

Fact Sheet

Pacific Pocket Mouse

Perognathus longimembris pacificus



History and Distribution

The Pacific pocket mouse is an endangered mammal, which is currently protected by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. At one time the species inhabited the southern California coast from Marina del Rey to the northern regions of Baja, California. As agriculture, recreation, and development replaced the coastal sage scrub plant community, populations of Pacific pocket mice disappeared. The animal was thought to be extinct until rediscovered in 1993. Protected populations of Pacific pocket mice are currently living at Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base and at Dana Point Preserve in Dana Point California. There is an ongoing conservation effort to breed pocket mice in captivity with plans to release them into protected habitats.

Description

The Pacific pocket mouse is a rodent belonging to the family Heteromyidae, which includes pocket kangaroo rats, kangaroo mice, and pocket mice. Unique to all members of the family are external, fur-lined cheek pouches, which are used to transport their cache of seeds back to their burrow.

Weighing as little as .25 oz. and a length of only 4 to 5 inches from head to tail, it is one of the smallest animals in the rodent family. It is covered in silky, brown fur with a cream colored underside. It is easily camouflaged in the sandy soil in which it lives.

Habitat and Diet

Pacific pocket mice are known to live in sandy coastal soil and they survive primarily on annual grass stems and seeds. They may also eat forbs and small insects. The plant community supporting this rodent is coastal sage scrub, coastal strand, coastal dune, and river alluvium. They are nocturnal animals and forage at night using their keen sense of smell to help them locate food sources. They also have excellent

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hearing that alerts them to flying and crawling predators. Predators include snakes, owls, weasels, skunks, fox and coyote.

The Pacific pocket mouse makes its home in an underground burrow, which provides warmth in the winter and cool comfort in the summer. It hibernates from November to February. During times of environmental stress it may become torpid, which slows the animal's metabolism, thus conserving its energy.

Reproduction

Females have been observed pregnant from April through June. The gestation period is 22-23 days. Litters are small with only two to eight pups. It is possible for some females to produce two litters in one year. Newborn pups are tiny - usually less than one inch long and .035 oz. For thirty days the mother nurses the pups.

Ecological Importance

Like other pocket mice and rodents, it is helpful to nature. It digs up the soil causing the sand to become aerated and more nutritious for plants. Its feces fertilizes the soil. Pocket mice also drop seeds while foraging, which causes new plants to grow.

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