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- ◆ **Order:** Rodentia (Rodents)
 - ◆ **Family:** Heteromyidae (Pocket Mice, Kangaroo Rats, Kangaroo Mice)
 - [Dipodomys agilis](#) (Agile Kangaroo Rat)
 - [Dipodomys californicus](#) (California Kangaroo Rat)
 - [Dipodomys compactus](#) (Gulf Coast Kangaroo Rat)
 - [Dipodomys deserti](#) (Desert Kangaroo Rat)
 - [Dipodomys elator](#) (Texas Kangaroo Rat)
 - [Dipodomys gravipes](#) (San Quintin Kangaroo Rat)
 - [Dipodomys heermanni](#) (Heermann's Kangaroo Rat)
 - [Dipodomys ingens](#) (Giant Kangaroo Rat)
 - [Dipodomys merriami](#) (Merriam's Kangaroo Rat)
 - [Dipodomys microps](#) (Chisel-toothed Kangaroo Rat)
 - [Dipodomys nelsoni](#) (Nelson's Kangaroo Rat)
 - [Dipodomys nitratoides](#) (San Joaquin Valley Kangaroo Rat)
 - [Dipodomys ordii](#) (Ord's Kangaroo Rat)
 - [Dipodomys panamintinus](#) (Panamint Kangaroo Rat)
 - [Dipodomys phillipsii](#) (Phillips's Kangaroo Rat)
 - [Dipodomys simulans](#) (Dulzura Kangaroo Rat)
 - [Dipodomys spectabilis](#) (Banner-tailed Kangaroo Rat)
 - [Dipodomys stephensi](#) (Stephens' Kangaroo Rat)
 - [Dipodomys venustus](#) (Narrow-faced Kangaroo Rat)

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FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

Agile Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys agilis*)

ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Heteromyidae

Conservation Status: Least Concern.

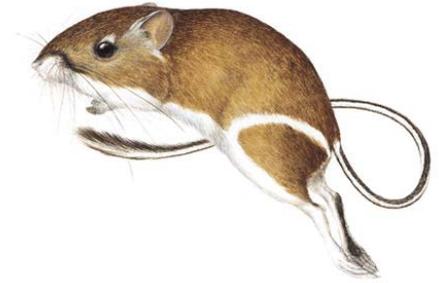
Agile Kangaroo Rats are excellent swimmers. They can run on all four feet as well as hop on their large hind feet, and if they are fleeing a predator, can make sharp turns. They are not strong diggers, so they commonly dig their burrows in loose, sandy soil. Their burrows can be extensive: one had six branches, each ending in a chamber. One chamber held a nest made of the hulls of grass seeds, and the other chambers served for food storage. The Kangaroo Rat had carried acorns, grass seeds, and flower parts to the burrow in its external, fur-lined cheek pouches, stored these items, and plugged the entrance to most of the chambers with soil.

Also known as:
Pacific Kangaroo Rat, Nimble Kangaroo Rat

Sexual Dimorphism:
Males are larger than females.

Length:
Average: 302 mm males; 295 mm females
Range: 285-320 mm males; 277-305 mm females

Weight:
Average: 72 g males; 66 g females
Range: 66-72 g males; 63-78 g females



Credit: painting by Elizabeth McClelland from Kays and Wilson's Mammals of North America, © Princeton University Press (2002)



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DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

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California Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys californicus*)

ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Heteromyidae

Conservation Status: Least Concern.

California Kangaroo Rats require open areas away from the humidity of the coast in northern California and southern Oregon. They seem to need well-drained soil, and after a rain can be seen pushing mud out of their burrows. Cold, wet winter weather can be a cause of mortality. California Kangaroo Rats eat seeds, berries, green vegetation, and small tubers, and store food in very small and scattered caches. This Kangaroo Rat has a broad face and dark fur, and its tail has a distinct white tuft on the end.

Sexual Dimorphism:

Males are larger than females.

Length:

Average: 307.3 mm males; 304.8 mm females

Range: 260-340 mm

Weight:

Range: 60-85 g



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FIELD NOTES

DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

Gulf Coast Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys compactus*)

ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Heteromyidae

Conservation Status: Least Concern.

Gulf Coast Kangaroo Rats are confined to barrier islands of northeastern Mexico and southern Texas and the nearby Texas mainland. No fossils of this species have been found, but because of features of its teeth and skull, scientists think it is the most primitive living species of kangaroo rat. It has five toes on each hind foot, unlike most kangaroo rats, which have four. Seeds are its main food, although it also eats insects. Unlike Ord's Kangaroo Rat, which shares part of its range, it can take advantage of areas that have been cleared for farming and ranching. It must have soft soil to dig its burrows, however, whereas Ord's Kangaroo Rat usually lives where the soil is hard-packed and vegetation is thick.

Sexual Dimorphism:
Males are larger than females.

Length:
Average: 228.1 mm males; 227.6 mm females
Range: 203-255 mm males; 210-266 mm females

Weight:
Average: 53 g males; 45 g females
Range: 46-60 g males; 44-46 g females



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FIELD NOTES

DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

Desert Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys deserti*)

ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Heteromyidae

Conservation Status: Least Concern.

Desert Kangaroo Rats live in sand dunes in very hot, dry deserts of the southwestern United States, even below sea level in Death Valley, California. They need deep sand for their burrows, and will not dig them in rapidly shifting sand. Only one Kangaroo Rat lives in each burrow, except for a mother with her young. Desert Kangaroo Rats leave their burrows at night to forage for seeds and other plant food to eat, but they are also active by day, digging new tunnels. The underground network of tunnels includes a grass-lined nest chamber and storerooms for food the Kangaroo Rat carries home in its fur-lined cheek pouches. Desert Kangaroo Rats communicate by drumming their feet on the ground, tooth-chattering, and with squeals, grunts, and growling sounds.

Sexual Dimorphism:
Males are larger than females.

Length:
Average: 342 mm males; 331 mm females

Weight:
Range: 91-148 g males; 83-141 g females



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FIELD NOTES

DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

Texas Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys elator*)

ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Heteromyidae

Conservation Status: Vulnerable.

Texas Kangaroo Rats live in only a few counties of north-central Texas, although the species was once also present in Oklahoma. They prefer to live where soils have a high percentage of clay. They are most active on moonless nights, when the dark gives them some protection from predators hunting by moonlight. Those predators include owls, coyotes, bobcats, and domestic cats. Texas Kangaroo Rats have litters of 2-4 young. Most litters are born in late spring and summer, and the young develop rapidly; breeding juveniles have been seen in July and September.

Also known as:
Loring's Kangaroo Rat

Sexual Dimorphism:
Males are larger than females.

Length:
Average: 302.5 mm
Range: 260-345 mm

Weight:
Range: 65-90 g



Credit: painting by Elizabeth McClelland from Kays and Wilson's Mammals of North America, © Princeton University Press (2002)



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DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

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San Quintin Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys gravipes*)

ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Heteromyidae

Conservation Status: Critically Endangered. The population is restricted to a small area of coastal strip and is possibly extinct.

As the land where it lives has been turned into farmland, the San Quintin Kangaroo Rat has all but disappeared from its range on the Pacific coast of Baja California. Where it can, this relatively large kangaroo rat occupies coastal scrub and desert scrub habitat. It digs burrow systems and uses the burrows to rest during the day and to store food. In the northern part of its range, burrows have been found with about four openings, containing three or more nests. Farther south, they usually have one or two entrances and one or two nests. Young have been seen almost year-round, with apparent birth peaks in winter and spring. As with all kangaroo rats, the fur of juveniles is softer and grayer in color than that of adult animals. Adult San Quintin Kangaroo Rats have dark tufts at the ends of their tails and extra-large hind feet.

Length:

Range: Total Length: males: 299-312; females 296-310mm; Tail: males: 168-180mm; females, 170-180 mm

Weight:

Average: Males 81.3 to 90.6; females: 78.9 to 85.1 (2 different locations)



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FIELD NOTES

DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

Heermann's Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys heermanni*)

ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Heteromyidae

Conservation Status: Least Concern.

Also known as the Morro Bay Kangaroo Rat and the Tulare Kangaroo Rat, Heermann's Kangaroo Rats live in many different kinds of habitats in southern California. Although they often take advantage of tunnels dug by ground squirrels, they also dig their own. Burrows can be more than 10 m long and rather labyrinthine, with loops and side branches. Most have areas for dust-bathing nearby, which the animals often use after foraging. An individual may spend only one hour in 24 outside its burrow. These Kangaroo Rats breed from February to October and have litters of 2 or 3 young. They are naked at birth. Fine hairs start to appear when they are three days old, and their eyes open in about two weeks. Weaning begins soon after, and when they are about 40 days old they learn to dig, excavating small pits with their forefeet. When they are 20 weeks old they are full grown, with an adult's coat of fur.

Also known as:
Morro Bay Kangaroo Rat, Tulare Kangaroo Rat

Sexual Dimorphism:
Males are larger than females.

Length:
Average: 300.4 mm males; 295.1 mm females
Range: 250-313 mm

Weight:
Range: 70-80 g



Dipodomys heermanni - dusky-crested tail
Credit: painting by Elizabeth McClelland from *Kays and Wilson's Mammals of North America*, © Princeton University Press (2002)



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DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

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Giant Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys ingens*)

ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Heteromyidae

Conservation Status: Endangered.

Although large (for a kangaroo rat) and assertive, the Giant Kangaroo Rat occupies a relatively small home range (averaging 0.04 hectares). It keeps quite busy and is remarkably manipulative of this territory, however, storing seeds both above and belowground, clearing the ground of all plant remains after it has harvested seeds, and frequently reshaping its burrows. It destroys shrubs that sprout within its territory, and so has a significant impact on the plant communities where it lives out a solitary life.

Sexual Dimorphism:
Males are larger than females.

Length:
Average: 333.2 mm males; 328.9 mm females

Weight:
Average: 138 g males; 132 g females
Range: 93-180 g males; 101-195 g females



Credit: painting by Elizabeth McClelland from Kays and Wilson's Mammals of North America, © Princeton University Press (2002)



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DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

Merriam's Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys merriami*)

ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Heteromyidae

Conservation Status: Least Concern.

Like all members of the family Heteromyidae, Merriam's Kangaroo Rat is found only in the New World. Many kangaroo rats have rather specific habitat preferences, but Merriam's Kangaroo Rat is not one of these. It can inhabit arid regions where the ground is predominantly rocks, gravel, sand, or clay. Like other kangaroo rats (and kangaroo mice), it specializes in bipedal locomotion, which means that it usually moves around by hopping on two feet, like a chubby little kangaroo. The hindquarters of kangaroo rats and mice are strong and well developed to support this method of locomotion. Some kangaroo rats can leap 2 m (more than 6 feet) at a single bound.

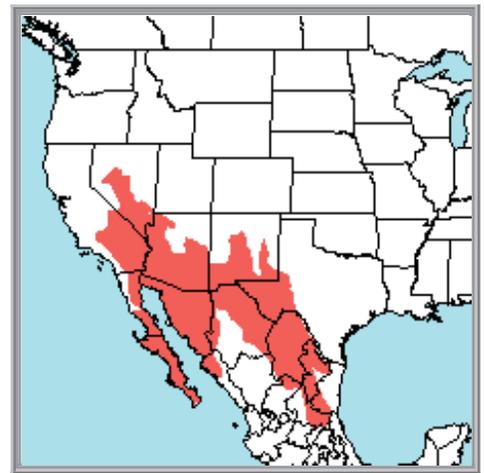
Sexual Dimorphism:
Males are larger than females.

Length:
Average: 247 mm
Range: 195-282 mm

Weight:
Range: 33.2-53.1 g



Credit: painting by Elizabeth McClelland from Kays and Wilson's Mammals of North America, © Princeton University Press (2002)



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FIELD NOTES

DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

Chisel-toothed Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys microps*)

ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Heteromyidae

Conservation Status: Least Concern.

The Chisel-toothed Kangaroo Rat has chisel-shaped lower incisors, with which it strips the epidermis from the leaves of desert shadscale or saltbush, thereby reaching the palatable and water-rich interior of the leaf. This Kangaroo Rat eats more leaves than seeds, which is unusual for the genus. Its ability to subsist on perennial shrubs gives it an advantage when the climate does not support the growth of herbaceous vegetation. The species is common across the Great Basin of the western United States, and is also known as the Great Basin Kangaroo Rat.

Also known as:

Great Basin Kangaroo Rat, Small-faced Kangaroo Rat, Inyo Pocket Rat

Sexual Dimorphism:

Males are larger than females.

Length:

Average: 270 mm
Range: 245-295 mm

Weight:

Average: 55 g
Range: 40-70 g



Credit: painting by Elizabeth McClelland from Kays and Wilson's Mammals of North America, © Princeton University Press (2002)



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FIELD NOTES

DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

Nelson's Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys nelsoni*)

ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Heteromyidae

Conservation Status: Least Concern.

Scattered, low, dome-shaped mounds are a clue to the presence of Nelson's Kangaroo Rats. The mounds they construct are often honeycombed with tunnels. When a scientist stepped on one of the tunnels, flattening it, the rats repaired it overnight. Nelson's are among the largest kangaroo rats, and males are larger and heavier than females, and have longer tails. They are found in grassy plains and desert mountains, and eat cactus and other desert plants. Usually just two kangaroo rats live in each burrow.

Length:

Average: Total Length: 308.1 mm; Tail: 180.1 mm

Weight:

Average: 86.5 g
Range: 78-102 g



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DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

San Joaquin Valley Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys nitratoides*)

ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Heteromyidae

Conservation Status: Vulnerable.

As might be expected from its name, the San Joaquin Valley Kangaroo Rat inhabits south-central California. The species is at risk because agriculture takes ever-increasing bits of its habitat. It cannot live in cultivated areas, and particularly dislikes the near-proximity of irrigation ditches. It prefers arid, alkaline plains with sparse vegetation, where it consumes seeds of annuals and shrubs, including saltbush. These small kangaroo rats are nocturnal and do not hibernate. Adults are very aggressive toward each other except for male-female interactions during the breeding season. Females usually have litters of two. The young are well-developed at birth. They mother crouches over them, keeping them warm but not crushing them, while they nurse. Young siblings interact and groom each other. They are weaned when they are about three weeks old and are soon independent, digging their own burrows and keeping all others of their kind out.

Also known as:
San Joaquin Kangaroo Rat, Fresno Kangaroo Rat

Sexual Dimorphism:
Males are larger than females.

Length:
Average: 240 mm males; 235 mm females
Range: 215-253 mm males; 211-250 mm females

Weight:
Average: 44 g
Range: 40-53 g



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DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

Ord's Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys ordii*)

ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Heteromyidae

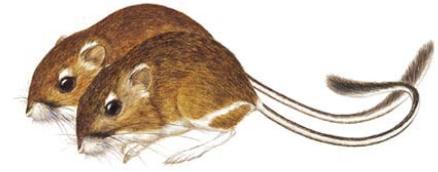
Conservation Status: Least Concern.

By occupying the short grass prairie of the Great Plains, and a variety of habitats where there are fine-textured, sandy soils, Ord's Kangaroo Rat has managed a truly enormous geographic distribution. The varied habitats that it occupies include semi-arid grasslands, mixed-grasslands, and scrublands. This ecological variation, together with the considerable geographic range, has contributed to the fact that more than 30 subspecies have been named. Ord's Kangaroo Rats are most active on cloudy nights. They usually stay in their burrows in bad weather and especially on clear, moonlit nights when owls can spot them most easily. Other predators include foxes, coyotes, badgers, and long-tailed weasels.

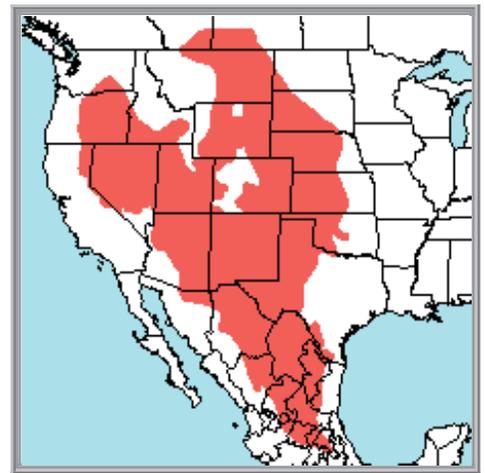
Sexual Dimorphism:
Males are larger than females.

Length:
Average: 243 mm males; 242 mm females
Range: 210-365 mm males; 208-360 mm females

Weight:
Average: 52 g



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FIELD NOTES

DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

Panamint Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys panamintinus*)

ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Heteromyidae

Conservation Status: Least Concern.

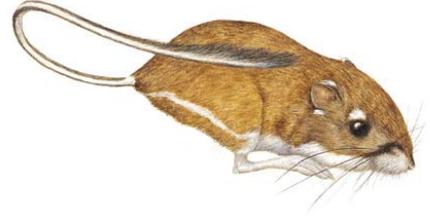
The Panamint Kangaroo Rat lives where vegetation includes creosote bush, cactus, yucca, juniper trees, and Joshua trees. A seed eater, this Kangaroo Rat makes particularly efficient use of its external cheek pouches, as it removes the hulls of seeds before placing them there, and therefore is able to carry more seeds per trip. It holds and manipulates seeds and other food items in its front paws, near its chest and out of eye range, before stuffing them into its cheek pouches. It does not seem to sniff the food items, relying only on its sense of touch to choose what to eat and what not to eat. Individuals live alone, and two will fight very aggressively if placed together, sometimes inflicting mortal wounds.

Also known as:
Mohave Kangaroo Rat

Sexual Dimorphism:
Males are larger than females.

Length:
Average: 292 mm males; 288 mm females

Weight:
Average: 72 g



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FIELD NOTES

DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

Phillips's Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys phillipsii*)

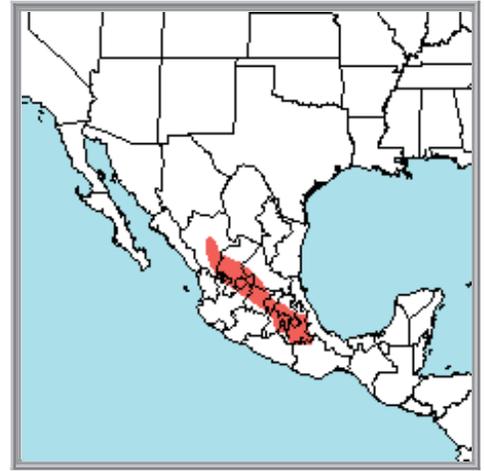
ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Heteromyidae

Conservation Status: Least Concern.

In 1841, the British naturalist who scientifically described this animal named the genus *Dipodomys*, from Greek words meaning "two-footed mouse," because of its hopping gait. The common name, kangaroo rat, also refers to the way these rodents bound along, like miniature kangaroos. Phillips's Kangaroo Rats are moderate in size for the genus, with relatively long tails. Males and females are about the same size. Individuals in the southern part of the range are smaller and paler in color. In most places, they are found on sandy soil where short grass, cactus, or low thornbrush grow. Their burrows are about a foot underground. Some have only one entrance, but some have a branching tunnel that lets the kangaroo rat escape if it is disturbed. Burrows have been found containing leaves, and kangaroo rats have been caught with their cheek pouches stuffed with seeds and leaves. Not a lot is known about reproduction in Phillips's Kangaroo Rat, but juveniles have been seen just about year-round, and females have been found carrying two and three embryos.

Length:

Range: Total Length: 244.3-279.7 (15 samples); Tail: 155.0-176.7 (15 samples)



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FIELD NOTES

DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

Dulzura Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys simulans*)

ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Heteromyidae

Conservation Status: Least Concern.

The Dulzura Kangaroo Rat is an excellent swimmer; its long hind feet are as well adapted for swimming as for hopping. On land, it usually makes short hops on its hind feet, but can hurry along using all four feet. It is the most common kangaroo rat of California's southern coast. A seed eater, or granivore, this rodent also consumes green vegetation and insects. It lives mostly on slopes, washes, and areas of open chaparral, and digs its burrows in gravelly or sandy soils. The average burrow has seven side branches and two areas for caching food. Individuals in the northern part of the range are smaller and make more complex burrows than those made by the larger individuals in the south. Soils in the north, where it is cooler and moister, are easier to dig in than soils in the south.

Also known as:

San Borja Kangaroo Rat, Santa Catarina Kangaroo Rat, Cebezon Kangaroo Rat

Sexual Dimorphism:

Males are larger than females.

Length:

Average: 282 mm males; 282 mm females
Range: 277-302 mm males; 273-291 mm females

Weight:

Average: 59 g males; 56 g females
Range: 58-70 g males; 55-67 g females



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FIELD NOTES

DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

Banner-tailed Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys spectabilis*)

ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Heteromyidae

Conservation Status: Near Threatened.

The Banner-tailed Kangaroo Rat confines its activities to small areas near the large earthen mounds that contain its complex burrow systems. Usually gentle and timid, this Kangaroo Rat will fight furiously to defend its territory from invasion by other Banner-tailed Kangaroo Rats. Foot-drumming on top of the mounds is used as a warning signal. Like other kangaroo rats, it sandbathes, both to clean its fur and to scent-mark its territory. The white tip on the end of its long tail waves as the animal moves around, giving this Kangaroo Rat both its common name, Banner-tailed, and its Latin scientific name, "spectabilis," which means visible, worth seeing, notable, admirable, or remarkable.

Sexual Dimorphism:
Males are larger than females.

Length:
Average: 342 mm males; 338 mm females
Range: 315-349 mm males; 310-345 mm females

Weight:
Average: 126 g males; 120 g females
Range: 100-132 g males; 98-130 g females



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FIELD NOTES

DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

Stephens' Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys stephensi*)

ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Heteromyidae

Conservation Status: Endangered.

Stephens' Kangaroo Rat is endangered, chiefly due to habitat loss. It lives only in isolated populations in three counties of southern California. The Kangaroo Rats maintain a network of aboveground trails that follow the lines of their tunnels and connect burrow openings. Their home ranges average 570-970 square meters, but may be as large as 1,600 square meters. Living in association with this Kangaroo Rat in sparsely vegetated annual grassland and sage-scrub communities are Deermice, Agile and Dulzura's Kangaroo Rats, and Desert Woodrats. Domestic dogs and cats prey on this species, as do owls, coyotes, foxes, and snakes.

Also known as:
Bonsall Relict Kangaroo Rat

Sexual Dimorphism:
None

Length:
Average: 284 mm males; 282 mm females
Range: 280-300 mm males; 277-295 mm females

Weight:
Average: 62 g
Range: 45-73 g



Credit: painting by Elizabeth McClelland from Kays and Wilson's Mammals of North America, © Princeton University Press (2002)



Data provided by NatureServe in collaboration with Bruce Patterson, Wes Sechrest, Marcelo Tognelli, Gerardo Ceballos, The Nature Conservancy — Migratory Bird Program, Conservation International — CABS, World Wildlife Fund — US, and Environment Canada — WILDSPACE.

FIELD NOTES

DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

Narrow-faced Kangaroo Rat

(*Dipodomys venustus*)

ORDER: Rodentia

FAMILY: Heteromyidae

Conservation Status: Least Concern.

The Narrow-faced Kangaroo Rat, also known as the Santa Cruz Kangaroo Rat, occurs in central coastal California where annual rainfall is 75 cm and temperatures are moderate. It requires well-drained, deep soils and is often found on slopes where chaparral, or chaparral mixed with oak or pine, grow. This Kangaroo Rat takes advantage of abandoned farm fields, but is not found in orchards or actively cultivated areas, where plowing would destroy its burrows. Narrow-faced Kangaroo Rats make burrow networks that are simple, but that include several supplementary branches where no food is cached or nests are built. The diet is almost completely the seeds of annual plants, which are cached in summer and fall.

Also known as:

Santa Cruz Kangaroo Rat

Sexual Dimorphism:

Males are larger than females.

Length:

Average: 318 mm males; 314 mm females

Range: 295-332 mm males; 292-330 mm females

Weight:

Average: 83 g males; 82 g females

Range: 70-97 g males; 68-96 g females



Dipodomys venustus - right (*Dipodomys elephantinus* - left)

Credit: painting by Elizabeth McClelland from Kays and Wilson's *Mammals of North America*, © Princeton University Press (2002)



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