

Adopt an Ocelot



Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge's Ocelots

Ocelots are beautiful spotted cats that once roamed from South Texas up into Arkansas and Louisiana. Today, they have all but disappeared from the United States. Current estimates are that fewer than 50 of these wild cats are left in the U.S., with all of them residing in South Texas. Of those, an estimated 20 find sanctuary at the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and surrounding private lands.

The Laguna Atascosa NWR ocelot population has been studied intensively since 1982. More than 70 ocelots have been captured, examined and released unharmed in an effort to learn more about these mysterious animals, including how to ensure they are always part of the American landscape.

Your support through the Adopt-An-Ocelot program provides important funding for the purchasing of equipment used to gather important biological data. It goes toward protecting habitat and educating the public and much, much more. All proceeds from the Adopt-An-Ocelot program go directly to ocelot conservation.

Your adoption makes a difference for ocelots!



Ocelot at wildlife guzzler

What Does An Ocelot Look Like? Ocelots stand about a foot high. Adults weigh 15-30 pounds and measure about 3' long from their nose to the tip of their tail. Ocelots have a long ringed or barred tail and their rounded ears are black with a single, large white spot.

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Esperanza &



E*speranza* (means 'hope') was first trapped on the Laguna Atascosa NWR in Feb. 2008. Biologists know she has successfully given birth three times, once to a litter of two. She is a cautious cat and a very good mother. At one point, she was the only known breeding

female ocelot on the Refuge. Esperanza seems to favor the northern portion of the Bayside Drive area of the Refuge where biologists have taken many photographs of her and her kittens using a wildlife guzzler to get fresh water. She is a healthy female in her prime and provides real hope for the survival of ocelots in the United States. That is why she was named 'Hope'.



A*legron* (means 'unexpected joy') is Esperanza's first documented kitten. He was first photographed at about four months old with his mother in December 2008. He was captured and fitted with a temporary collar that came off a few months later. He is currently still in his parents' territory but will likely leave soon to try and find a territory of his own, entering a

dangerous "transient" period. He will have territorial confrontations and cross many roads.

Adonis' Family

A *donis* (means 'handsome youth') is a confident and playful cat. Between the ages of six and seven, he was first captured on the Laguna Atascosa NWR in February 2008 near the road entering the Refuge. His mate is Esperanza and he has successfully sired several kittens with her.



Adonis seems to like having his picture taken and quite often poses for multiple pictures from the remote trip cameras. He is the charming and handsome adult male in town!



Esperanza's litter of two, August 2009.

S *alma* and her mother are two currently known female ocelots on the Refuge. She has been photographed with her mother several times and is playful, feisty and full of energy. She was captured in December 2010 but was too small to radio collar. She is a calm, alert, and independent young female who no longer travels with her mother but is still in her parents' territory. Salma is one of the future breeding females and there is a lot of hope riding on her success.

We have photographed the ocelot on the right but don't yet know for sure if it is male or female. It has never been captured and the photos are not yet conclusive. This ocelot seems to be shy but looks very healthy and active.





How Long Do Ocelots Live? Ocelots typically live for about ten years in the wild but have been known to live longer. One female ocelot on the Laguna Atascosa NWR was first found as a two-week old kitten in September of 1985 and was tracked for 11 years.

An ocelot's fur is white underneath and buff above, with black bars, spots and streaks all over. Just as each human has unique fingerprints, each ocelot has unique markings on its fur!

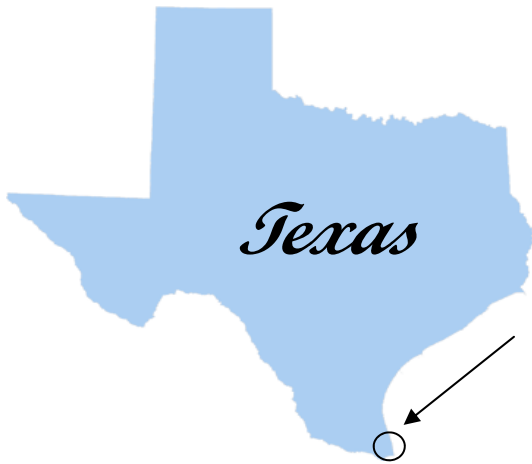
Why Are Ocelots Endangered?

Ocelots in the United States face several challenges. The biggest problem, like many endangered species, is loss of habitat. In the last 75 years, more than 95% of the native habitat in the lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas has disappeared. The small amount of habitat that remains is often broken up into smaller tracts of land, fragmented by roads, fences, agriculture, golf courses and other development. This habitat loss and fragmentation has left ocelots stranded in small groups on isolated pockets of habitat. This in turn has led to other problems.

When an ocelot begins to mature, it must leave its parents and go out in search of its own territory. This can be a very dangerous time in an ocelot's life. Because so little habitat remains and so much is fragmented, ocelots must often travel long distances to

find enough food, water, suitable habitat, and other things they need to survive and reproduce. Having to travel longer distances means having to cross more dangerous highways and avoiding urban areas and territories occupied by other ocelots. Too often ocelots are hit and killed by cars. Nearly half of the ocelots studied around the Laguna Atascosa NWR died as a result of getting hit by a car.

Ocelots in the U.S. are now split into two small groups separated from each other by open areas where habitat has been lost or broken up by roads, houses, fences, farm fields, and other obstacles. Their inability to reach other ocelots has resulted in inbreeding and loss of genetic health. These cats are becoming more and more genetically alike and are increasingly vulnerable to diseases and other health problems.



Where Can You Spot These Beautiful Spotted Cats?
Laguna Atascosa NWR is the place you are most likely to see an ocelot, though it is highly unlikely. In the United States, ocelots used to range from South Texas to Arkansas and Louisiana. Today, an estimated 50 cats remain in the United States. Other subspecies of ocelots can be found in Mexico, Central and South America.

The Life Of An Ocelot Ocelot's diet consists mostly of rabbits, mice, rats and birds. They like to travel under the cover of darkness, making them very difficult to see. The South Texas brush, made up of thorny and dense plants, looks uninviting and painful to humans but to ocelots, the thick brush means protection from danger, shade from the heat, shelter for sleeping, dens for having kittens, and a place to call home.

Photogenic Ocelots!

Researchers have discovered a way to study ocelots without putting them in direct contact with humans. To do this, they use the ocelot's great sense of smell. A special pad with a scent that attracts ocelots is placed on a tree with the hope that ocelots in the area will come by to investigate the new scent. Ocelots will often rub their cheek against the pad to leave their scent as a way of letting other ocelots know they have been there. The scent pad is like a comb and it 'catches' hairs off of the ocelot, which can then be sent off and used to analyze the ocelot's DNA. Near the scent pad, biologists also place motion sensor cameras. When an ocelot approaches the pad, the motion sensor on the camera is triggered and the ocelot takes a self-portrait. These photographs are then matched to the hair samples and used to identify visiting ocelots.



FUN FACT: Obsessed with Obsession! A favorite scent among ocelots is the cologne *Obsession for Men*. This was discovered by a zookeeper who realized that the ocelots in the zoo behaved differently when he wore his cologne!

How the Adopt an Ocelot program helps:

Radio collars used to track the movements of ocelots both on the Refuge and private lands.

Trip cameras, which help biologists gather important information regarding the general health of the animals. These cameras also help identify cats according to the patterns on their back.

Wildlife guzzlers, which provide an important source of water for ocelots and other wildlife during droughts.

Ocelot Conservation Festival, which promotes understanding and appreciation of this animal to ensure its long-term survival.

Restoring habitat and much, much more!

How you can help:

~ **Adopt an Ocelot for yourself or give it as a gift! You can adopt a family for \$75 or an individual for \$50.**

- ~ Visit the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, one of the last places in the United States where ocelots can be found.
- ~ Share the roadway with wildlife. *Drive slowly and be aware of wildlife crossings.*
- ~ Plant and protect native trees and shrubs on your property.
- ~ Stay informed through www.friendsofsouthtexasrefuges.org or by becoming a fan of Viva the Ocelot! on Facebook.

The Adopt an Ocelot program is sponsored by the Friends of Laguna Atascosa NWR, a non-profit organization established to protect, support and enhance its namesake Refuge. One of the primary purposes of the Friends is to help recover the ocelot, a highly endangered species in the United States. ALL proceeds from the Adopt an Ocelot program directly benefit ocelots.

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