

White-belted Coloration in a Masked Shrew, *Sorex cinereus*, from Massachusetts

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A Masked Shrew (*Sorex cinereus*) with white-belted coloration pattern was captured in a mixed deciduous-coniferous forest in central Massachusetts. Only one other published record of this pelage condition in *S. cinereus* was found in an intensive search of the literature and no similarly colored specimens were found in collections of several national or regional museums.

Key Words: Masked Shrew, *Sorex cinereus*, belted coloration, Massachusetts.

A specimen of the Masked Shrew (*Sorex cinereus*) with white-belted coloration was captured by the authors in a pitfall trap on 8 July 1994 in the town of New Salem, Franklin County, in central Massachusetts (42°26'50.2" N; 72°22'14.4" W). The study site was forested (53% pine/hemlock, 47% maple/oak) and located adjacent to a temporary pond.

Prior to the capture of this specimen, 81 (in 1992), 35 (1993) and 132 (1994) *S. cinereus* with normal coloration had been captured at this study site. The belted specimen was a sexually immature female with a total length of 99 mm and a mass of 3.8 g. Age was estimated to be 18–24 wks based on tooth wear and cranial characteristics as described by Rudd (1955).

The belted coloration of this specimen occurred as a transverse white band that completely encircled the animal (Figure 1). The belt began anterior to the middle of the body and included the ventral side of the forelimbs. The width of the belt, measured on the prepared skin, ranged from 10 mm to 13 mm dorsally and was 20 mm wide ventrally. The variation in

the ventral-posterior margin of the belt seen in Figure 1 is an artifact of preparation. The posterior 31 mm of the tail was also white.

Belted coloration is described as a fairly regular type of white-spotting in rodents and ungulates (Searle 1968). In our review of the literature, we found one record of belted coloration in *S. cinereus* (Pearce 1934). The occurrence of belted coloration is not mentioned in reviews of shrew pelage coloration (Jackson 1928; Elder 1960; Fons et al. 1983; Churchfield 1990).

No specimens of *S. cinereus* with belted coloration are housed in the mammal collections of the University of Massachusetts Museum of Zoology; Vertebrate Museum, Shippensburg University; Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University; Carnegie Museum of Natural History; Museum of Natural History, University of Kansas; American Museum of Natural History; National Museum of Natural History; Royal Ontario Museum; or the Canadian Museum of Nature. This specimen (UMMZ 4163) will be retained in the mammal collection of the University of Massachusetts.

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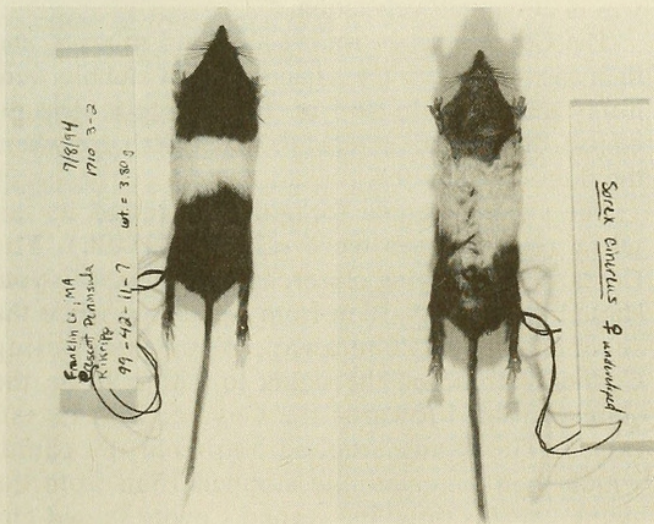


FIGURE 1. Dorsal (left) and ventral (right) views of *Sorex cinereus* with belted pelage coloration from Franklin County, Massachusetts.

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A Striped Skunk, *Mephitis mephitis*, Repels Two Coyotes, *Canis latrans*, without Scenting

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Walton, Lyle R., and Serge Larivière. 1994. A Striped Skunk, *Mephitis mephitis*, repels two Coyotes, *Canis latrans*, without scenting. *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 108(4): 492–493.

An encounter between a female Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) and two Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) is reported. Display behavior by the Skunk was sufficient to resolve the encounter without any physical contact or scenting.

Key Words: Striped Skunk, *Mephitis mephitis*, Coyote, *Canis latrans*, predation, behavior.

Striped Skunks (*Mephitis mephitis*) are occasionally preyed upon by Great Horned Owls (*Bubo virginianus*) (Wilkinson 1913), Badgers, *Taxidea taxus* (Sargeant et al. 1982), Coyotes (*Canis latrans*; Young and Jackson 1951), and Domestic Dogs (*Canis familiaris*; Verts 1967). However, the chemical defense of the Striped Skunk is believed to repel most potential predators. Scenting can only occur a limited number of times (Verts 1967), and therefore is believed to be used only as a last resort (Verts 1967). Displays of defensive postures by Striped Skunks, combined with conspicuous coloration facilitates recognition by predators (Verts 1967; Endler 1991), hence decreasing the need to spray during encounters.

We report an instance during which a Striped Skunk successfully repelled two Coyotes without any physical contacts or scenting. The subsequent movements of both Coyotes and Striped Skunk were observed using night-vision goggles (AN-PVS 5, Bill's Electronics Ltd., Mildmay, Ontario). Observations were further enhanced by a full moon and a clear sky.

On the night of 25 May 1994, while radio-tracking a female Striped Skunk along a prairie creek drainage in central Saskatchewan (52°N, 107°W), LRW noticed two Coyotes on the opposite side of the creek, 30 m away (23:32h). At this time, the skunk was for-

aging in tall (>1 m) vegetation, 30 m from the observer, and approximately 65 m from the Coyotes.

The pair of Coyotes followed the creek for 150 m, moving away from the observer. The canids then crossed the 2-m wide creek and changed direction, coming back towards both skunk and observer. At this time, L.R.W. sat down; motionless, in 50-cm tall vegetation, and 35 m behind the skunk. The skunk was in 20-cm tall vegetation.

The Coyotes came trotting abreast 5 m apart, and their movements in the adjacent wheat stubble were noisy and audible ≤65 m. Following a straight course, the Coyotes entered the creek drainage where the skunk was located.

The skunk stopped foraging and raised its tail when the Coyotes were <25 m (23:40h). The Coyotes kept coming closer, and the closest Coyote started to circle 15–20 m from the skunk, while the second stopped 20 m away. When the circling Coyote approached the skunk to within 10 m, the skunk charged towards the Coyote, with its tail raised. The skunk stopped 5 m from the canid, which then retreated and stopped 15 m from the skunk. At this time, the second Coyote started circling the skunk. As the Coyote approached to within 8 m, the skunk charged 5 m towards this second Coyote, now 3 m away. The second Coyote retreat-



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