

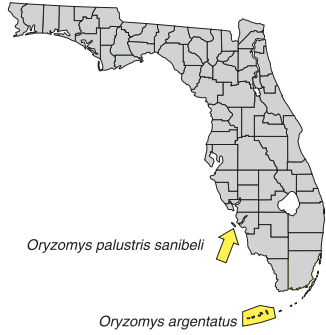
KEY RICE RAT

Oryzomys argentatus

SANIBEL ISLAND RICE RAT

Oryzomys palustris sanibeli

There is some disagreement regarding the taxonomic distinctness of both the Key rice rat and the Sanibel Island rice rat.



Order:	Rodentia
Family:	Cricetidae
FNAI Ranks:	<i>O. argentatus</i> : G5T2Q/S2 <i>O. p. sanibeli</i> : G5T1Q/S1
U.S. Status:	<i>O. argentatus</i> —Endangered; <i>O. p. sanibeli</i> —None
FL Status:	<i>O. argentatus</i> —Endangered; <i>O. p. sanibeli</i> —Species of Special Concern



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Description: Medium-sized (but size highly variable; adult total length 9 - 12.5 in. = 230 - 318 mm) rat with a sparsely haired tail about equal to the length of the head and body. Fur on upper side is brownish to buff, sprinkled with black. Underparts are grayish white; feet are white. Tail is brown above, grayish white below. Ears are medium-sized and round. Key rice rat has silver-gray fur on its sides and tends to be paler than the mainland subspecies. Key rice rat tends to be large relative to other subspecies (average total length of 11 in. = 281 mm); Sanibel Island rice rat is also large (average total length of 10 in. = 257 mm).

KEY RICE RAT*Oryzomys argentatus***SANIBEL ISLAND RICE RAT***Oryzomys palustris
sanibeli*

Similar Species: Black rat (*Rattus rattus*) and Norway rat (*Rattus norvegicus*) have hairless ears and tails. Cotton rat (*Sigmodon hispidus*) has a grizzled appearance with long, lightly furred tail about equal to the body length; ears are small and round. Woodrat (*Neotoma floridana*), which does not occur in the Lower Keys, is generally larger with a tail noticeably shorter than the body.

Habitat: Transition from upland to marine and freshwater marsh communities, including buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*) and black mangrove (*Avicennia germinans*) swamps, coastal strand, saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*) flats, and other communities within this zone that have moderate to abundant herbaceous cover.

Seasonal Occurrence: Active year-round.

Florida Distribution: Key rice rat occurs on most of the large islands of the Lower Keys. Sanibel Island rice rat occurs only on Sanibel Island in Lee County.

Range-wide Distribution: Same as Florida distribution. Other subspecies occur throughout the eastern U.S. from Texas to Maine.

Conservation Status: Key rice rat is protected on several public and private conservation lands, but is threatened by further development in the Lower Keys. Sanibel Island rice rat is protected in part on Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge, but is also threatened by further development within its range.

Protection and Management: Maintain natural transition from upland to wetland and marine communities. These taxa are known to occupy large home ranges (>50 acres = >20 ha); therefore, protection area should be as large as possible given the limited remaining habitat.

Selected References: Brown 1997, Humphrey (ed.) 1992, Lazell 1989, Whitaker 1996.