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Distributional Records of the Badger (*Taxidea taxus*) in Arkansas

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Hall (The mammals of North America, Wiley-Interscience Press. p. 1012, 1981) and Sealander and Heidt (Arkansas mammals: Their natural history, classification, and distribution. Univ. Arkansas Press. p. 308, 1990) both include the extreme northwestern portion of Arkansas in the distributional range of the badger (*Taxidea taxus*). To date, one specimen from Fayetteville, Washington County, has been documented (Sealander and Heidt, 1990). Reliable sight records have been made in Newton and Franklin counties, and each year one or two badgers from unknown localities are sold annually by Arkansas trappers. We document two additional specimen records.

An adult male badger was trapped by Charles Bonner in January 1983, 2.5 km S of the Ozark Dam (Arkansas River), Franklin County. Land use in this area consists of open pastures and turkey farms interspersed with hardwood. The soil type primarily is sandy-loam and the area contains pocket gophers (*Geomys breviceps*). Burrowing rodents, such as gophers, are major prey items of badgers (Sealander and Heidt, 1990). The presence of pocket gophers also indicates suitable soil for badger activity. This specimen currently is on display at the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission headquarters in Little Rock.

The second specimen was an adult male found as a roadkill on Highway 5 near the community of Optimus, Stone County, by U.S. Forest Service personnel on 25 August 1993. The specimen measured total length - 780mm; tail length - 150; hind foot - 110; and ear - 41. When first examined, an infestation of ticks, along with several scars and healing sores were noted. An examination of the intestinal tract revealed no helminthes or food items; badger hair, however, was present in the lower stomach and upper duodenum. This specimen has been deposited in the Vertebrate Collections at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Optimus is located within the Salem Plateau and the general habitat consists primarily of upland, mixed hardwood-shortleaf pine forest interspersed by pastures. The White River is within 2 km of Optimus. There is one documented record of a gopher from Stone County (vicinity of Newnata), and directly across the river (Izard County) there are several known populations of pocket gophers. Soils along the river and at various locations within the area are shallow and characterized by silt and loam. Badger home ranges have been reported from 200-1700

ha (Lindzey, Badger, *In* Chapman and Feldhammer, eds., Wild mammals of North America, Johns Hopkins Univ. Press. pp. 653-663, 1982); distances potentially within the range of movement from the site where this specimen was found.

Although roadkill records must be evaluated with caution, we believe there is a high degree of probability that this record, although tentative, is valid. Condition and injuries were consistent with a fresh roadkill, and while there have been, to our knowledge, no previous reports of badgers in this area, habitat, soils, and presence of potential prey would indicate that a small population of badgers could be supported.

The badger is an interesting but rare and elusive member of Arkansas' mammalian fauna. More study on its distribution, particularly further confirmation in the Stone County area, is needed.