

# Records of the Horned Toad in Saskatchewan

By ROBERT W. NERO, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History



Photo by F. W. Lahrman

A Horned Toad, or more properly Horned Lizard, recently received from Mrs. Don Gillespie of Rosefield, Sask., provides the second official record of a lizard in the province. A previously unreported specimen of

Horned Toad in the National Museum was collected at Gergovia on August 22, 1931. The present record is from the same area. It was captured on June 1, 1957 near Rosefield (23, 1, 11, W23rd). Mrs. Gillespie wrote: "My sister and I went for a walk on June 1 and I just picked him up and put him in my pocket. They are found anywhere in the badlands where there are outcroppings of blue shale. I have seen a lot of them but never more than one at a time in one place. You see them mostly in dry years."

This information should help us find other specimens and thus extend our knowledge of the distribution of this interesting animal. We look forward to further reports from naturalists in that section of the province. The semi-desert conditions which are found in far southwestern Saskatchewan have long been presumed to provide conditions suitable to the occurrence of the Horned Lizard. Dr. E. B. S. Logier has pointed out that the distribution

range drawn by H. M. Smith (1946. *Handbook of Lizards*. Comstock, New York) includes the extreme southwestern corner of Saskatchewan (pers. corres.). Logier and Toner state that it occurs in southwestern Alberta north to about 50 degrees latitude (1955. *Check-list of the Amphibians of Reptiles of Canada and Alaska*. Contrib. Royal Ont. Mus. Zool. Pal., No. 41). According to the same authors our lizard should be the Eastern Short-horned Toad (*Phrynosoma douglassi brevirostre* Girard). The identification of our specimen as such has been confirmed by Dr. Sherman Bleakney who also sent the information on the National Museum specimen.

As shown by the photo our specimen is small, being a little over two and one half inches in total length. It was alive when received and was brownish-gray above, yellowish-white below. It was quite sluggish during the period we had it under observation, even when being photographed outside in the sun. However, as pointed out by several authors, this is a creature which likes very hot days, when it becomes quick and active. Its food, like most lizards consists mainly of insects. Unlike many lizards, the young of this group are born alive. Horned lizards are



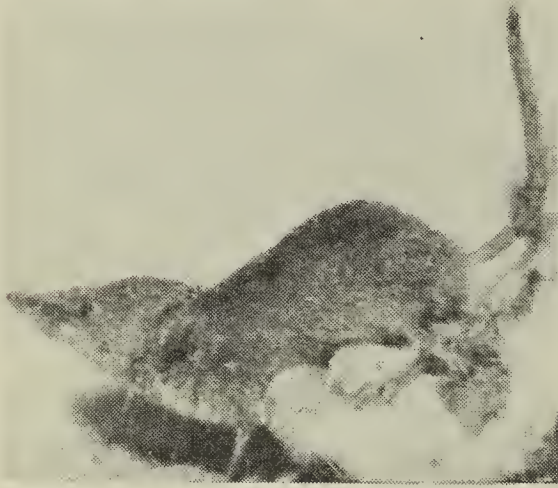
generally supposed to be docile and have not been known to bite. According to G. C. Carl, however, when irritated they may open the mouth, hiss or inflate the body (1951. *Reptiles of British Columbia*).

Under extreme irritation they may

even suddenly eject a thin stream of blood from the corner of an eye! This astounding feat has been well authenticated, and it amuses me to wonder whether it might have been the origin of the expression "mud in your eye"!

## "Taming the Shrew"

By RICHARD W. FYFE, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History



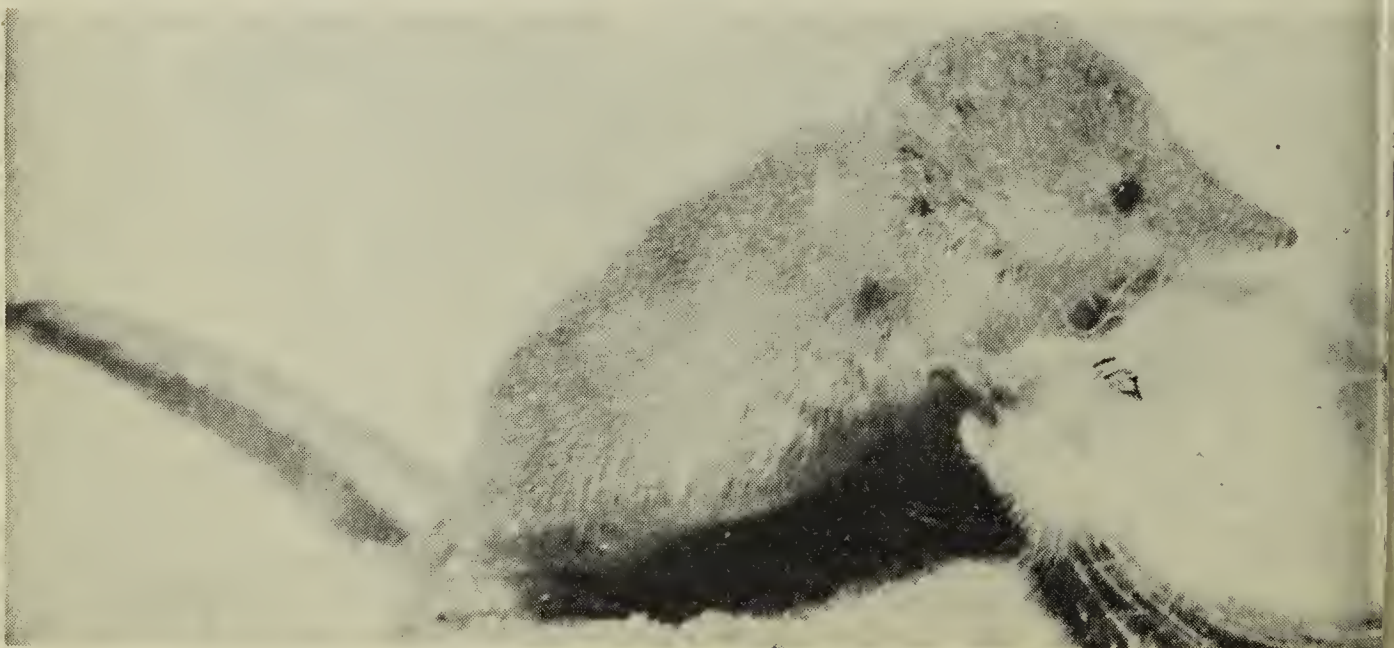
Common Shrew, natural size

The cover photo and those on this page are of a Common Shrew recently donated to the museum by some junior naturalists in Regina. The live animal is pictured here behind glass and feeding on a White-footed Mouse.

The Common Shrew is usually found in areas of brush or on the prairie near streams or other water areas. Seldom seen because of their small size, they are more common than we realize. Although they have a total length of from 3½ to 4 inches and a weight about that of a penny (3.6 gm.), they are noted for their fearlessness and will occasionally attack and kill mice much larger than

themselves. However, the main diet of most shrews is insects which are more easily obtained. Having a very high metabolic rate with a heart beat of 1,600 beats a minute, they require a tremendous amount of food and are reported by some authors to eat up to three times their weight in food per day. They are admirably equipped to do so, because they have piercing teeth and because they can poison their prey with venom similar to that of a cobra. Although the Common Shrew is not considered very poisonous, one other member of the shrew family, the Short-tailed Shrew, can inject enough poison into humans to cause considerable pain for one or two weeks.

The Pygmy Shrew, which is the world's smallest mammal, is often confused with the Common Shrew shown here. This is very understandable as they are similar in appearance. Although the Pygmy Shrew is slightly smaller, it can only be distinguished by an examination of its tooth pattern. However, the Common Shrew is the one most often found in Saskatchewan. Questionable specimens should be sent to the museum for identification.



Common Shrew