OBSERVATIONS ON A NUTRIA (*MYOCASTER COYPUS*) POPULATION IN SOUTHEASTERN OKLAHOMA

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A nutria population was observed on Ward Lake, a 400-acre irrigation lake, 3 miles southeast of Tom, in southeastern McCurtain County, Oklahoma. On February 27, two females with separate litters were observed and three specimens were taken from a densely vegetated arm of the lake. From the observations of the litters and the specimens taken (Table 1), it was evident that three different age groups were represented. It appeared that the nutria were breeding several times throughout the year, an observation supported by Atwood (1), who reports nutria breeding the entire year in pen-raised and wild specimens.

TABLE 1. *Measurements of specimens of nutria collected.*

Specimen	Total length (mm)	Tail length (mm)	Foot length (mm)	Ear length (mm)	Weight (lb)	Sex
1	760	332	123	24	9	Male
2	405	212	85	22	2.25	Male
3	34	148	63	20	0.5	Male

Winter platforms were being utilized by the nutria for nesting and feeding. These platforms were circular, from 20 to 30 inches wide, and extended from six to nine inches above the water. They were composed of the coarse emergents at hand (1). Little burrowing by the nutria was noticed, whereas the native beaver was burrowing extensively.

In Louisiana and Texas, nutria are reported to compete with the muskrat to the detriment of muskrat populations (2). The presence of muskrats on the lake or in the immediate area was not detected, but there was no sound evidence that the nutria were responsible for the scarcity of the muskrats. On Ward Lake beaver and nutria were observed living in close proximity, with no apparent competition for food or space. The beaver seemed tolerant of the invader. Feeding and nesting activities of the nutria were observed along the edges of a beaver lodge. No competition was noticed with any of the other species, as was described by O'Neil (2) in Louisiana.

The primary vegetation being used by the nutria were species of *Typha, Zizaniopsis, Saururus, Brasenia, Nelumbo, Chara,* and *Utricularia.*

According to Kimsey (3), live nutria were introduced and raised for commercial fur in Hinton and at Fort Sill in western Oklahoma in the 1950's, but no established populations or collections have been reported in the state since that time. Davis (4) reported nutria in several counties bordering the Red River in eastern Texas and a relatively solid distribution in the remainder of east Texas. According to the owner of the lake, nutria were not introduced to the lake, but occurred first in the streams of the Red River flood plain, and then became established in the lake. Considering the location of the observed population, within three miles of the Red River in Oklahoma, and the information provided by the owner, the evidence suggests that the distribution of the nutria has been extended north across the Red River into Oklahoma.

Specimens of nutria collected in Oklahoma were not found in museums at either the University of Oklahoma or Oklahoma State University. The three specimens collected (Table 1) are apparently the only representatives of the species for the state of Oklahoma. Identifications were verified by Dr. John Taylor, and the specimens have been entered in the museum collection at Southeastern State College.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors are grateful to Dr. John Taylor, Southeastern State College, for his professional advice, and to Mr. John Jones for his technical assistance.

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