



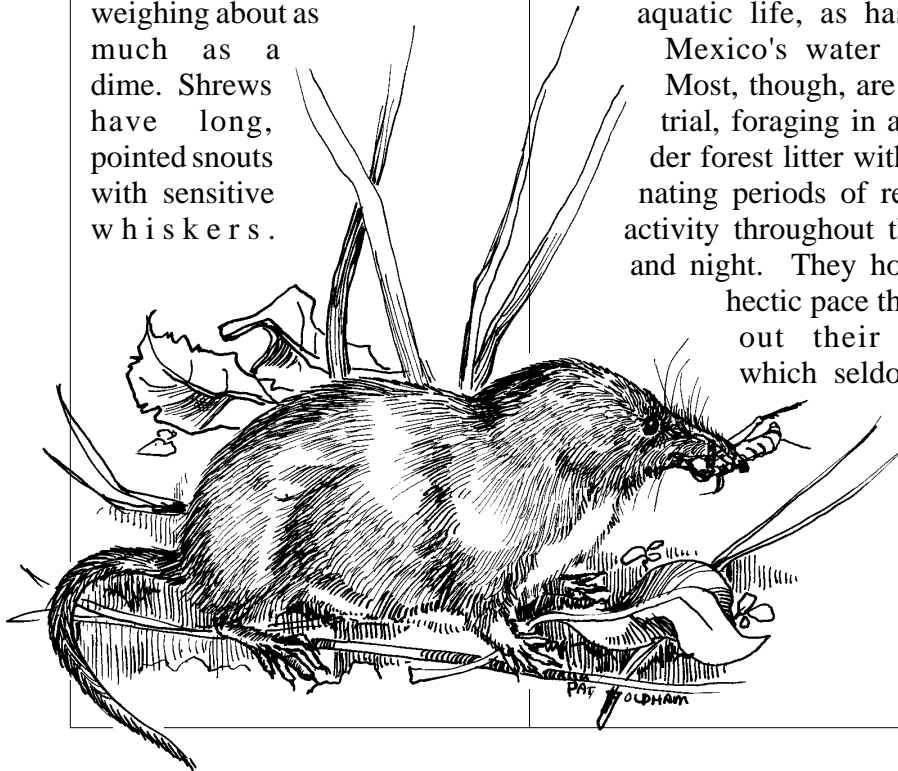
WILDLIFE NOTES

Shrews

Shrews will never be sought after by meat or trophy hunters, and their pelts will never command a high price. Nevertheless, they are some of the most fascinating creatures inhabiting our state.

Thought they resemble small mice, shrews are not rodents but members of the more ancient mammalian order, Insectivora (insect-eaters.) They are found worldwide, on all the continents except Australia, Antarctica, and most of South America.

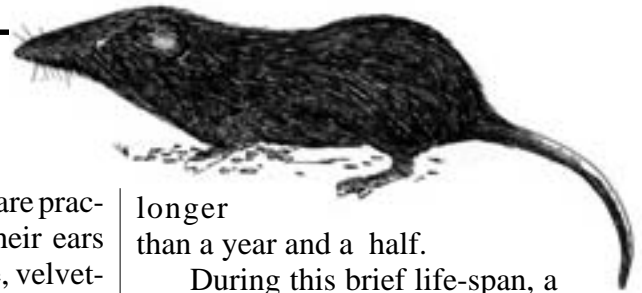
Upon close examination, shrews can be easily distinguished from mice. They are much smaller – in fact, the pygmy shrew is the smallest living mammal, measuring a little over three inches in length – including the tail – and weighing about as much as a dime. Shrews have long, pointed snouts with sensitive whiskers.



Their small bead-like eyes are practically functionless, and their ears are almost hidden by dense, velvet-like fur.

Despite their small size, shrews have gained quite a reputation for ferocity, primarily because the shrew is merely hungry – constantly hungry – driven to maintain its life and energy. The shrews' tiny body has a large surface area which causes it to lose body heat rapidly. In order to live, the shrew must eat often – their appetites are huge – and they often consume an amount of food greater than their own body weight each day. Prey consists mainly of insects but also includes spiders and probably any other small animal they can overpower.

Some shrews have adapted to aquatic life, as has New Mexico's water shrew. Most, though, are terrestrial, foraging in and under forest litter with alternating periods of rest and activity throughout the day and night. They hold this hectic pace throughout their lives, which seldom last



longer than a year and a half.

During this brief life-span, a female shrew may produce two or three litters of from three to 10 young, usually six or seven. Young shrews, born hairless, blind and helpless, rarely leave the nest before they are a month old. By that time they are very nearly adult size – ready to be cast out to fend for themselves.

Some – but not all – species of shrews are known to be poisonous. Venom is produced in the salivary glands and flows into the wounds inflicted upon the prey. None of the species of shrews which occur in New Mexico is known to be poisonous.

The eight species of shrews found in New Mexico are: the desert shrew (*Notiosorex crawfordi*), the masked shrew (*Sorex cinereus*), the water shrew (*Sorex palustris*), the dwarf shrew (*Sorex nanus*), Merriam's shrew (*Sorex merriami*), the vagrant shrew (*Sorex vagrans*), the Arizona shrew (*Sorex vagrans*), and the least shrew (*Cryptotis parva*.)

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Conservation Education Section
Department of Game and Fish
PO Box 25112
Santa Fe, NM 87504
(505) 476-8119

Shrews That Are Protected in New Mexico

Arizona Shrew

Until recently the Arizona shrew had been found only in the Huachuca, Santa Rita, and Chiricahua mountains of southeastern Arizona. In August 1976 a shrew was found in the Animas Mountains of southwestern Hidalgo County in New Mexico. It had drowned in a spring at the upper end of Indian Creek. The specimen was preserved in alcohol and transported to Albuquerque for confirmation of its identity. It was then confirmed that it was *Sorex arizonae* – a new species for New Mexico!

Because of its rarity and extremely limited distribution in this state, the Arizona shrew has been listed as one of New Mexico's endangered species. Fortunately, this shrew occurs in an area where its habitat is relatively secure for the foreseeable future.

Least Shrew

This shrew is found in areas around Tucumcari, La Grulla National Wildlife Refuge in Roosevelt County, and Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Chaves County.

Because the least shrew is uncommon in New Mexico, it has been listed as one of this state's endangered species. A few thousand years ago it was common to the southern part of the state.

The least shrew is vulnerable to habitat loss resulting from water diversion, agriculture, and grazing. Preservation of the suitable habitat in eastern New Mexico is critical to the survival of the least shrew in New Mexico.

