

Adding a new Ocelot to the population: OM344

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One helpful tool that the Ocelot Research, Recovery and Monitoring Program at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge uses are remote cameras, also known as trail cameras, which are placed throughout the Refuge in the ocelots' thornscrub habitat. Remote cameras allow researchers to learn more about ocelots across the Refuge, since it is over 110,000 acres. This is a large area and can be difficult to study otherwise. There are also only about 15 known Ocelots on the refuge and they are difficult to detect.

These cameras take pictures once they detect movement and/or when the cameras detect thermal differences using infrared sensors, specifically, when something warmer than the background is detected. Then researchers collect and review the digital photos, using each specific ocelot coat pattern to identify individuals. Cameras often capture pictures of other animals on the refuge including: Turkey Vulture, Crested Caracara, opossum, javelina, indigo snake, white-tailed deer, nilgai antelope, armadillo and raccoon. Each Ocelot has a unique pattern that researchers can then use to track movement.

An Ocelot becomes an identified individual and added to the population when researchers have multiple photos from the remote cameras that show its coat pattern clearly and reliably or when an individual is captured in Refuge trapping efforts. Identified Individuals are given a two part name: OF or OM and a number. OF is an abbreviation for ocelot female and OM is an abbreviation for ocelot male. Ocelots are numbered in chronological order, although a small percentage of bobcats have also been given individual IDs (e.g., BF298, BM299) during monitoring of recently installed underpasses on Farm-to-Market Road 106. Therefore, OM344 means it is a male ocelot and the 344th individual wild cat identified over the years of ocelot monitoring on the Refuge. OM344 was first seen on remote camera photos on March 29, 2020 and has now become an identified individual and therefore added to the population. This is great news for the Ocelot Research, Recovery and Monitoring Program, the Refuge, and most importantly, the ocelot population! Being a young male can be tough but we hope to see him on the refuge for many years to come!

Thanks to Dr. Hilary Swarts, Wildlife Biologist with the Ocelot Research, Recovery and Monitoring Program at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge for help writing this article!