

**RIPARIAN WOODRAT
(NEOTOMA FUSCIPES RIPARIA)**

Federal/California status: Endangered/--



Description and taxonomy

The riparian or San Joaquin Valley woodrat is one of eleven described subspecies of the dusky-footed woodrat (Hooper 1938) found in forest and shrubland communities throughout much of California, the Willamette Valley of Western Oregon, and northern Baja California (Carraway and Verts 1991). Dusky-footed woodrats are medium sized rodents ranging from 200-400g. The head and body length range from 7.5 to 9 inches (193-229 mm) long with a tail length of 6.8 to 8.67 inches (173-220 mm). The body coloring is brown/grey with white/grey underside and white/dusky coloring on feet. The woodrats have a hairy brown trail usually with a lighter underside, and large ear (Burt and Gossenheider 1980).

Range/distribution

The range of the riparian woodrat is far more restricted today than it was in 1938 (Williams 1986). The only extant population that has been studied is restricted to about 100 ha (250 acres) of riparian forest on the Stanislaus River in Caswell Memorial State Park (Williams 1993).

Life history and habitat

Woodrats are, for the most part, generalist herbivores. They consume a wide variety of nuts and fruits, fungi, foliage and some forbs (Linsdale and Tevis 1951). Many species are good climbers and rock dwellers, and dusky-footed woodrats are highly arboreal (Kelly 1990). Evergreen or live oaks and other thick-leaved trees and shrubs are important habitat components for *N. fuscipes* (Kelly 1990, Williams et al. 1992). Riparian woodrats are common, however, where there are deciduous valley oaks, but few live oaks. They are most numerous where

shrub cover is dense and are least abundant in open areas. In riparian areas, highest densities of houses and woodrats are often encountered in willow thickets with an oak overstory.

Dusky-footed woodrats are well known for their large terrestrial stick houses, some of which can last for twenty or more years (Linsdale and Tevis, 1951). At Caswell Memorial State Park, riparian woodrats also make houses of sticks and other litter (Williams 1993). At the Hastings Reserve, Monterey County, dusky-footed woodrat houses range from 60 cm (2 feet) to 150 cm (5 feet) in height, and can be 120 cm (4 feet) to 240 cm (8 feet) in basal diameter. Houses typically are placed on the ground against or straddling a log or exposed roots of a standing tree, and, are often located in dense brush. Nests are also placed in the crotches and cavities of trees and in hollow logs. Sometimes arboreal nests are constructed but this behavior seems to be more common in habitat with evergreen trees such as live oak.

Photo: CSUS/ESRP

References

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