

GENERAL NOTES

RECENT RECORDS OF THE RIVER OTTER (*LUTRA CANADENSIS*)
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The North American river otter (*Lutra canadensis*) formerly ranged throughout most of the eastern portion of Texas from the coast west to approximately the 98th Meridian (Bailey 1905). Schmidly (1983) places otter occurrence east of the Balcones Fault Zone, which separates the Gulf coastal plains from the upland plateaus and plains of central and western Texas. River otters are presently known only from the eastern one-fourth of the state in major watersheds (Davis & Schmidly 1994). Otters have most likely been extirpated from the Panhandle, north-central and southern Texas (Davis & Schmidly 1994). Historically, river otter presence was indicated as far south as Cameron County (Schmidly 1984; Davis & Schmidly 1994).

A significant decline in the Texas river otter population in the early 1920s was attributed to over-harvest for the fur trade and caused the state to suspend otter trapping from 1927-1950 (Brownlee 1977; Bartnicki & Boone 1989). Declines in otter populations in Texas due to hunting and trapping have recently been noted as early as the 1830s (Weniger 1997). Current river otter populations are considered to be increasing in some areas (Brownlee 1977; Toweill & Tabor 1982), but limited to the Pineywoods, Post Oak Savannah, and Gulf Prairie and Marsh regions of the easternmost quarter of the state (Brownlee 1977; Foy 1984; Schmidly 1984; Bartnicki & Boone 1989).

Boone (1983) indicated otter presence was not recorded south of the Trinity River system. Coastal river otter populations have been reported as restricted to the area from eastern Galveston County northeast to

Orange County (Bartnicki & Boone 1989). Available information on the current range of *L. canadensis* does not indicate it to occupy the Texas Gulf Coast any farther south than the Bolivar Peninsula. Current maps of river otter distribution in Texas do not depict river otter presence in Matagorda County. Over the past four years, river otters (single and in groups) have been sighted on 22 different instances along the coastal waters of Galveston and Matagorda counties (see Sighting Records). This constitutes a possible southern extension of the present range of the river otter of at least 150 km along the Texas Gulf Coast.

Several opportunistic sightings were made on Galveston Island and in the Galveston Ship Channel (GSC) in Galveston County, and near the Intracoastal Waterway (ICWW) on the Clive Runnells Family Mad Island Marsh Preserve (MIMP) in Matagorda County. Two of the Galveston County sightings were made while conducting bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) surveys for the Marine Mammal Research Program (MMRP), Texas A&M University at Galveston; other sightings were reported by local residents, colleagues and fishermen. The MIMP is approximately 13 km southwest of Matagorda and 14.5 km northeast of Palacios in Matagorda County at 28°40'N 96°05'W. Sightings in the MIMP were collected by staff of the Nature Conservancy of Texas during routine preserve monitoring. Sightings not made directly by the authors were confirmed by verifying the observers' descriptions.

The following is a listing of the records reported herein. Data are grouped by county and in chronological order. Specific arrangement of these data are: County; Specific locality; Date Observed; Numbers observed; Type of evidence (sighting, specimens, photo); Deposition of evidence (if available).

Sighting records.—**Galveston County:** GSC between the Pelican Island Bridge and Pennzoil Sulfur Dock, across from Texas A&M University at Galveston (TAMUG) campus; 8 and 27 Aug. 1994; 4 individuals; sightings and photographs; photos held at MMRP, TAMUG. Residential boat slips/canals in Jamaica Beach (10 km W of Galveston on FM 3005, Galveston Island at 29°22'28"N 94°58'47"W); 9 Sept. 1994; 1 individual; sighting. GSC at Del Monte Foods dock (Pier 18); 23 Nov. 1994; 1 individual; sighting. TAMUG ship dock at Pelican Island; 23 Nov. 1994; 1 individual; sighting. GSC at Texas Sea Port Museum/Elissa dock (Pier 21); 11 Feb. 1995; 1 individual; sighting. Hwy. 146 at Loop 197 bridge in a wastewater discharge

canal, Texas City, TX; 27 March 1995; 2 individuals; sighting. Galveston Island Causeway (southbound at Galveston Island); 19 Aug. 1995; 3 carcasses; photographs; photos held at MMRP, TAMUG. Residential boat slips/canals in Jamaica Beach (10 km west of Galveston on FM 3005, Galveston Island at 29°22'28"N 94°58'47"W); 7 Oct. 1995; 1 individual; sighting. Spanish Grant Subdivision (off Stewart Rd. 1.6 km west of nine mile road on Galveston Island); 10 Jan. 1996; 2 individuals; sighting. Bolivar Peninsula (approximately 1.6 km from the ferry landing); 2 April 1996; 1 individual; sighting. Spanish Grant Subdivision (off Stewart Rd. 2.9 km west of Nine Mile Road on Galveston Island); 10 April 1996; 1 carcass; pelt at Texas Cooperative Wildlife Collection (TCWC 53282; total length of 114 cm). Hwy. 146 (approximately 10 km from I45N), Texas City; 16 July 1996; 1 carcass; sighting. GSC at Del Monte Foods dock (Pier 18); 8 Dec. 1996; 1 individual; sighting. TAMUG ship dock at Pelican Island; 8 Dec. 1996; 1 individual; sighting. Bolivar Peninsula (0.40 km from ferry landing) 13 Nov. 1997; 1 carcass; sighting.

Matagorda County: Irrigation ditch along N. Road of MIMP; 30 Nov. 1991; 1 individual; sighting. Canal on MIMP; 28 Jan. 1994; 2 individuals; sighting. ICWW near the Mad Island Cut outlet to W. Matagorda Bay on MIMP; 8 Feb. 1994; 2 individuals; sighting. West Branch Slough Crossing on MIMP; 4 April 1995; 1 individual; sighting. N. Slough Crossing on MIMP; 11 Sept. 1995; 2 individuals; sighting. MIMP; 28 Feb. 1996; 2 individuals; sighting.

It was not possible to determine if the records were of different individuals or multiple sightings of a small number of animals. It is believed that the sightings in Galveston County made on 8 and 27 August 1994 represent the same group, based on location of the sighting (only a 13 m difference in location) and size and number of the animals.

While Melquist & Dronkert (1987) noted that food resources are usually responsible for range expansion or significant movements by otters, the results of the sightings reported here may indicate not only a possible range expansion but an increase in the Texas river otter population. Considering that trapping and hunting of otters is not as prevalent as it once was, these sightings appear to support the premise that otters may still be recovering from serious population decimation that began many years ago.

In spite of this possible recovery, otters inhabiting industrial and/or heavily trafficked areas such as the Galveston Ship Channel and surrounding areas, are subject to additional risks. The sighting made on 2 Apr. 1996 in Galveston County was of a river otter running across the road at night. All six carcasses noted for Galveston County were found on roadways. Four carcasses were recovered. Of these, only one (TCWC 53282) was in salvageable condition. Currently, automobile traffic and habitat destruction appear to be the worst threats to otters (Toweill & Tabor 1982; Foy 1984; Melquist & Dronkert 1987; Ehrhart 1995).

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ATYPICAL INFECTION OF ADULT
*MACDONALDIUS SEETA*E KHANNA, 1933
(NEMATODA: FILARIATA) IN A TRANS-PECOS RAT SNAKE,
BOGERTOPHIS SUBOCULARIS (SERPENTES: COLUBRIDAE)

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The genus *Macdonaldius* was established by Khanna (1933) for the type species *Macdonaldius seetae* Khanna 1933, which was collected from the portal vein of the colubrid snake, *Coluber melanoleucus*. Since its description, eight more species have been described from Squamata hosts (four from snakes, four from lizards); and one from the order Testudines. Two of these species: *Macdonaldius carinii* Vaz & Pereira 1935, from snakes of Brazil; and *Macdonaldius pflugfelder* Frank 1964, from *Physignathus lesueurii* of Australia, were transferred to the genus *Oswaldofilaria* Travassos, 1933 by Sonin & Baruš (1968). The following are considered valid species by Sonin (1968): *M. seetae* Khanna, 1933; *Macdonaldius andersoni*, Chabaud & Frank 1961; *Macdonaldius grassii* (Caballero 1954) Chabaud & Frank 1961; *Macdonaldius oschei*, Chabaud & Frank 1961; *Macdonaldius innisfailensis* (Mackerras 1962) Frank 1964; *Macdonaldius colimensis* Telford, 1965; and additionally, *Macdonaldius mackiewicz*i Chattervati, 1985, which has subsequently been described.

The purpose of this note is to report adult *M. seetae* in the colubrid