

Banisteria 22: 59-60

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PELAGE ANOMALY IN A NORTHERN SHORT-TAILED SHREW, *BLARINA BREVICAUDA*, FROM WEST VIRGINIA -- Pure albinism is rare in insectivores; however, albinism, white spotting or belting has been documented for masked shrews (*Sorex cinereus*), dusky shrews (*Sorex obscurus*), least shrews (*Cryptotis parva*), and northern short-tailed shrews (*Blarina brevicauda*) (Hamilton, 1939; Elder, 1960; Brooks & Doyle, 1994; Long & Gehring, 1995; Moncrief & Anderson, 1997; Bumann & Scanlon, 2002; S. McLaren, pers. comm.). Older short-tailed shrews often display white hairs infrequently throughout the pelage or they may be concentrated into dime-sized spots near the flanks (Hamilton, 1939). Twelve short-tailed shrews with pelage anomalies have been documented in Pennsylvania, most with a single or few white spots (S. McLaren, pers. comm.). Most of these animals were captured over 50 years ago, and only two have been taken in the last 25 years. One of these two was a pure albino short-tailed shrew collected at Powdermill Biological Station, ca. 100 km southeast of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In over 43,000 captures in that project, this was the only short-tailed shrew with a white pelage; no partial albinos were captured (J. Merritt, pers. comm.).

We captured a northern short-tailed shrew (*Blarina brevicauda*) with partially white pelage. The specimen was captured in a pitfall on 30 May 2001 in a wetland located in the Monongahela National Forest in Tucker Co., West Virginia (39.07238° N; 79.473078° W, ca. 1114 m). The dry pitfall trap was a 964-cm³ plastic drink cup set flush in the ground. The vegetation in this acidic (pH range: 3.3-5.5) shrub-bog was dominated by groundberry (*Rubus* spp.), black chokeberry (*Pyrus melanocarpa*), blueberry (*Vaccinium* spp.), *Polytrichum* moss, and *Sphagnum* moss.

The specimen weighed 11.0 g, and was identified as a non-lactating female. She had a partial white band, ca. 8 x 15 mm, on the right side, about halfway between the forelegs and hindlegs (Fig. 1). It was photographed and released near the capture point. This specimen was one of 30 northern short-tailed shrews captured in five nights of trapping at this site (1875 trap-nights) using pitfalls, Sherman live traps, and Museum Special snap-traps. We captured 198 northern short-tailed shrews at 19 additional wetland sites in West Virginia and western Maryland in 2001; all exhibited normal pelage coloration.

Through inquiry to regional natural history museums, we note that our capture is the only the second recorded pelage anomaly for northern short-tailed shrews in West Virginia. Another specimen with several white spots was captured in 1985 in Pocahontas County, in the Cranberry Back Country of the Monongahela National Forest (S. McLaren, pers. comm.).

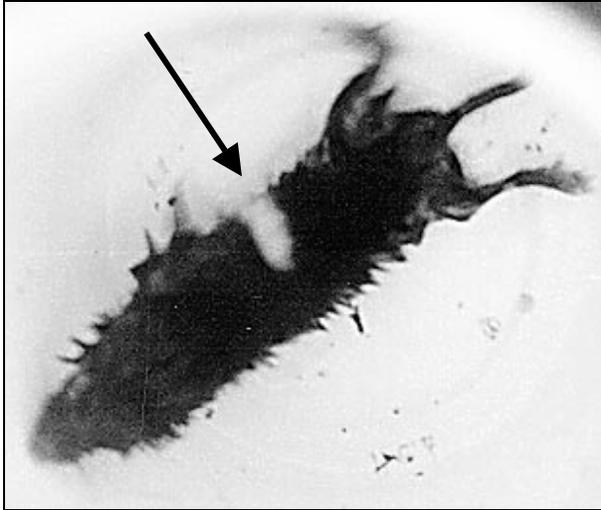


Fig. 1. Live northern short-tailed shrew (*Blarina brevicauda*) from West Virginia with a white pelage anomaly (arrow).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank S. McLaren (Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Pittsburgh, PA), J. Merritt (Powdermill Biological Station, Rector, PA), N. Castleberry (West Virginia University), M.E. Hight (Marshall University), and E. McGhee (Georgia Museum of Natural History) for checking the collections of their respective institutions for *B. brevicauda* with abnormal pelage

conditions. Additionally, we thank S. Dumpert, R. Kotecki, and H. Hadley for assistance in the field.

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