed to visiting and checking every day. No trapped animal will spend more than one night in the trap so they must be checked every day. If roads are unpassable then we must walk or ride into the park.

-finally began on ~~Thursday~~ November 18. Placed 6 traps and one photo trap.

Friday, november 19. Next day placed 6 more live traps, No captures or photos.

Saturday, 11/20. placed 6 more traps. One photo shot.

Sunday, 11/21. The night had been cooler and likely increased carnivore activity. Photo trap had taken 1 picture. Trap 3, yielded one large bobcat. trap placed about 50 yds north of road on a principal sendero. Cat was large, little coloration, mostly gray. some spots towards rear and on sides. Trap 8 had 1 smaller bobcat. trap placed about 50 yds north of principal road on a major sendero. Bobcat was slightly smaller thn first with much more spots, especially on belly. Both animals very active in cages, growled alot. Apprentice David >>> filmed both animals in cages for about 20 minutes and then they were released. dissappeared quickly into the bushes.

Monday, 11/22. checked at 8:00 AM, weather was wrmer than day before, cloudcover. Photo trpa had 3 additional pictures. Total now 7 (three were tests) Trap 5 had one immature ~~red-tailed hawk~~. Trap placed about 10yds off road in mesquite brush. Much thicket but not heavy brush. Bird very skitish and flew to a high perch

after release. (probably an immature red-tailed ut small size says it might have been a merlin). Trap 16 had one ~~possum~~. trap placed on wash/principal sendero, about 30yds nrth of road. medium-sized possum was very subdued in trap and then ran off immediately into bush after release.

Tuesday, 11/23. weather warm and dry, scattered cloud cover. Trap five on main sendero 30yds north of road was tripped and had been violently pulled out of its place and pulled about 10yds. Apparently done by ~~feral hogs~~. Trap 14 on main sendero about 30 yds from road had an ~~opossum~~.

Wednesday, 11/24. Weather warm day with little cloud cover. Trap #1 on main road was tripped, lots of digging in rear suggests ~~raccoons~~. trap was removed. Trap #2 in brush about 10 yds from road. bird cage destroyed, chicken killed and eaten. probably feral hogs, rare occurrence, very violent. Cats present too from scat evidence. trap removed. Trap #5, 50 yds from road on main sendero tripped and moved by hogs, same as previous night. trap removed. Photo trap on 13. Another photo trap set on northern road on meadow-like sendero.

Thursday, 11/25. Weather cold. 1 ~~possum~~ caught on trap #4 in thick brush about 5-10yds from main road.

Friday, 11/26. traps closed for Thanksgiving.

Saturday, 11/27. Traps closed overnight and reopened. Film on trap 1 completed.

Sunday, 11/28. weather warmer. No action.

Monday, 11/29. Weather warmer, clear. No traps. Photo trapping on 1st trap at about 16. 2nd trap has about 12.

Tuesday, 11/30. Weather warm with little cloud cover. Trap #10 in brush about ten yards from main road was broken open and chicken killed. probably raccoons since there was little further disruption. Trap removed. Photo traps shw little action. first trap at 16, second at 12. no animals trapped.

Wednesday, 12/1. Weather very nice with moderate cloud cover. photo trap #1 had 19 pictures, therefore 7 overnight. Trap #2 had 12 no action. Trap # 13 on main sendero about 50 yds from main suthern road had a ~~raccoon~~. Very large and hostile, although quiet in the cage until released and then growled and almost attacked as it escaped.

Thursday, 12/2. Warm weather, no animals trapped.

Friday, 12/3. Warm but cloudcover with light rain. No animals trapped but photos about 26-27 each. Traps removed, end of trapping project.

Recommendations for further study. Integrated pest management plan to determine feasibility of eradicating wild pigs from property. there are many and they've been disruptive to the trapping process. ~~It is likely there are no resident ocelots on the property, nevertheless it is very possible that cats can range as far south as Palo Alto from the Laguna atascosa region~~ since cats are known to go as far south as route 100, north of the battlefield. Possible project would be to seek out ways to develop a wildlife corridor from there to Palo alto to increase cats' range.

A few factors need to be considered for future planning of endangered felines at Palo Alto. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has worked cooperatively with the Texas state Highway Department and TPWD officials to provide safe road crossings for endangered cats. Future plans may make specific recommendations for construction work to provide for safe highway crossings of endangered cats.

Cats are highly habitat specific. Plans may be instigated for brush restoration in accordance with Section 6 of the federal Endangered Species Act. In the past few years great headway has been made in restoring brush habitat to the wildlife corridor through the planting of granjeno, brazil, anacua, ebony, ash, tepeguaje, huisache, wild olive, coma, persimmon, sugar hackberry, and sabal palms seedlings.

Bibliography.

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