

Mammal Endangered Species Technical Advisory Committee (ESTAC)

Minutes of the ESTAC Meeting on January 31, 2024

Illinois Natural History Survey Main Floor Conference Room

1816 S. Oak Street, Champaign IL 61820

1. Call to Order, Roll Call of ESTAC Members, and Introduction of Guests

Committee Members Present: Dr. Max Allen, Dr. Justin Boyles, Ms. Tara Hohoff, Mr. Joseph Kath, Ms. Jean Mengelkoch, Dr. Joy O'Keefe, Dr. Tih-Fen. Ting

Committee Members Absent: Mr. Chris Anchor, Dr. Christopher Jacques

Others present: Dr. Joyce Hofmann (ESPB), Ms. Samantha Chavez (ESPB), Ms. Natalia Maass (IDNR), Amelia Cheek (Illinois Farm Bureau)

Dr. Hofmann called the meeting to order at 10: 06 AM and welcomed the committee members on behalf of the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board.

2. Adoption of Agenda

Ms. Mengelkoch moved that the agenda be adopted as presented and Ms. Hohoff seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

3. Review of the Status of Mammal Species on the Illinois List of Endangered and Threatened Species

Members of the committee discussed the status of the wolf. It was decided to leave the wolf on the Illinois list as endangered to match its current federal status.

Corynorhinus rafinesquii. Dr. Boyles stated the population numbers for Rafinesque's big-eared bat were probably the same as previously. The species is at the edge of its range in Illinois. Dr. O'Keefe said that it was found in the same places as previously, with not much change. More rigorous surveys are needed. Mr. Kath mentioned that the species is only found occasionally in abandoned structures in extreme southern Illinois. He felt that its status should remain unchanged.

Myotis austroriparius. Dr. O'Keefe pointed out that the southeastern bat is found in caves on U.S. Forest Service land and other caves as well. Dr. Boyles pointed out that it is a southeastern species, also on the edge of its range in Illinois. Mr. Kath stated that there is no indication of a change in status during the winter at two of three sites. They are not large sites, and the number of bats present was never in the hundreds. There are a few in a bachelor colony at Magazine Mine.

Myotis grisescens. The number of gray bats in southern Indiana has shown a large increase. Dr. O'Keefe said that the species should be watched. Mr. Kath stated that the species is consistently present at Cave Spring Cave where there is a maternity colony that is quite large.

Myotis sodalis: Ms. Hohoff said that a graduate student had caught quite a few Indiana bats over the past few years.

Myotis leibii. Mr. Kath stated that there are a few new locations for the eastern small-footed bat in the same geographic area – barrens in the Shawnee Hills. The species is breeding. If people look more, he thought more will be found. Some may roost in cliff faces that can't be surveyed. Dr. Boyles said that a rescued bat on the Southern Illinois University campus turned out to be *M. leibii*. Dr. O'Keefe said that a graduate student thought he saw one near the Mississippi River. The western small-footed bat is found in Minnesota.

Myotis septentrionalis. Dr. O'Keefe pointed out that the northern long-eared bat is now listed as federally endangered. Mr. Kath thought its status in Illinois should be endangered as well. Numbers have been down at the major hibernacula for several years. It is the same in Missouri. Ms. Mengelkoch said that very few *M. septentrionalis* have shown up in recent years when she has identified bats tested for rabies in Illinois. She detected one at a bridge recently. Dr. O'Keefe captured a male at Busey Woods in Urbana. Ms. Hohoff stated that during surveys at forested corridors in the Chicago area only one individual had been caught.

Poliocitellus franklinii. Dr. Ting stated that in 2022 a local population of Franklin's ground squirrel had she had followed for a decade had crashed. There were 33 individuals in 2019, but only one in 2020. Twenty-six counties were surveyed in 2019-2020 and 2021-2022 and there were no captures. There were two sightings, but the species is hard to catch. She wondered if the species should be endangered rather than threatened. There is no difference in the protection afforded, but endangered status might be a signal. The species doesn't get much attention in the Midwest. Mr. Kath said that Dr. Ting had done an incredible amount of work. He agreed that the species should be endangered. It is blinking out; people are looking but not finding it. The animals can disperse long distances but there may be no habitat for them to colonize. Dr. Ting concurred that populations were isolated. Mr. Kath said that GIS staff at the Department of Natural Resources had produced a habitat model for the species. He drove through many counties to look at potential sites. They were mostly small islands in developed areas. Ms. Mengelkoch said that she had trapped at the Springfield bike trail, I-55, and I-72 and captured no *P. franklinii*. The only success was at a golf course in Cook County in 2020. The course manager was mowing less and has seen the squirrels. Ms. Mengelkoch also mentioned that she and other Illinois biologists have not even been seeing many thirteen-lined ground squirrels in recent years. Dr. Ting speculated that wet winters and saturated soil have had a negative effect on ground squirrels since they spend a lot of time underground. Dr. O'Keefe said there were a number of specimens in the Field Museum collection. Ms. Hohoff asked about the Illinois Natural History Survey mammal collection. Dr. Allen said that there were only some older specimens.

4. Approval of Recommendations for Changes to the Status of Listed Mammal Species

Ms. Hohoff moved that the status of *M. septentrionalis* be changed to endangered. Dr. O'Keefe seconded the motion. Dr. Boyles said he was hard pressed to say the decline in this species is severe. Dr. O'Keefe stated that there was not enough data historically. Mr. Kath

said he had a feeling that the species was endangered but its situation may get better. There was quite a bit of netting in southern Illinois in the past with lots of captures of this bat. Dr. O'Keefe stated that last summer no *M. septentrionalis* were caught on U.S. Forest Service land. Ms. Hohoff mentioned that since 2013-2014 her group had only found the species at one site. Ms. Hohoff, Mr. Kath, Ms. Mengelkoch, and Dr. O'Keefe voted in favor of the motion.

Dr. Ting moved that the status of *P. franklinii* be changed to endangered. Ms. Mengelkoch seconded the motion. Dr. O'Keefe said there is a lack of population data, but the situation is relatively worrying. Dr. Ting mentioned the decline of the species in the Springfield area and Ms. Mengelkoch mentioned the work of University of Illinois students. Dr. Allen, Ms. Hohoff, Mr. Kath, Ms. Mengelkoch, and Dr. Ting voted in favor of the motion. Dr. Ting volunteered to write the petition.

5. Discussion of Potential Additions of Mammal Species to the Illinois List of Endangered and Threatened Species

Mr. Kath pointed out that the tricolored bat *Perimyotis subflavus* has been proposed for federal listing. The decision is supposed to be made this year. Discussion on the federal status of the little brown bat *Myotis lucifugus* is slated for 2025-2026. He stated that the only Illinois stronghold for the tricolored bat in winter is the Magazine Mine complex. There are more than 3,000 in one mine. Ms. Hohoff said that her group had caught 18 tricolored bats in 2017. Dr. O'Keefe stated that the species is difficult to capture. Numbers in hibernacula have been holding steady since the onset of White-Nose Syndrome. Dr. Boyles said that the species was doing alright in some places but not in others. He expressed the opinion that there isn't a severe decline. Mr. Kath reiterated that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would be making a listing decision and there was a consensus to wait for the federal decision before acting on the state level.

Ms. Hohoff expressed concern about the little brown bat, saying there seem to be a lot fewer of them. Mr. Kath said they needed to get data from Blackball Mine. There are not as many little brown bats there now. Dr. O'Keefe stated that the numbers were the same as earlier in southern Illinois but low. Mr. Kath agreed that there were never many, but numbers are relatively stable. He said that some people have seen a good rebound in numbers after the decline due to White-Nose Syndrome. He then said that there is not enough evidence now for a decision on listing. Dr. O'Keefe agreed that there is not enough data at the state level. Ms. Maass informed the members that data on the tricolored and little brown bats are included in the Biotics database and she will send that to them.

Dr. Allen mentioned that mountain lions may be breeding in Iowa and that a fisher had been found at Rockford. Black bears also occur in Illinois at times. Mr. Kath pointed out that the wolf, mountain lion, and black bear are protected in Illinois. He said that mortality for wolves in Illinois has been 90%. Some were hit on highways while others were shot as coyotes. He expressed the opinion that a self-sustaining population in Illinois is not feasible. He also suggested that an Illinois habitat model might predict survey routes for

mountain lions. Dr. Allen said that the fur harvest for gray fox has declined. Last year none were harvested. He suggested that there could be a long term population decline. Mr. Kath said that long term data are needed. There was a federal work plan for the “prairie gray fox,” but its range didn’t include Illinois. He thought the serious attention was warranted for this species. Furbearer spotlight surveys are ongoing. Mr. Kath mentioned competition from red fox and Dr. Allen interactions with coyotes. Dr. Boyles said that camera traps in the Shawnee should provide lots of data.

6. Approval of Recommendations for Additions of Mammal Species to the Illinois List of Endangered and Threatened Species

There were no motions to add species to the list.

7. Assignment of ESTAC Members to Complete Petition Forms for Recommended Changes or Additions to the Illinois List of Endangered and Threatened Species

Dr. Ting had offered to work on a petition to change the status of Franklin’s ground squirrel (item 4).

Ms. Hohoff volunteered to write the petition to change the status of the northern long-eared bat.

8. Recommendations to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources for Surveys or Research on Mammals

Committee members recommended compiling data on the gray fox and surveys at known little brown bat sites. Ms. Maass said that she could provide information on those locations.

9. Public Comment Period

There were no public comments.

10. Adjournment

Dr. Hofmann adjourned the meeting at 12:00 PM.