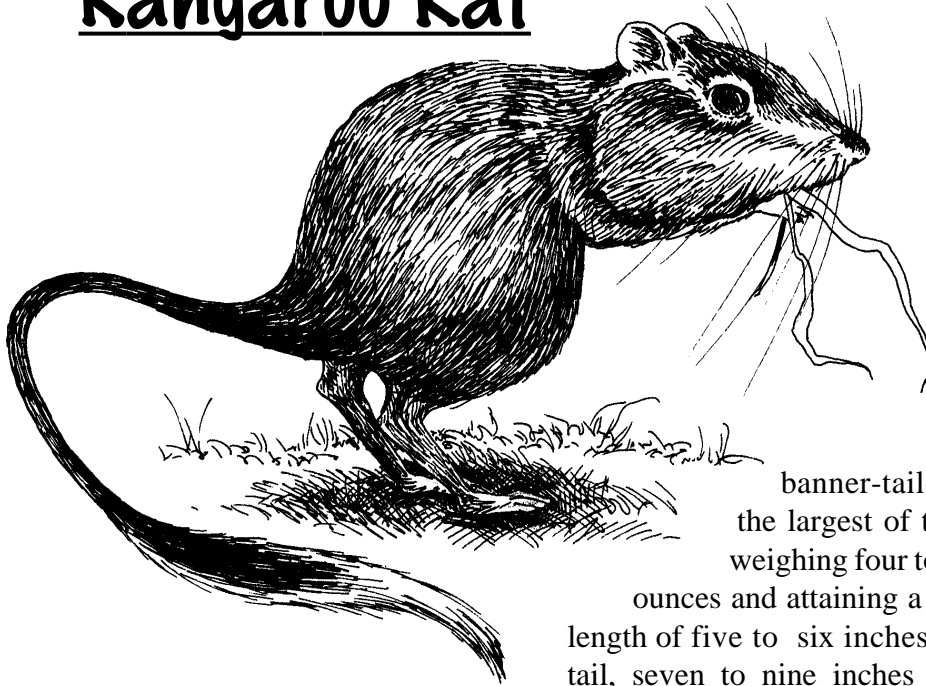




WILDLIFE NOTES

Kangaroo Rat



In the summer twilight, a small something hops down a dusty New Mexico road. Miles from water, this agile hopper moves faster than a frog. Car headlights bathe the creature in light, and the children in the car point with excitement.

“It’s a kangaroo rat!”

Boing-boing. In two long leaps the kangaroo rat has disappeared in the grass. This is *Dipodomys spectabilis*, the banner-tailed version.

Like all kangaroo rats, this species has a white belly and large, strong hind legs. The front legs are weaker and considerably smaller. Of the 22 species of kangaroo rats occurring in the United States and Mexico, our state can claim only three.

The banner-tailed is the largest of these, weighing four to six ounces and attaining a body length of five to six inches. The tail, seven to nine inches long, sports a prominent, brushy white tip. The Ord’s and Merriam’s weigh less than three ounces and lack the distinctive white tail tuft of the banner-tail. Distribution of the three kinds of New Mexican kangaroo rats overlaps.

Subhead

Their homes are also distinctive. This species prefers heavy soils that can support a large and complex system of burrows. Mounds can be several feet in diameter and may have a dozen entrances. The kangaroo rat may store large amounts of food in the dens for use in times of scarcity. Primarily a

seed eater, the kangaroo rat will consume seeds of grasses, weeds and mesquite.

These animals are usually nocturnal. They will most likely be seen when they are illuminated by your car’s headlights. The unique hop and amber eye shine identifies the kangaroo rat. Look closely, and see if he is a banner-tail!

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Conservation Education Section
Department of Game and Fish
PO Box 25112

Santa Fe, NM 87504
(505) 827-7867

