



Blue-listed species

are considered vulnerable because they have characteristics that make them particularly sensitive to human activities or natural events.

Western Harvest Mouse

Reithrodontomys megalotis

At a Glance

The Western Harvest Mouse looks a lot like the House Mouse. One difference is that it has hairs on its tail, while the House Mouse's tail is naked. The Western Harvest Mouse also has grooves that run down its front teeth, but the House Mouse does not. The Western Harvest Mouse weighs about 10 grams and is about 13 centimetres long. Half of this length is its tail. Its fur is brownish on top, with a faintly darker stripe along its back. Underneath, its fur is a little lighter.

Home Sweet Home

This mouse likes areas of tall grass and shrubs. Dry bunchgrass valleys are its favourite habitat in B.C. Other suitable areas include grassy roadsides and fallow fields. It builds a cup-shaped or spherical grass nest. Nests are usually located on or near the ground. Sometimes they are placed in bushes as high as one metre above the ground. The Western Harvest Mouse often uses vole runways to get around. It does not make burrows of its own, but may seek shelter in other small animals' burrows.

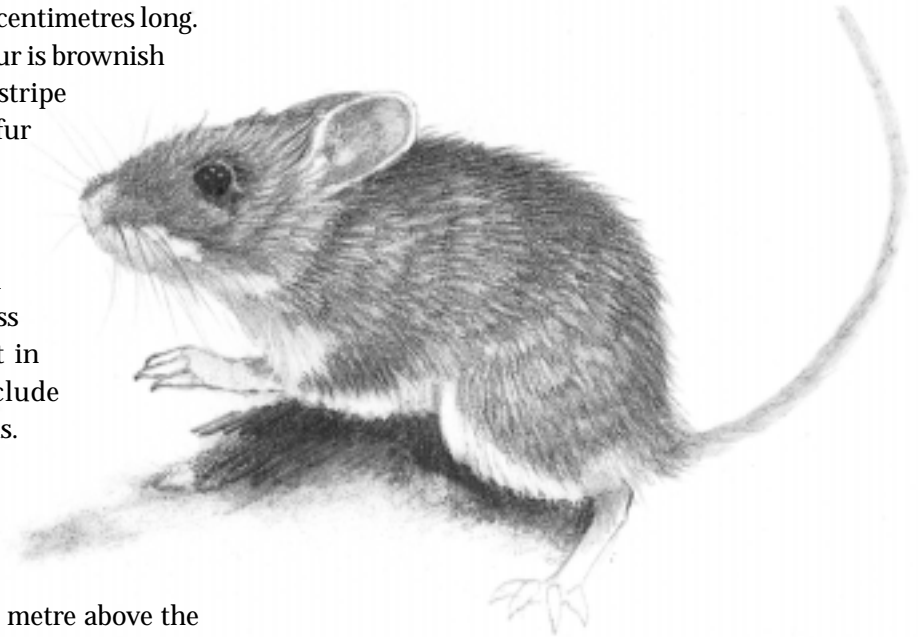
This is the Life

Western Harvest Mice are rarely seen because they are strictly nocturnal, coming out only after dark. They are most active on moonless or rainy nights, probably because it is harder for predators to see them at these times.

In B.C., females give birth to two or three litters every year. There are usually about four young in each litter.

What's on the Menu?

Two important items in the diet of the Western Harvest Mouse are seeds and caterpillars. Sometimes they have to climb up in bushes to reach these foods. They also eat flowers, green plants and fungi.



Where and When

The Western Harvest Mouse lives in most parts of the western United States and Mexico. In these areas it can be quite common, with populations as high as 60 mice per hectare. In Canada, it is much rarer and is found only in a few parts of southern Alberta and B.C. In this province, its density is about one to seven mice per hectare. The only regions in B.C. where the Western Harvest Mouse has been found are the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys.



BRITISH COLUMBIA'S Wildlife at Risk

NO KIDDING!

Western Harvest Mice can become parents when they are only four months old!



This species was not discovered in British Columbia until 1942. It is not known if this was because it is so rare or because it had only just arrived here from further south.



The Western Harvest Mouse is not a wanderer. Most of these mice never leave their home range, which is only about one hectare in size.



The Western Harvest Mouse has the ability to "home." Mice taken as far as 300 metres from their home ranges have been able to find their way back.



■ *Present range of the Western Harvest Mouse in British Columbia*



How They're Doing

The grasslands of the Okanagan Valley are rapidly disappearing. In the past, many were ploughed under for agricultural use. Today, large areas of remaining grassland are being developed for housing. Very little of this habitat is protected. Even where patches of grassland remain, they are often no longer connected to other fragments of habitat. If Western Harvest Mice are eliminated from one area by a disaster, such as a fire, other members of this species will not be able to quickly recolonize the damaged area unless the two areas are joined by suitable mouse habitat. It may also take a number of years for a damaged area to regain the grassland features that this mouse requires.

This species has been placed on the Blue List in B.C. It is considered to be vulnerable because of the disappearance of its habitat and because it was never very common in this province.

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) has designated this species as Vulnerable.

How We're Helping

A few areas of Western Harvest Mouse habitat in B.C. are currently protected within provincial parks and ecological reserves. Plans to create more grassland parks in the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys are now being discussed.

The Western Harvest Mouse is protected under the British Columbia Wildlife Act.

How You Can Help

Private landowners can help provide habitat by leaving undisturbed strips of grass and shrubs along the edges of fields. Sightings of this mouse should be reported to the Conservation Data Centre in Victoria. This may help to provide more information on the numbers and distribution of the Western Harvest Mouse in our province.

You can find out more about the Wildlife Branch and Conservation Data Centre at:

<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/>

Conservation Data Centre
Resources Inventory Branch
Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks
P.O. Box 9344 Stn Prov Gov
Victoria, B.C. V8W 9M1

Wildlife Branch
Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks
P.O. Box 9374 Stn Prov Gov
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Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks

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