



The Ocelot is one of 13 species of wild cat native to the western hemisphere and one of 10 felids inhabiting Latin America. The Ocelot occurs from the lower Rio Grande Valley to extreme south Texas and the Sky Islands of southern Arizona. S.P.E.C.I.E.S is undertaking the first comprehensive effort to study ocelots in Trinidad. The history of the ocelot on Trinidad is unique for several reasons. It is the only place that the ocelot has evolved in the absence of larger mammalian carnivores, on Trinidad it is the largest predatory mammal. Among Neotropical small felids, it is second only to the jaguarundi in distribution expanse, and is classified by the IUCN as a species of “Least Concern”, the lowest priority for conservation among the world’s threatened and endangered species. But on Trinidad, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest the ocelot population may be declining, and its future may be threatened by human activities. More importantly perhaps, Trinidad hosts the only population of ocelots on a continental island, making it the most geographically isolated of all ocelot populations. Because Trinidad has been isolated from the mainland for approximately 11,000 years, much of its biodiversity is unique. Isolated from mainland South American species, many vertebrates and invertebrates on the island are genetically distinct enough to be different species or subspecies.

This study aims to look at the ecology of Trinidad’s ocelot population, define its place in the evolutionary history of the ocelot as a species and develop an integrative plan for its long-term conservation. The study will investigate the impacts of deforestation, illegal hunting, urbanization, and different types of agricultural land use and intensity on ocelot habitat suitability, population density, and the diversity of prey species available to the predator. S.P.E.C.I.E.S are also collaborating with local institutions to promote greater awareness of the ocelot’s needs among the public of Trinidad & Tobago, build individual capacity and organizational capacity to monitor ocelots, and develop an island strategy for habitat connectivity and conservation across based on the needs of the species. If the ecological needs of ocelots can be better understood, it is possible to more precisely define the types and intensity of human activities that are compatible with an increasing or stable ocelot population.

Read more about the work done by S.P.E.C.I.E.S here: <http://carnivores.org/>

