



Texas Ocelot

Laguna Atascosa NWR
22817 Ocelot Road
Los Fresnos, Texas 78566
956/748-3607

www.fws.gov/refuge/laguna_atascosa/

A wild Texas legacy can be found roaming the dense thorn forests of Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. The ocelot is a small, beautiful wild cat whose historic range in the U.S. included most of Texas and portions of Arizona, Arkansas, and Louisiana. Today, the less than 50 remaining cats depend on the remnant thorn forests of deep South Texas for their survival. With your help, we can keep the ocelot in Texas and pass on this natural legacy for future generations.

History and Reasons for Decline

Throughout its U.S. range, ocelot habitat has been changed. Forests have been cut for timber, ranching, agriculture, and urban development leaving little dense cover for this secretive cat to call home. Add to that a period of unregulated pet trade and a fashion industry thirst for ocelot coats and the end result is a critically endangered cat. Even in their last stronghold, deep South Texas, more than 95% of their habitat has been lost.



Current Threats

Large expanses of thorn forest are rare. Much of the remaining thorn forest in South Texas is broken up by roads and development. As ocelots search for food, shelter and mates they often have to cross roads, as do the young cats that must search for a new territory. The majority of current ocelot deaths are due to vehicle strikes. The limitations of their remaining habitat have resulted in ocelots living in small, isolated groups, which has led to inbreeding and a decrease in genetic diversity.

Recovery Efforts

Despite the critical condition of the Texas ocelot, there is much hope for the long term survival of this wild cat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) continues to research the ocelots at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) to determine their needs and monitor their health. USFWS and its many partners are working to protect, restore and connect the thorn forests of South Texas and make sure fresh water is readily available. We work closely with Texas Department of Transportation to build wildlife crossings that safely funnel ocelots and other wildlife under roads allowing them to establish new territories and find mates. And, experts in the United States and Mexico are now considering a proposal to translocate (move) ocelots from Mexico to Laguna Atascosa NWR. If approved, translocation could be an important tool to help prevent extinction of ocelots in Texas by increasing population size and improving genetic diversity.

What You Can Do

We'd like to invite you to become our partner and help keep the ocelot in Texas! There are many ways individuals, schools and organizations can get involved and make a difference for ocelots.

- Visit the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, one of the last places in the United States where ocelots can be found. Located east of Harlingen, TX off FM 106, the Refuge is open daily from about sunrise to sunset. Experience the thorn forest on our hiking & biking trails and auto tour routes. Go on a tram tour and learn more about ocelots and the Refuge habitats. View the ocelot exhibits at the Visitor Center. Purchase a book, artwork or other ocelot item in the Nature Store. Talk to the staff and volunteers to find out more about ocelots. Although primarily nocturnal and very secretive, ocelots are occasionally seen by Refuge visitors. Call the Refuge at 956/748-3607, ext. 111 for information or to schedule a group visit.

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- Share the roadway with wildlife. Drive slowly and be aware of wildlife crossings. When driving on the Refuge pay attention to speed limits and watch for signs placed at known ocelot crossing areas. When driving throughout South Texas, especially after dark, be alert when in heavily vegetated areas, as ocelots may be nearby.
 - Plant and protect native trees and shrubs on your property. Every little bit helps. Even a fencerow can be a travel lane for ocelots and other wildlife. If you are a landowner with acreage you may wish to consider a Safe Harbor Agreement or Conservation Easement—contact the Endangered Species Program Office at 505/248-6654 for more information.
 - Volunteer for a National Wildlife Refuge. Learn more about native plants and wildlife and help spread the word! From staffing the information desk to leading wildlife tours to tending the native plant gardens, there is something for everyone. In South Texas contact the Refuge Volunteer Coordinator at 956/748-3607 ext 119. Nationally, go to volunteer.gov/gov for more information.
 - Support ocelots through the Adopt an Ocelot! Program. The Friends of Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, a nonprofit organization, has created the Adopt-an-Ocelot program. This program allows supporters to symbolically ‘adopt’ an ocelot by contributing to a fund to be used for education, research, and habitat restoration for the ocelot. Supporters receive educational materials about ocelot ecology, the species’ conservation challenges, and details of the lives of individual ocelots found at the Refuge. Visit the Friends website www.friendsofsouthtexasRefuges.org or call the Refuge at 956/748-3607 for more information.
 - Purchase an ocelot license plate. www.savetexasocelots.org
 - Keep informed about Texas ocelots. Become a fan of Viva the Ocelot! on Facebook to keep up to date on current ocelot information including the annual Ocelot Conservation Festival.

Report Ocelot Sightings (dead or alive)

Please immediately call any of the following phone numbers.

Law Enforcement Dispatch:	956/784-7520
Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge:	956/748-3607, ext 111
Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge:	956/784-7500

Provide important information, including your name and a phone number where you can be reached; the location, time and type of sighting (dead or alive); identifying marks that confirm it was an ocelot and not a bobcat; and directions to the location and details of the site.

If you find a dead ocelot, please stay with the carcass if you can until USFWS arrives. If you are not able to stay, please photograph the carcass and move it off the road so that it is not visible to passersby. Be sure to let USFWS know exactly where to find the carcass so they can retrieve it and collect important information such as internal tags and genetic information.

(ocelot artwork credit: Jill Goldstein / USFWS)