

THE LEAST WEASEL, *MUSTELA NIVALIS*, IN
WEST-CENTRAL ILLINOIS

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ABSTRACT.—The first record in west-central Illinois of *Mustela nivalis*, and a review of recent literature reporting southward range extensions of *Mustela nivalis* in the central and eastern United States are presented.

On March 13, 1971, a recently killed least weasel, *Mustela nivalis*, was found along a rural gravel road three miles NNW of Macomb, McDonough County, Illinois. Collection of this specimen is significant because it extends the known range of the least weasel into west-central Illinois. Closest previously reported occurrences to the McDonough County site are about 207 miles WSW at Stanberry, Gentry County, Missouri (Easterla, 1970); about 58 miles WNW at Mt. Pleasant, Henry County, Iowa (Hall, 1951); a minimum of 79 miles NNE somewhere within the area of Whiteside, Jo Daviess and Carroll counties, Illinois (Verts, 1960); about 109

miles NE at Henkel, Lee County, Illinois (Mohr, 1943); about 89 miles E near Normal, McLean County, Illinois (Schmidt and Lewin, 1968); about 134 miles ESE at Urbana, Champaign County, Illinois (Hoffmeister, 1956); and about 146 miles SSE near Columbia, Monroe County, Illinois (Parmalee, Bieri, and Mohrman, 1961). The Monroe County, Illinois report represents recovery of the lower jaw and the anterior half of a skull of a least weasel during excavation of a fissure fill in a Mississippi River bluff about four miles SW of Columbia; it was concluded that the specimen quite probably was a prehistoric occurrence (Parmalee and Munyer, 1966).

Collection of the McDonough County specimen reasonably extends the known range of the least weasel southwestward into most of an area

bounded by a line extending 114 miles ENE from Mt. Pleasant, Iowa to Henkel, Illinois, then 70 miles slightly SSE to Normal, Illinois, then 89 miles W to near Macomb, Illinois, and then 58 miles WNW back to Mt. Pleasant. Inclusion of this area as part of the range of *Mustela nivalis* on the range maps of Hall and Kelson (1959), and Burt and Grossenheider (1964) now appears completely justified.

Hoffmeister (1956) presented the then available information on the southern limits of the range of *Mustela nivalis* in the central United States. Since his review it has been reported for the first time from Kansas (Jones and Cortner, 1965), Missouri (Easterla, 1970), and Tennessee (Tuttle, 1968); southern extensions of range for the species have been reported for Indiana (Whitaker and Zimmerman, 1965), Iowa (Easterla, 1970), North Carolina (Barkalow, 1967), and Illinois (Parmalee and Munyer, 1966).

Other recent collections of the least weasel in Illinois which represent minor range extensions to the W in the center portion of the state are one specimen from Woodford County (Parmalee and Munyer, 1966) and 4 specimens from McLean County (Schmidt and Lewin, 1968). While not representing records of range extension, other recently reported collections of the least weasel in Illinois are 4 specimens from Champaign County (Parmalee and Munyer, 1966) and one from Kendall County (Calhoun, 1971).

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We wish to thank Dr. Donald F. Hoffmeister, Museum of Natural History, University of Illinois, for reviewing the manuscript.

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- Manuscript received March 30, 1972.*