

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

**Animal Abstract**

**Element Code:** AMAEB04010

**Data Sensitivity:** No

**CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE**

**NAME:** *Sylvilagus idahoensis*  
**COMMON NAME:** Pygmy rabbit, Pigmy rabbit  
**SYNONYMS:** *Brachylagus idahoensis*; *Lepus idahoensis*  
**FAMILY:** Leporidae

**AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION:** *Lepus idahoensis* Merriam, N. Amer. Fauna, 5:76, July 30, 1891. *Sylvilagus idahoensis*, Grinnell, Dixon and Linsdale, Univ. California Publ. Zool., 35:553, October 10, 1930. *Brachylagus idahoensis*, Stanford, Journ. Mamm., 13:79, February 9, 1932; Shantz, Journ. Mamm., 28:187, June 1, 1947.

**TYPE LOCALITY:** Pahsimeroi Valley, near Goldburg, Custer County, Idaho.

**TYPE SPECIMEN:**

**TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS:** Formerly included in genus *Sylvilagus* (see Diersing 1984). Included in the genus *Brachylagus* by Jones et al. (1992) and Hoffmann (in Wilson and Reeder 1993).

**DESCRIPTION:** The smallest rabbit in North America, the pygmy rabbit measures 9.2 to 11.5 inches (25-29 cm). The tail length is  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1  $\frac{1}{8}$  inches (2-3 cm) and the mass is 8  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 16 oz (246-458 grams). They are buffy grayish or blackish above and the tail is gray above and below. The nape of the neck and the front legs are cinnamon in color. It has whitish spots on the side of its nostrils that distinguish it from all others. Their antorbital process is nearly as long as the postorbital and they are both free from the cranium.

**AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION:** It has whitish spots on the side of its nostrils as well as no white on its' tail which distinguishes it from all others.

**ILLUSTRATIONS:** Color photo (In <http://www.irn.pdx.edu/~ursula/ursula12.htm>).  
Color photo (In <http://www.washington.edu/burkemuseum/mammology/brid.html>).  
Color photo (Washington F&W in <http://www.pacificbio.org/ESIN/Mammals/PygmyRabbit/pygmyrabbit.html>)

**TOTAL RANGE:** Oregon to east-central California, east to western Utah and southwestern Montana and an isolated population in east-central Washington.

**RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA:** None. Potentially may exist in the State, but there is no documentation to prove or disprove its existence.

## **SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS**

**BIOLOGY:** In southwestern Wyoming their winter home range was 548-18,464 sq m. Most of their activity is found to be within a 30m radius of their burrow. Weasels are their principal predator followed by coyotes, foxes, owls and hawks. They are active throughout the year. They may be active at any time of day or night, but they are generally crepuscular. They dig burrows 3 inches in diameter and may be 3.3 feet deep (1 m). The burrow may have up to 10 entrances and are located in slopes oriented in a north-to-east direction. They have a distinct alarm call. It has been supposed that they have developed this call because they live in dense sagebrush and as a result can't see their neighbors. The males tend to be more vocal than the females.

**REPRODUCTION:** Breeding period extends from spring to early summer. The gestation period lasts probably about 27-30 days and they average 6 young per litter. In California mating occurs from late February to early May. In December the testes of the male begin to enlarge and they shrink again in June following the mating. The young are born from March to early August. Three litters per year have been reported in Idaho. The young are altricial and mortality is highest in late winter and early spring.

**FOOD HABITS:** They are herbivores with big sagebrush being their primary food source but grasses and forbs are eaten in mid- to late summer. Big sagebrush provides up to 99% of the diet in the winter and grasses provide up to 40% of their diet in mid-summer to fall. Bitterbush is only taken rarely, even though it may be dense in the pygmy rabbit's habitat. They forage on the ground and in shrubs and they may store food in their burrow.

**HABITAT:** They are typically found in dense stands of big sagebrush growing in deep loose soils. In southwestern Wyoming, pygmy rabbits selectively used dense and structurally diverse strands of sagebrush that accumulated a relatively large amount of snow. The subnivean environment provided access to a relatively constant supply of food and provided protection from predators and thermal extremes.

**ELEVATION:**

**PLANT COMMUNITY:** Desert, Shrubland/Chaparral

**POPULATION TRENDS:** Declining. Their range apparently decreased in Washington during the last 3,000 years as the extent of sagebrush-dominated steppe diminished. The Washington population was estimated at less than 250 animals in 1995 and is now estimated at 0.

## **SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION**

**ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS:** None (USDI, FWS 1996)  
[C2 USDI, FWS 1991]

**STATE STATUS:**

**OTHER STATUS:**

**MANAGEMENT FACTORS:** Threats to this species include fire, grazing, invasion of exotic annuals and agricultural conversion. Their positive impacts are that they add biodiversity, their droppings serve as a fertilizer and they are a food source for predators. However, they can cause problems for farmers that grow vegetation by causing minor damage to crops. Also humans are a threat to them because hunters often mistake them for other species of rabbits.

**PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN:** A captive breeding program has been initiated in Washington.

**SUGGESTED PROJECTS:** An assessment of all current populations needs to be performed to determine their status.

**LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP:**

## **SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION**

### **REFERENCES:**

Available at <http://www.sibr.com/mammals/M044.html>.

Available at <http://www.irn.pdx.edu/~ursula/ursula12.htm>.

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NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. 2001. Version 1.6. Arlington, Virginia, USA: NatureServe. Available: <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>. (Accessed: June 6, 2002).

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USDI, Fish and Wildlife Service. 1996. Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants: Review of Plant and Animal Taxa that are Candidates for Listing as Endangered or Threatened Species. Federal Register 61(40): 7596-7613.

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**MAJOR KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS:**

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

**Revised:** 2002-06-21 (AMS)

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