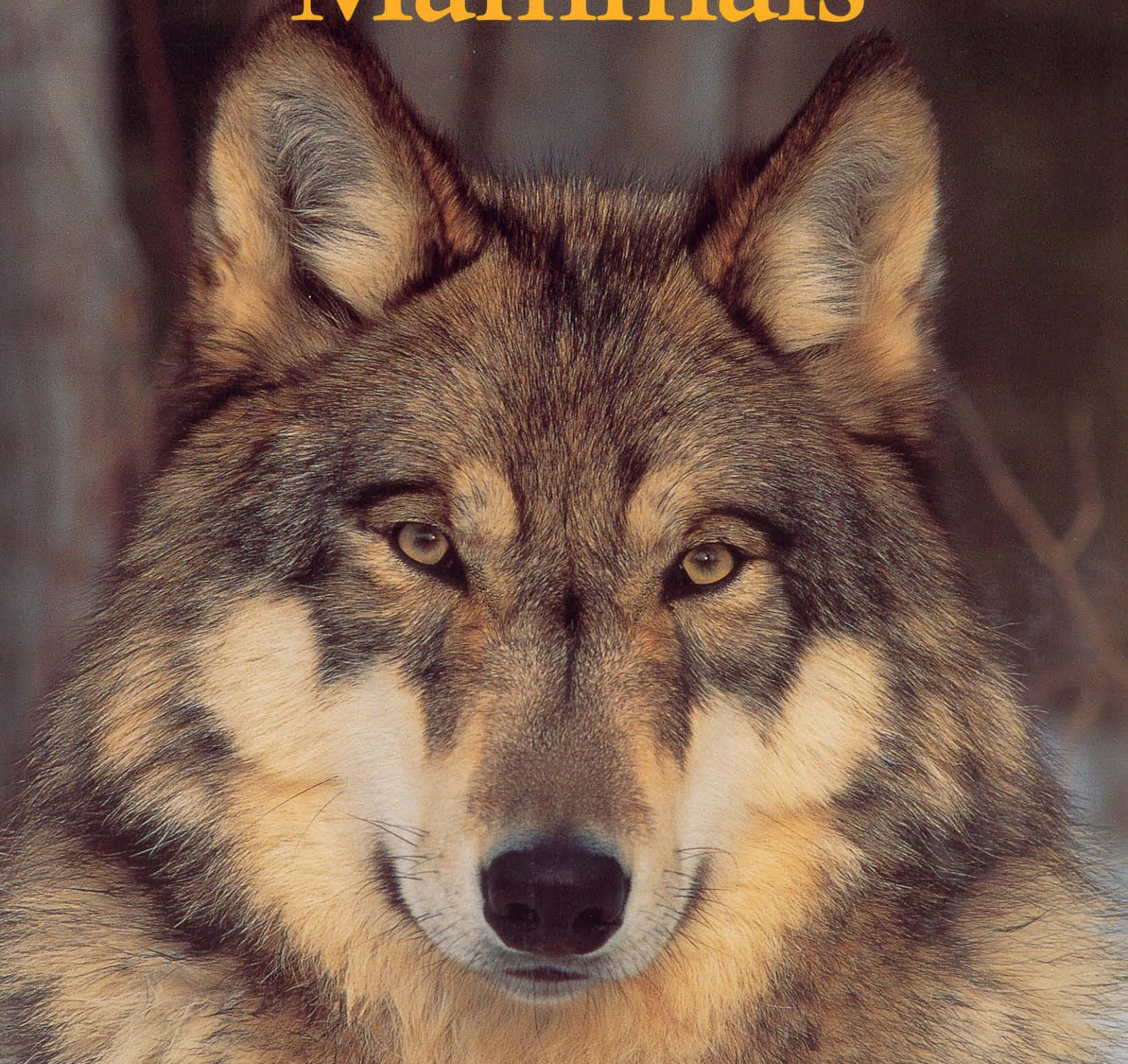


The Smithsonian Book of
**North American
Mammals**



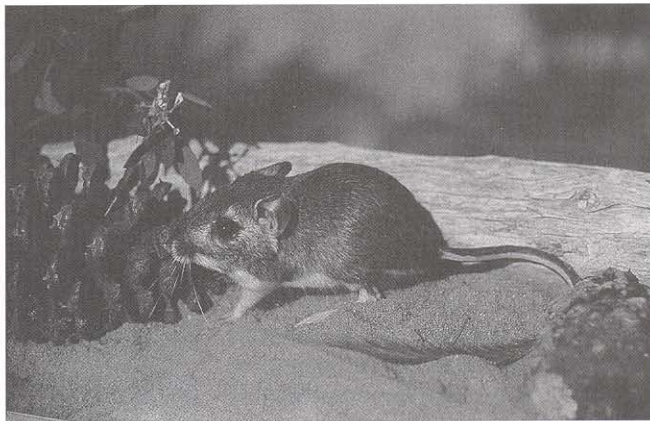
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Narrow-faced kangaroo rat | *Dipodomys venustus*

The narrow-faced kangaroo rat occurs along the coast of central California at elevations from sea level to 1,770 meters. No fossils are known.

Dipodomys venustus is a medium-sized, dark-colored kangaroo rat with five toes on each hind foot. Its black nose merges into a black band at the base of the whiskers. The top of the head, back, sides, and thigh patches are yellowish brown. The ears are large and nearly black, with pale spots at the base and at the top of the fold. The ankles, sides of the heel, sole, and tail stripes are nearly black. The underside of the body is white. The tail is 159 percent of the length of the head and body.

The narrow-faced kangaroo rat lives in maritime areas where the annual rainfall is about 75 centimeters and temperatures are moderate. The precipitation is seasonal (82 percent occurs from November through March), but the dryness of the long summer and autumn is tempered by frequent fogs and proximity to the ocean, giving *D. venustus* a relatively mild, moist habitat. The narrow-faced kangaroo rat inhabits slopes



clothed with chaparral or a mixture of chaparral and oaks or digger pine. It usually locates its burrows on sandy, well-drained, and deep soils, often on abandoned agricultural land.

A burrow consists of a main runway, a few blind side branches, a nest, and food caches. One burrow was 2.4 meters

long with a 1.4-meter side branch, five food caches, and a nest. Burrows at least 2 years old are no more complex than those only months old. Often, both main burrow openings and one or both of the auxiliary burrow openings are under weeds or shrubs. Each animal apparently has several supplementary burrows not too closely associated with the main one, which partially offsets the lack of protection offered by such a simple main burrow system. The supplementary burrows are simple, often unbranched runways without nests, caches, or sidepockets. On the surface, the two burrow types can be distinguished because usually the main burrow openings are plugged, while the subsidiary burrow openings always are open. When disturbed in the main burrow, the kangaroo rat will break out through a side branch that ends near the surface and go directly to another opening. Burrows are 5–50 centimeters below the ground surface, and during the rainy period, they are damp because the rain soaks into the ground to a depth of 1.5 meters. Burrows are absent from orchards and cultivated areas: even light harrowing completely destroys them.

The nest cavity usually is lower than the rest of the burrow and filled with seed coats of annual plants. It often contains live insects such as crickets and dung beetles. One or two litters of two to four young per litter are produced each year. A nest found on 31 May contained one young that was too small to run; it squirmed and made a suckling noise.

Although some green material is used as food, the diet is made up almost entirely of seeds of annuals, as determined by cheekpouch contents and underground and surface caches. One or two underground caches, containing up to 3,145 cubic centimeters of seeds, were found in each burrow examined in December. Surface caches generally are 10 centimeters deep



Dipodomys venustus

and about 5 centimeters in diameter, and are usually are grouped more or less fanwise about the mouth of the burrow, but can also be found singly at some distance from any burrow. Except for a little debris, only mature seeds or seed husks have been found in the caches. Caching occurs during the summer and autumn when seeds ripen and fall. Some seeds are carried as far as 50 meters from the source.

Potential predators include coyotes, bobcats, and house cats. Internal parasites include protozoans and cestodes. Ectoparasites include chiggers, mites, ticks, and fleas. *T. L. Best*

Size

Males are slightly larger than females.
 Total length: 295–332 (318) mm (males);
 293–330 (314) mm (females)
 Length of tail: 180–203 (193) mm (males);
 175–200 (191) mm (females)
 Weight: 70–97 (83) g (males); 68–96 (82) g
 (females)

Identification

Compared with *D. agilis*, *D. venustus* has darker pelage, bolder facial markings, much larger ears, a much longer tail, and a proportionally longer rostrum. Compared with *D. elephantinus*, *D. venustus* is smaller and darker, especially on the head; the cheeks have less white, the ears are blacker, and the facial marking is bolder.

The dark ventral tail stripe is wider, rather than narrower, than the lateral white stripe at mid-length on the tail. *Dipodomys venustus* is darker and has much larger ears than *D. heermanni*.

Recent Synonyms

Dipodomys sanctiluciae
Perodipus venustus

Other Common Names

Santa Cruz kangaroo rat

Status

Uncommon

Subspecies

Dipodomys venustus sanctiluciae, coastal mountains from the southern end of Monterey Bay southward to the Santa Lucia Mountains east of Morro Bay, and east to the Salinas Valley
Dipodomys venustus venustus, disjunct populations in the Santa Cruz Mountains and adjacent areas west of the Santa Clara Valley, the Diablo Range in Santa Clara, Stanislaus, Merced, San Benito, and Fresno counties, and the northern end of the Gabilan Range in Monterey and San Benito counties

References

Mammalian Species 403; Hawbecker, 1940