

HIGHLIGHTS

Cultural landscape recognized as important wildlife habitat at Eisenhower National Historic Site

At Eisenhower National Historic Site (NHS) in Pennsylvania, amidst the layers of cultural fabric dating from prehistoric times when Native Americans lived there, through Confederate Civil War occupation, and up to modern times where President Dwight D. Eisenhower's home is commemorated, there lives an inconspicuous critter commonly known as the least shrew (*Cryptotis parva*). Classified as an insectivore, the fine velvety-furred shrew inhabits meadows, old fields, and moist woodlands. The least shrew is listed in Pennsylvania as an endangered mammal whose occurrence has been noted only three times in the state since 1962. Bone fragments detected in barn-owl pellets were the first indicators alerting local mammalogists to the shrew's presence in the park. Through subsequent inventories, the shrew was discovered at three locations in Eisenhower NHS. As a result of the shrew's presence, the mammal technical committee of the Pennsylvania Biological Survey has designated the park as an "Important Mammals Area." This designation helps focus voluntary

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At Eisenhower National Historic Site, agricultural practices are not intensive and allow small mammals like the least shrew to survive by moving to undisturbed fields each season. COURTESY OF JIM HART

efforts on identifying sites critical to wild mammals, rare or common, and to draw attention to these sites as tools for teaching people about the mammals' habitat needs.

Once widely distributed throughout the state, least shrews seem to have undergone a precipitous decline over the last 50 years. The reasons for this are unknown, but the decline may be a result of secondary forest growth following farm abandonment combined with a change in farming practices from small-patch rotational agriculture to large-scale, nonrotational crop monocultures. Agricultural practices at Eisenhower NHS preserve the farming and cattle operations of Eisenhower's time; however, they are not intensive and allow small mammals like the least shrew to survive by moving to undisturbed fields each season. This may be the reason the least shrew populations at Eisenhower NHS have had more success than in other areas across the state. The National Park Service is continuing to study Eisenhower NHS and the adjacent Gettysburg National Military Park for the presence of the least shrew and other species of concern.

In addition, part of Eisenhower NHS has been identified by the Pennsylvania Audubon Society as an "Important Bird Area" (southern Adams County grasslands) because it provides critical habitat to bird species of special concern. Species such as the state-endangered loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) have been observed using the corridor as a nesting area. And other grassland species not listed but infrequently seen, such as the grasshopper sparrow (*Ammodramus saviarum*) and common bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*), have been observed by park staff yearly since 1999.

Eisenhower NHS is one example of how a park originally established for its cultural significance has also perpetuated a piece of our natural history. As landscapes across our nation continue to change, even small parks offer habitat where species, common or rare, can persist.

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