

A POSSIBLE SIGHT RECORD OF THE BLACK-FOOTED FERRET IN SASKATCHEWAN

WILLIAM B. PRESTON, Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, 190 Rupert Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3B 0N2.

On 17 June 1979, accompanied by my seven-year-old daughter, I visited Chimney Coulee, four miles (6.4 km) north of Eastend, Saskatchewan. At approximately 1100 hr. MDT, I was walking up the coulee on a dirt track, near the cairn, when my attention was attracted by the movement of a small mammal leaping in weasel fashion through low shrubbery (approximately 0.5 m in height) to my right, between my daughter and myself (Figure 1). As it crossed the track about 20 m in front of me I

recognized it as a black-footed ferret (*Mustela nigripes*). The animal disappeared into aspen bush on the north side of the track. My daughter, who did not see it, possibly had frightened it toward me.

The animal I saw was somewhat larger, more heavily built, and had a shorter tail than a long-tailed weasel. It was very pale in colour, much paler than the palest long-tailed weasel in the collections of the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, and the



Figure 1. The ferret was first seen in the low shrubbery, right foreground, a few minutes before this photograph was made with a telephoto lens.



Figure 2. Habitat near the area where the ferret was seen.

tip of the tail was black. As it did not look at me I did not notice a mask on the face.

Except for the woods in the coulee the area is mixed-grass prairie with shrubs (mainly *Artemisia*) (Figure 2), and there are numerous ground squirrel burrows (probably Richardson's ground squirrel) dotting the hillsides.

Not until later did I realize the significance of this sighting. According to Banfield the last Canadian specimen of the black-footed ferret was taken in 1937 at Climax, Saskatchewan, ". . . and the species is now

believed to be extirpated in Canada."² Anderson reported 22 records, including 11 specimens, from Saskatchewan between 1929 and 1937, most of these from within 50 to 70 km of Eastend.¹

I wish to thank Dr. J. R. Jowsey for his encouragement in publishing this note and Dr. R. E. Wrigley for making valuable suggestions.

¹ANDERSON, R. M. 1946. Catalogue of Canadian Recent Mammals. Nat. Mus. Canada, Bull. No. 102, 238 pp.

²BANFIELD, A. W. F. 1974. The Mammals of Canada. Univ. of Toronto Press, Toronto, 438 pp.