



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE RELEASES TEXAS, NEW MEXICO PESTICIDE STUDY

The Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has released results of a study on levels of pesticides (DDT and DDE) in fish and wildlife from the Rio Grande and Pecos River drainages in Texas and New Mexico.

The study found an increase in DDE (the principal breakdown product of DDT) in birds, lizards, and bats above levels that are found elsewhere in the United States. Fish samples did not show a similar increase, although several samples from the Rio Grande did show some elevation. The data suggest that the elevated pesticide levels result from localized exposure in the immediate vicinity of the study area.

Michael Spear, regional director of the Fish and Wildlife Service for the Southwest, said agency biologists have not been able to identify the specific source of the contamination.

The \$200,000 study was initiated in November 1982 after elevated pesticide levels were noted in starlings from the Roswell, New Mexico, National Contaminant Biomonitoring Station. The Fish and Wildlife Service established 400 of these stations nationwide in 1964 to monitor the presence and trends of chemicals that can have harmful effects on fish and wildlife.

The study's objectives were to determine the levels of DDT and its derivatives in fish and wildlife and to identify the source of the contamination. Field work for the study was completed in August 1983 and included three major areas: the Rio Grande from Los Lunas, New Mexico to El Paso, Texas; the Pecos River from Ft. Sumner, New Mexico, to Pecos, Texas; and the Trans Pecos region consisting of locations near Van Horn, Presidio, Balmorhea, and Dell City, Texas. The study analyzed pesticide levels in waterfowl, western kingbirds, house sparrows, black-crowned night herons, whiptail lizards, free-tailed bats, common carp, river carpsucker, and crayfish. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and the National Park Service assisted in the study.

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The data collected in the study suggest that there is a major source of DDE contamination to wildlife in the Rio Grande and Pecos River drainages, according to the report. Kingbirds had significantly higher levels after 2 months than when they arrived from Latin America; some resident, nonmigratory house sparrows and lizards had elevated DDE levels; young bats at Carlsbad Caverns had DDE levels 13 times higher than bats from a relatively clean area in Texas; and DDE residues in black-crowned night heron eggs were significantly higher at two sites on the Pecos River in New Mexico than at a control site in Texas. Since most other parts of the nation have shown significant declines in DDE residues according to data from the National Contaminant Biomonitoring Program, recent local use of DDT or DDE-containing products is suggested. Very little DDT was detected in the samples.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has provided the study results to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and to New Mexico and Texas departments of agriculture, which regulate and enforce the use of pesticides and other chemicals in the environment.

Fish and Wildlife Service officials emphasized that DDT is not now a major threat to wildlife nationwide. Since 1972 when the pesticide's use was banned in the United States, a number of species affected by the chemical have begun to recover.