

## Riparian Woodrat (*Neotoma fuscipes riparia*)

Status - Federal: Endangered California: Special Concern



Photo: Moose Peterson, WRP

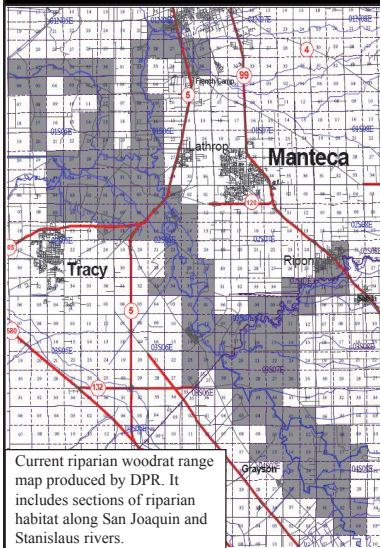
The riparian woodrat is a medium-sized (1/2 to 1 lb) rodent with a stockier build and furrier tail (and not scaled), as compared to nonnative “black” rats (*Rattus rattus*). It differs from other, adjacent subspecies of woodrats by being larger, lighter, and more grayish in color, with hind feet white instead of dusky on their upper surfaces, and a tail more distinctly bicolored (lighter below contrasting more with the darker dorsal color).

**Range:** Historical records for the riparian woodrat are distributed along the San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tuolumne rivers, and Corral Hollow, in San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Merced counties. Before the statewide reduction of riparian communities by nearly 90 percent, this species probably ranged throughout the extensive riparian forests along major streams flowing onto

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the floor of the northern San Joaquin Valley. Currently, they are known to occur in Caswell Memorial State Park, and nearby riparian areas along the San Joaquin and Stanislaus rivers, in parts of San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties.

**Habitat & Behavior:** Riparian woodrats are common where there are deciduous valley oaks, but few live oaks. They are most numerous where shrub cover is dense and least abundant in open areas. In riparian areas, highest densities of woodrats and their houses are often encountered in willow thickets with an oak overstory. Mostly active at night, the woodrat’s diet is diverse and principally herbivorous, with leaves, fruits, terminal shoots of twigs,

flowers, nuts, and fungi. The young are born in stick nest houses, or lodges, on the ground, which measure 2 to 3 feet high and 4 to 6 feet in diameter. Most lodges are positioned over or against logs. Unlike other subspecies, the riparian woodrat occasionally builds nests in cavities in trees and artificial wood duck nest boxes. Because of its ability to climb in trees, the woodrat itself is not as sensitive to flooding as some other brush-dwelling species (e.g., the riparian brush rabbit). However, woodrat houses are essential for survival and these can be severely impacted by flooding. Because of this, the woodrat population at Caswell Memorial State Park is vulnerable to flooding of the Stanislaus River.

**Reproduction:** Breeding occurs throughout most of the year except for late autumn and early winter. The gestation period is somewhere between 23 and 38 days with females usually having more than one litter per year. Litters vary in size from one to three young, with two being the most common litter size.