



News Release

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Southwest Region (Arizona • New Mexico • Oklahoma • Texas)

www.fws.gov/refuge/laquna_atascosa

Date: July 17, 2014

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Fourth Endangered Ocelot Killed on State Highway 100

A male ocelot was killed on State Highway 100 between Laguna Vista and Los Fresnos, Texas, on July 9, 2014. The cat was discovered by a member of the public who reported the incident to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). Found along the concrete traffic barrier, the wild cat's injuries are consistent with a vehicular collision. It is the fourth documented endangered ocelot killed by a vehicle on this stretch of highway and is the third in the last four years since the concrete traffic barrier was constructed.

The ocelot was one of 12 being monitored by the Service at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). The loss of this ocelot is significant in that he was 20% of the current breeding male population at the Refuge. Ocelots are a federally listed endangered species whose historic range in the U.S. extended from South Texas up into Arkansas and Louisiana, but is now reduced to less than 50 animals, mostly in south Texas. Though loss of habitat is the single greatest threat to the cats, an estimated 40% of ocelots from the Refuge, studied over a 30-year period, have died as a result of being struck by a vehicle.

"We believe the concrete barrier is contributing to the increase in ocelot deaths by vehicles in this area" stated Laguna Atascosa Refuge Manager Boyd Blihovde. "Many animals will not, or cannot, jump them, get trapped on the road and pose a danger to drivers and themselves. We have been working with the Texas Department of Transportation on constructing wildlife crossings, but clearly more needs to be done".

For the wild population to stay healthy and genetically diverse, ocelots from the Refuge need to travel and meet up with ocelots from other populations. Crossing roads and highways is a deadly hazard for the cats.

Scientific studies have shown that wildlife crossings, an under-the-road passage with fencing to funnel animals to it, are very effective at keeping wildlife off roads. Crossings have been successful in south Florida where vehicle collisions with endangered Florida

panthers were a huge threat to their existence. Locally, an existing wildlife crossing on State Highway 48, near the Refuge's Bahia Grande Unit, has been used by bobcats, raccoons and coyotes.

"Under road wildlife crossings can play an important role in alleviating unnecessary ocelot deaths" says Zone Biologist Mitch Sternberg. "Because so few wild cats remain, losing one animal has a huge impact on the population. The crossings not only keep wildlife safe, but also the public".

Sternberg also stated the public plays an important role in keeping this endangered wild cat in the Rio Grande Valley. "The public can contribute to our knowledge of ocelots by watching for ocelots throughout the valley". The public is encouraged to report any possible sightings to the Refuge by calling 956-748-3607, or after hours 956-784-7520.

To learn more about ocelots in south Texas, visit the Refuge's website www.fws.gov/refuge/laguna_atascosa or Facebook page www.facebook.com/LagunaAtascosaNWR.

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