

NONGAME FIELD NOTES

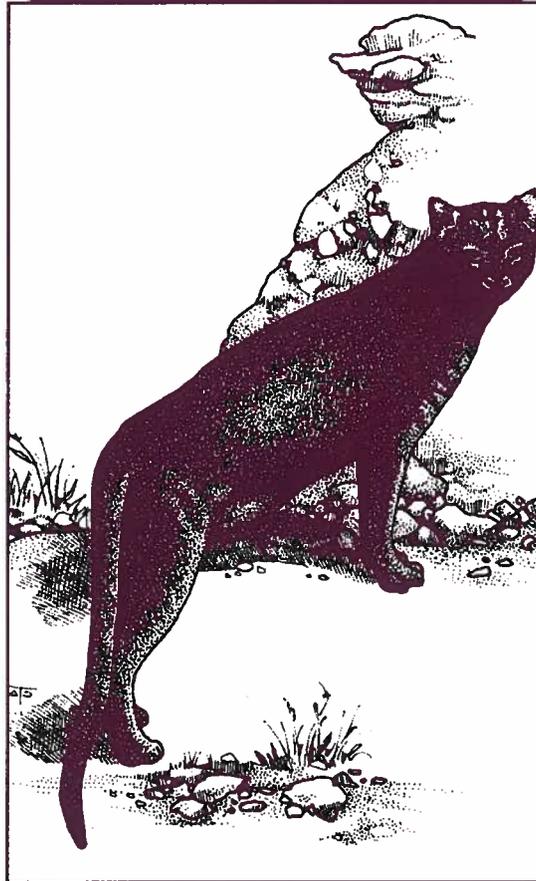
SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Felis yagouaroundi tolteca*. From the Greek *felis* meaning cat, Latin *yagouaroundi* for the Indian word from which jaguar is derived, and Latin *und* meaning wave. The latter perhaps refers to the species' sinuous body movements. The subspecific epithet *tolteca* refers to the pre-Columbian civilization that dominated the region from which this animal was first known.

DESCRIPTION: The jaguarundi (jag-er-un-dee) is smaller than a bobcat, with a 30-inch body and a 24-inch tail. It is slender, almost weasel-like, with conspicuously small head and ears. The face is flattened. The legs seem short for the body. Two color phases are known: gray (or brownish-gray to blackish), and reddish-brown (or chestnut). Neither phase is spotted, but kittens are lightly spotted for a brief time after birth. All color phases may occur in a single litter.

HABITAT: Semiarid mesquite and thornscrub thickets, chaparral, and other thick brushland and cover, especially along streams and in bottomlands. In the southern portion of the range, dense lowland forests. The report that caused the jaguarundi to be described as a component of Arizona's fauna (E.L. Little, Jr. 1938. *J. Mamm.* 19:500-501) was a sight record from "semidesert grassland (with scattered oaks)" in the Canelo Hills.

DISTRIBUTION: Extreme south Texas through eastern Mexico and Central America, across the South American lowlands to Argentina. No documented record for Arizona, Sonora, or Chihuahua. Occasionally reported from the Chiricahua Mountains, and from the upper San Pedro River and Huachucas to the Santa Ritas and the eastern Tohono O'odham Reservation.

BIOLOGY: The jaguarundi is often described as elusive,



Jaguarundi

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which is a vast understatement. It is an inhabitant of dense to impenetrable thickets, and a confirmed Arizona record has been as hard to find as the Lost Dutchman's Mine. Even live trapping to capture and radiocollar individuals known of elsewhere in the range is often not rewarding. Not surprisingly, we know little of its habits.

Jaguarundis are most active at twilight and early morning. Although adept climbers, they prefer a ground-dwelling existence. Usually they stalk or chase down small birds and mammals, but they also prey on amphibians, reptiles, and perhaps even fish. They live in pairs, or alone, not in packs. They den in thickets or dense brush, or under fallen trees. One, occasionally two, litters of two to four kittens are born in spring-summer, after a nine week gestation.

STATUS: Despite lack of a bona fide scientific record within several hundred miles of Arizona's borders, the jaguarundi is often described as inhabiting the state and is Federally listed as endangered in Arizona. This prompts field guides to include Arizona within its range, thus generating more "sightings" and in turn giving "credence" to maintaining Arizona within the "possibly or potentially occupied" historical range. At best, this species is hypothetical for Arizona (See Hoffmeister's *Mammals of Arizona*, 1986). Although movement corridors exist along river bottoms that might have taken the jaguarundi northward from Sinaloa's thornscrub into southern Arizona, its occurrence here is better described as wishful thinking.

MANAGEMENT NEEDS: Until a specimen is confirmed, Arizona should be dropped from the jaguarundi's range and the listed status should be changed accordingly. Management attention (reintroduction) and survey efforts should be shifted to Texas-Tamaulipas, and Sonora-Sinaloa. 🐾