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Badger, *Taxidea taxus*

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not be confused with any other species of mammals in Pennsylvania because of its general body form, coloration, and large claws on the forefeet. This is a terrestrial species which is highly adapted for digging. The middle claw of the forefoot may be over an inch long. The nose, crown of the head, and neck are dark brown or black. The sides of the head are white as is a slender stripe from the nose over top of the head to the shoulders. The remainder of the upper parts have a grizzled appearance because of mixing of hairs which have yellowish white, pale brown to black, and white segments. The tail is short.

Total length of adult badgers is from 600 to 730 mm, length of tail 105 to 135 mm, and length of hind foot 95 to 128 mm. Adult badgers will weigh 6.8–11.4 kg, with males larger than females.

Status Undetermined

BADGER

Taxidea taxus

Family Mustelidae

Order Carnivora

OTHER NAME: North American badger.

DESCRIPTION: *Taxidea taxus* is a short-legged, stout-bodied member of the weasel family. It should

RANGE: This is a species primarily of the open grasslands and deserts of central and western United States, south-central Canada, and northern Mexico. The easternmost undisputed records are from central Ohio and southeastern Ontario (Snyder, 1935; Leedy, 1947; Long, 1972; Hall, 1981).

HABITAT: This species occurs primarily in prairie and desert habitats but it is known from Alpine tundra to the lower austral life zone. The altitudinal

range of the species is from below sea level in Death Valley to over 3,100 m. There is evidence that the species is extending its range eastward possibly as the result of habitat alteration and introductions by humans (Leedy, 1947; Nugent and Choate, 1970).

LIFE HISTORY AND ECOLOGY: There is no information on the life history or ecology of this species in Pennsylvania. Badgers breed in summer and early autumn but implantation is delayed until sometime between December and February. Young are born in March and early April. The young are furred and blind; nursing occurs through June. The litters usually contain three young. There are few reliable density estimates for badgers but one badger per 2.5 square km seems reasonable. Individuals are solitary except during breeding season.

Badgers have been recorded as taking a wide range of animal matter but their primary food is small rodents such as thirteen-lined ground squirrels and pocket gophers. The badger is highly fossorial and will burrow to catch prey as well as to construct dens.

BASIS OF CLASSIFICATION: There are two recorded occurrences of the badger in Pennsylvania. Game Protector Bruce W. Catherman recorded "A badger was killed in Indiana County by Russell Olsen, Blairsville," in the Pennsylvania Game News (17(2):21) in May 1946. The second specimen is deposited in the collections of Carnegie Museum of Natural History (CM 61342). The specimen, which was taken in Uniontown, Fayette Co., was brought to the Museum by Game Protector T. W. Meehan. The Museum's records indicate that this female specimen was taken on 22 September 1950 but no other circumstances of its capture were recorded.

Nugent and Choate (1970) in discussing other records to the east of Ohio in New York and Connecticut concluded that the situation may be more complex than simply the eastward dispersal of badgers in response to cutting of the eastern forests. They found that badgers were commercially raised in New York and that individuals escaped from these farms and many others were probably released when the price of fur dropped. They believed that some of these individuals became established in the agricultural areas of New York and have dispersed from there into New England.

It is possible that these early records of badgers in Pennsylvania resulted from similar commercial

operations. However, more recent records in western Pennsylvania may be expected as a result of a natural eastward dispersal of the badger. Opening of the right-of-ways along interstate highways has provided optimum habitat for the badger leading directly from Ohio into western Pennsylvania. The badger can be expected to disperse eastward along these narrow ribbons of grassland as one of its preferred food items, the thirteen-lined ground squirrel, follows the same routes. Until we know more about the current status of the badger in Pennsylvania, it can only be considered status undetermined.

RECOMMENDATIONS: No organized research effort on this species would be feasible. However, Game Protectors and the general public should be made aware that we need data on this species. If badgers are inadvertently killed such as on highways or while trapping for other species, these specimens should be salvaged so that they may be deposited in appropriate institutions in the Commonwealth. If living individuals are sighted, these should be reported to the appropriate authorities so that they can be protected and studied. Our top priority for this species should be the gathering of as much scientifically accurate information as possible so that we may determine its status in Pennsylvania.

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