

Plains Harvest Mouse



Reithrodontomys montanus

Identification

Plains harvest mouse is small, 3.5-5.5 in/9-14 cm with the tail less than half the length. They weigh 0.2-0.5 oz/5-14 g. The sparsely-haired bicolored tail is dark above and light below sometimes with a thin black stripe on the top. The plains harvest mouse is mixed brownish, gray-brown or yellow-gray. The ears and sides are pale yellowish brown. Belly and hindfeet are dull whitish or yellowish gray. Plains harvest mice have grooved front incisors as do all harvest mice.



Photo credit: Ashley Tubbs/Project Noah

Observation Tips

Plains harvest mouse is found across the Great Plains (North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming, Kansas, Colorado, Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico) and into eastern Arizona and Mexico (Sonora, Chihuahua, and Durango). They occupy a very large range but are generally found in small numbers and seldom encountered.

Interesting Fact

A plains harvest mouse in captivity gave birth at least four times in one year. Young mice are sexually mature at two months. Nests are composed of fine grasses compacted into small balls approximately 4 x 3 in/10 x 6 cm in bunchgrasses close to or on the ground.

Ideal Habitat

Plains harvest mouse prefers high quality prairie and grasslands including tallgrass, mixed grass, and shortgrass prairie. They have also been found in salt marshes, roadsides with mixed grasses and forbs including sunflowers, hay meadows, moderately grazed pastures, sagebrush shrublands, riparian areas, fence lines, and abandoned fields. Plains harvest mice eat seeds including brome, bluestem, grama grass, flowerheads, and insects including grasshoppers. In Nebraska, plains harvest mice prefer vegetation approximately 1-10 in/2.5-25 cm tall, less than 40% bare ground and loamy sand or sandy loam soil texture. In Texas, they are found in climax or near climax grasslands. In Wyoming, plains harvest mice are most abundant in areas with high grass cover (>60%), and loamy sand soil texture.



Range map provided by International Union for Conservation of Nature

Management Activities that Benefit Species – Best Management Practices (BMPs)

In tallgrass prairie areas, prescribed burning every few years can improve the forage productivity of the grassland and provide improved habitat conditions for many species including plains harvest mice. Restore native prairie when possible, planting diverse species mix. This harvest mouse prefers areas that are grazed, so moderately stocked rotational grazing should provide areas with taller and denser grasses for nesting.

Management Activities to Avoid

Avoid conversion of native prairies into cropland or residential development. Avoid allowing trees to encroach into high quality grasslands.

Other Species that Benefit from Similar Habitat Management

Management for plains harvest mouse will benefit other prairie species including greater prairie chicken, massasauga snake, and regal fritillary.

Other Resources

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). 2014. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2021-1

[Plains harvest mouse](#)

NatureServe. 2021. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 7.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. [Plains harvest mouse](#)

Nebraska. Species Conservation Assessment. [Plains harvest mouse](#)

Texas Tech University. Mammals of Texas. [Plains harvest mouse.](#)

Wyoming Game and Fish. Wyoming Species Account. [Plains harvest mouse.](#)