

## New Records of the Badger (*Taxidea taxus*) in Southeastern Oklahoma

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The badger (*Taxidea taxus*) generally is considered to be a grassland carnivore. It feeds on burrowing rodents and is common in central to western Oklahoma in the plains and the post oak-blackjack oak upland physiognomic regions (Caire et al 1989). Taylor (1965) provided a few reports of badgers from eastern Oklahoma, but they were not known from the southeastern one-third of the state. The most southeastern records were from Hughes, Pontotoc, and Johnston Counties (Caire et al 1989).

On 5 May 2007, at about 10:30 AM, a live male badger was hit as it ran across a dirt road about 2.5 km (1.5 mi.) W of Pleasant Hill Hwy, southwest of Haworth, McCurtain County, Oklahoma. The area was forested. Badgers typically have an affinity for open range and agricultural habitats, but show negative relationships with elevation, ruggedness of the terrain, and forested habitats (Apps et al 2002). The site of collection of the new Oklahoma record (Fig. 1) would seem to be inconsistent with usual habitats, except that the area is lowland (Red River bottoms). A nearby railroad, which could serve as a dispersal lane, runs westward toward Durant, Oklahoma, and roughly parallel to the Red River.

The specimen was brought to the U.S. Forest Service, photographed, and the skin was mounted by a taxidermist and is displayed at the Hochatown Office of the Oklahoma Ranger District. The skull is housed with the collection of vertebrates at Henderson State University, Arkadelphia, AR (HSU 659).

In recent years, badgers have been documented extending their range southward in some northern states (Lindzey 2003), and eastward in the northern United States (Nugent and Choate, 1970) and Texas (Davis and Schmidly 1994). Eastward expansion also has been recorded in neighboring Arkansas. A specimen of the badger was known only from Washington County in the northwestern part of the state (Sealander and Forsyth 1966) until sight records from Franklin County (Sealander and Heidt 1990) were supported by a specimen trapped near the Arkansas River (Cartwright and Heidt 1994). A disjunct record based on a road-hit specimen extended the reported range further eastward to Stone County (Cartwright and Heidt 1994).

To further evaluate the possible eastward expansion of the badger in Oklahoma, we checked with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) about more recent records (since Caire et al 1989). The ODWC has conducted a "dead or alive" road survey in March of each year since 2000, in which all wildlife and law enforcement field personnel keep a daily log of sightings during their travels. Two other observations of badgers had been noted for eastern Oklahoma since 2000. We contacted the observers to get details of their sightings.

Warden Larry Luman observed a road-hit badger in 2004 on Hwy 69 just south of Atoka, Atoka County, Oklahoma (Fig. 1). He commented that he hears about several sightings each year in the southern part

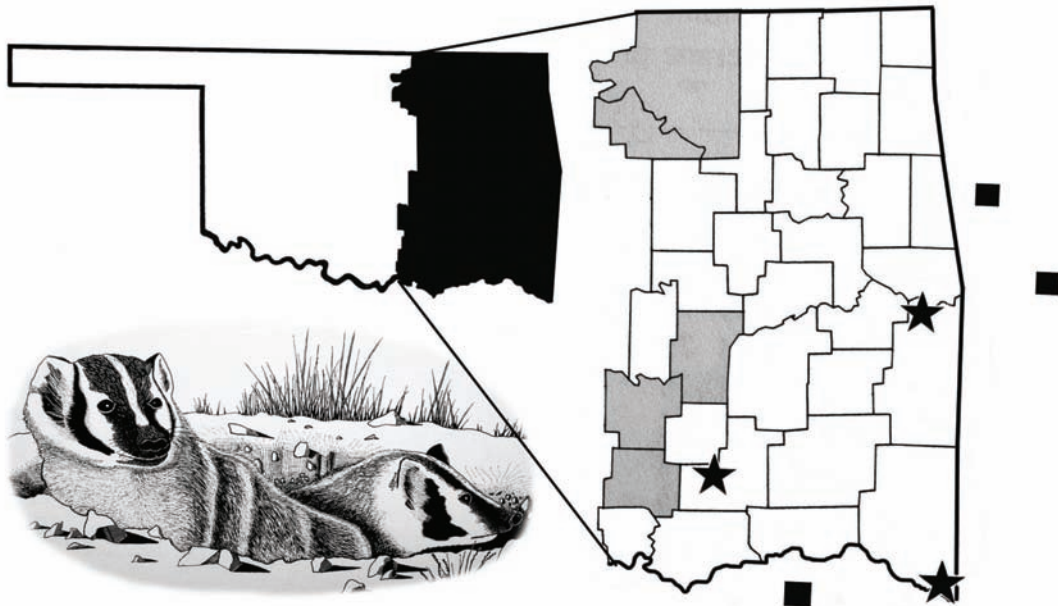
of the county. Adding credibility to those observations, the only other mammal that might be mistaken for a badger is the woodchuck (*Marmota monax*), which is not known to occur close to the area of observation (Caire et al. 1989).

In 2007, Spencer Grace (a game ranger for ODWC) reported a road-killed badger north of Poteau in extreme northern LeFlore County, just south of the Kerr Lock and Dam (Fig. 1). He commented that he had not heard of other badgers in the area. Farther eastward, however, specimens have been collected in Franklin County, Arkansas (Cartwright and Heidt 1994).

Dispersing young badgers sometimes move through what seems to be unsuitable habitat, and a dispersing young male, which apparently moves farther than females, has been recaptured 110 km from its original capture site (Messick and Hornocker 1981). The previously documented Oklahoma site closest to the present record is in Johnston

County, 4 mi. NE of Mill Creek (Caire et al 1989) – a distance of about 210 km (130 mi.). Across the Red River in Texas, a record from Lamar County (Davis and Schmidly 1994) is farther eastward and about the same longitude as Choctaw County, Oklahoma. The borders of Lamar County are between 55-110 km (35-67 mi.) west of the McCurtain County record.

In southwestern Arkansas, adjoining McCurtain County, badgers were thought to be present in Howard, Lafayette, and Pike Counties based on a mail survey of trappers and state biologists (Majors et al 1996). The authors suggested some caution, however, as some observations may actually have been of woodchucks (*Marmota monax*). Woodchucks have been extending their range southward in Arkansas (Tumlison et al 2007), outside of typical habitat, likely due to the effects of highway construction. In consideration of the new specimen record from McCurtain County and the sight



**Figure 1.** Distribution of the badger (*Taxidea taxus*) in eastern Oklahoma. Shaded counties represent previously known records (Caire et al 1989). Stars represent new records in Atoka, LeFlore, and McCurtain counties. Squares indicate nearest records in Lamar County, Texas (Davis and Schmidly 1994) and Washington and Franklin Counties, Arkansas (Cartwright and Heidt 1994).

records from Atoka and LeFlore Counties, we hypothesize that badgers may be using similar anthropogenic modifications of habitat as dispersal corridors to move eastward in Oklahoma.

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