

INSULAR COTTON RAT

Sigmodon hispidus insulicola

Order: Rodentia
Family: Cricetidae
FNAI Ranks: G5T1T2/S1S2
U.S. Status: none
FL Status: none



Description: A medium-sized rat (total length 10.78 in. = 27.4 cm) with a tail typically shorter than the body (4.6 in. = 117 mm). Dorsal fur is streaked with brown, often appearing dark overall. Grayish white below. Tail about the same color as upperparts. Ears fairly small and round.

Similar Species: Island locations are typically enough to separate from mainland subspecies. Sanibel Island marsh rice rat (*Oryzomys palustris sanibeli*) is similar in size, lighter brown overall with more uniform coloration, and tail about the same as body length. Black rat (*Rattus rattus*) is longer (up to 15 in. = 38.1 cm total length), darker overall, and has tail length greater than body length.

Habitat: Found in upland habitats such as pine flatwoods as well as drier areas of freshwater marshes. Also inhabits man-made habitats including dry, open grassy fields and garbage piles.

Seasonal Occurrence: Active year-round.

Florida Distribution: Endemic to southwest Florida where it is known from Sanibel, Captiva, and Pine Islands as well as Chadwick Beach near Englewood.

Range-wide Distribution: Endemic to southwest Florida.

Conservation Status: Insular cotton rats have been found on a limited number of conservation lands including J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

Protection and Management: Reduce woody shrub encroachment in grassy wetlands. Use prescribed fire to maintain natural vegetation composition and structure in natural communities. Allow prescribed fires to naturally enter wetlands. Remove invasive domestic cats (*Felis domesticus*) and black rats (*Rattus*

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rattus) from Sanibel and Captiva Islands.

References: Boone et al. 2021, Howell 1943, Layne 1978



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