



WILDLIFE NOTES

Spotted skunk *Spilogale gracilis*

Everyone knows that the small black creature with white stripes is a skunk. Three of New Mexico's skunks, the striped skunk, the hooded skunk, and the hog-nosed skunk, are just that: black with one or two white stripes.

Then there is the little guy, the spotted skunk, weighing less than two pounds. Not only is this the smallest of New Mexico's skunks, but it is also spotted and barred, instead of broadly striped. The bars on a spotted skunk are narrow and do not run the length of the body. Each spotted skunk has a unique combination of these white marks; no two individuals are marked exactly the same. Generally there is a white patch on the forehead, and the underside of the tail is white.

Unlike the other skunks, the spotted skunks are agile climbers. Because they are agile climbers, spotted skunks have been known to invade attics and cabin roofs. The homeowner must then decide if this excellent mouser is worth having as a neighbor. Although this is a small skunk, a blast from its scent glands is as potent and cloying as that of its larger cousins.

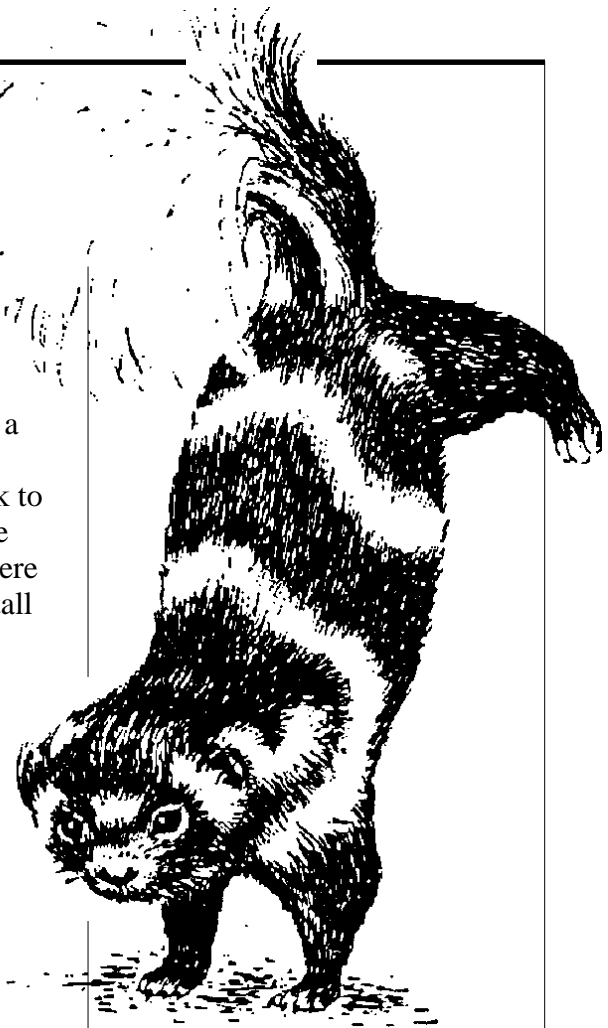
A spotted skunk gives fair warning, however, before using

his arsenal. A quick stamping of the front feet means, "You had better beware." The stamping is followed by a quick turn and a handstand. This may be an effort on the part of the skunk to look larger. It also allows the skunk to look back to see where to aim the spray and to hit a tall adversary (*Homo sapiens* for instance.)

Spotted skunks like good cover. They frequent rock outcroppings, gullies, fence rows, and embankments. In addition to mice, they eat young rabbits, rats, grasshoppers, beetles, grubs and bird eggs.

In the past, spotted skunks have been called "hydrophoby cats," but this species is no more likely to carry rabies than any other small mammal. Any wild animal that acts aggressive or appears unconcerned by human presence should be treated with caution. They are incorrectly called civet cats at times.

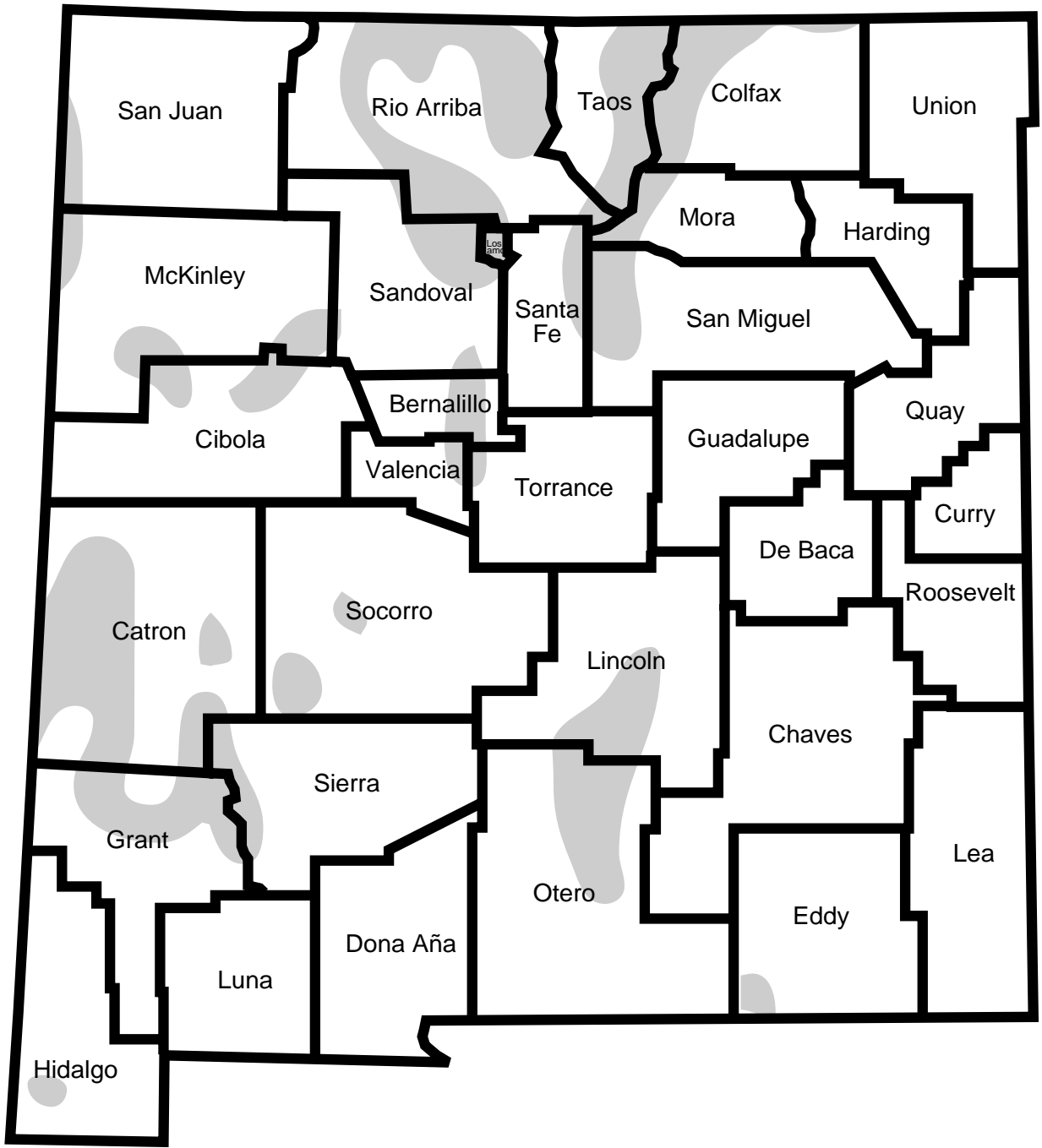
Spotted skunks have few natural predators other than man. They are occasionally taken by great horned owls, bobcats, coyotes, and domestic dogs (presumably these predators pay a price for this dinner.) Man is the primary mortality factor by



trapping for fur, shooting nuisance skunks near homes, and by automobile road kills.

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Shading indicates areas of spotted skunk occurrences.