SKUNK MORTALITY ON THE HIGHWAY

DEAD animals on the highway have brought to the attention of the naturalist, amateur and professional, the tremendous toll of wild life taken by motor vehicles.

Because of the seemingly unusual abundance of freshly killed skunks, *Mephitis mephitis,* on the highways recently, tabulations were made on three rides of approximately 200 miles each. These counts, the dates and the routes are given in Table 1 for whatever interest or value they may have for readers of SCIENCE.

All rides and observations were made in daylight; all the dead animals observed were readily identified, not having been crushed or otherwise sufficiently mutilated to destroy outstanding characteristics.

TABLE 1

Dead skunks	Date	Route
6	9/21/36	Belvidere, N. J., to Washington, D. C., *via* Allentown, Pottstown and Oxford, Pa., and Baltimore, Md.
11	9/22/36	Washington, D. C., to Parsons, W. Va., *via* Winchester, Va., Romney, W. Va., and Redhouse, Md.
5	9/24/36	Bangor, Pa., to Washington, D. C., *via* Allentown, Harrisburg and Gettysburg, Pa., and Frederick, Md.

As impressive was the complete absence of other dead animals.

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THE McDONALD OBSERVATORY

THE construction of the 82-inch reflector of the McDonald Observatory of the University of Texas is nearing completion. The mounting is installed in the dome on top of Mount Locke, near Fort Davis, Texas, and the large mirror is now being parabolized by Mr. C. A. R. Lundin in the optical shops of the Warner and Swasey Company in Cleveland. The mounting, designed by Mr. E. P. Burrell, director of engineering of the Warner and Swasey Company, meets all specifications. The telescope drive was built under Mr. Burrell's supervision by the General Electric Company and resembles the Hulburt-McMath drive developed at the Lake Angelus station of the University of Michigan.

Under the supervision of Dr. G. W. Moffitt, several accessory instruments have been built in the shops of the Yerkes Observatory, mostly by Mr. C. Ridell and Mr. H. Foote. A Cassegrain spectrograph with quartz and glass optics, using a 500 millimeter U.V. camera and two Schmidt cameras of 180 millimeters and 90 millimeters foci, is nearly completed. Practically all the lenses, including those for a slitless spectrograph as well as a large zero-corrector, were computed by Dr. F. E. Ross. To Dr. Ross's skill as an optical designer, the success of these instruments will, in no small measure, be due.

The construction of offices in the lower part of the dome, residences for the staff, a power plant and other subsidiary buildings, under the supervision of Mr. W. W. Dornberger, architect of the University of Texas, will be completed before the end of this year. The continued active interest on the part of the authorities of the University of Texas, principally of President H. Y. Benedict and of Mr. J. H. L. Stark, chairman of the Board of Regents, has made it possible to complete these building operations in time for the rigorous tests which will be made after the mirrors have been shipped to Mount Locke.

The University of Chicago, cooperating in this project with the University of Texas, has for more than two years maintained a small staff of workers on Mount Locke. Dr. C. T. Elvey, assistant professor of astrophysics in the University of Chicago, and Dr. F. E. Roach have made a series of photoelectric observations of the brightness of the night sky and of a number of eclipsing variables. They have also made observations of the color of sunlight seen through a clear, a dusty and a foggy atmosphere. The discovery of a surprisingly large excess of diffuse light in low galactic latitudes, after full account has been taken of the direct light of unresolved faint stars in the Milky Way, is one of the outstanding results of this work. It suggests the existence of extended nebulous regions over large parts of the galactic zone, similar perhaps to the "luminous films" found by Barnard on many of his photographs. Other results, by Struve, Elvey and Roach, were obtained with a new f/2 Schmidt camera. They include the determination of the colors of reflection nebulae and the detection of radial polarization in one of the nebulae.

The scientific staff of the McDonald Observatory has now been completed by the University of Chicago. Dr. Carl K. Seyfert, of the Harvard Observatory, and Dr. Paul Rudnick, of the University of Chicago, have been appointed astronomers. Mrs. Jessie Rudnick, M.S. in astronomy, will serve as part-time assistant. Dr. Elvey will continue to supervise the activities of the observatory during the absence of the director.

In order to make the most efficient use of the equipment on Mount Locke, and in accordance with the spirit of the agreement between the University of