

Pale kangaroo mouse | *Microdipodops pallidus*

The pale kangaroo mouse is a Nevada species, with only a single, small population occurring in eastern California. The distribution in Nevada is restricted to the west-central portion of the state. The only other species of kangaroo mouse, *Microdipodops megacephalus*, has a wider distribution, and overlaps portions of the range of *M. pallidus*. The pale kangaroo mouse is restricted to valley bottoms containing stabilized dunes with fine, wind-blown sand. Elevations range from 1,188 to 1,737 meters, and always appear to be in the zone below that dominated by big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*). Preferred habitat is characterized as Upper Sonoran life zone, which is dominated by saltbush (*Atriplex*) and greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*).

Morphologically, kangaroo mice resemble miniature kangaroo rats: the skull contains a greatly inflated auditory apparatus and the hind legs are enlarged, allowing bipedal, hopping locomotion. However, the tail is relatively short and lacks the well-developed crest of hair characteristic of kangaroo rats. Also, the tail contains a fat deposit in the middle, which may be of value in balance and is also a potential energy store.

Pale kangaroo mice live in a high, cold desert and use hibernation to maintain body weight and conserve stored seeds during periods of food shortage. *M. pallidus* is primarily granivorous, eating Indian rice grass (*Achnatherum hymenoides*) and a variety of forbs. The summer diet is supplemented with insects, including beetles, centipedes, and moth pupae.

Aboveground movement is characterized by a burst of activity just after sunset, with occasional forays through the

remainder of the night. As with other bipedal rodents, foraging is concentrated in open areas away from shrub canopy. *M. pallidus* appears to be relatively nonaggressive compared with other heteromyid rodents, and probably avoids surface encounters with other individuals by rapidly hopping away. Belowground, the burrow system appears to be short and simple. Apparently nest chambers are not regularly used.



Microdipodops pallidus

Pregnant individuals have been found from March into September. Litter size varies from two to six with an average of 3.9. As with other heteromyids, it is suspected that multiple litters and larger litter sizes occur during years with high vegetation productivity.

Size

No significant sexual dimorphism
Total length: 150–173 (160) mm
Length of tail: 74–99 (87) mm
Weight: 10.3–16.8 (13.5) g

Identification

M. pallidus is distinguished by its pale pinkish-cinnamon dorsal coloration; the dorsal surface of the tail is the same color as the body and lacks a dark tip; the hind foot is 25 mm or more in length.

Other Common Names

Pallid kangaroo mouse

Status

Common



Pale kangaroo mice live in a rich small mammal community. Common coexisting rodents include Merriam's, Ord's, and desert kangaroo rats, the little pocket mouse, the deer mouse, and the western harvest mouse. *M. J. O'Farrell*

Subspecies

Microdipodops pallidus ammophilus, Railroad Valley, Nye County, Nevada
Microdipodops pallidus pallidus, southwestern Nevada, Pershing County, through Fish Lake Valley to Oasis, and in the Deep Spring Valley, Inyo County, California
Microdipodops pallidus purus, Emigran and Desert valleys, Lincoln County, Nevada
Microdipodops pallidus restrictus, Soda Spring Valley, Mineral County, Nevada
Microdipodops pallidus ruficollaris, valleys of western Nye County, eastward to western Lincoln County, Nevada

References

Mammalian Species 47; Genoways and Brown, 1993; Hall, 1946