



## Perdido Key Beach Mouse

*(Peromyscus polionotus trissyllepsis)*

Perdido Key beach mice are a critically endangered subspecies of oldfield mice. They have small bodies, hairy tails, relatively large ears and protuberant eyes.

### Physical Description

Perdido Key beach mice have small bodies, hairy tails, large ears and big eyes. Their bodies are grayish fawn to wood brown with a very pale-yellow hue.

### Size

These mice are 2.7 to 3.3 inches long, excluding the tail. Their tails measure 1.7 to 2.5 inches. They weigh about 13 grams.

### Native Habitat

Beach mice inhabit frontal and scrub dunes along the coast of Florida and Alabama. They typically live in sparsely vegetated dunes just above the high-tide line and more densely vegetated dunes farther inland. These mice often maintain multiple burrows within a home range that averages 5,000 square meters. They use their burrows for sleeping, nesting, feeding, caching seeds and escaping from predators.

The role of the Perdido Key Beach Mouse is often overlooked when people think of the habitat. One critical behavior the mice have is to forage for seeds and then store them underground. Most importantly for the coastal dune ecosystem are the sea oat seeds. What foraging for and storing these particular seeds does for the ecosystem is to spread the plants throughout the habitat where they eventually sprout and take hold. This act allows for the constant spread of sea oats which tremendously aids in the stabilization of coastal dunes both primary and secondary.

### **Food/Eating Habits**

Beach mice emerge from their burrows at night to forage on the seeds and fruits of beach plants, as well as on insects. Sea oats make up a large part of their diet, but they also feed on other seasonally available dune plant seeds, such as bluestem, ground cherry, evening primrose, beach pea and dune spurge. Throughout the night, the mice make several trips to and from their burrows gathering seeds to store.

### **Reproduction and Development**

Beach mice are monogamous and pair for life, which is unusual among mammals. Breeding peaks during the winter months but can occur throughout the year if food is readily available. Gestation totals 23 days, and the female gives birth to up to four pups per litter. Females are capable of breeding again as soon as 24 hours after giving birth. Offspring are weaned 18 days after birth and reach sexual maturity around 30 days old.

### **Sleep Habits**

Perdido Key beach mice are primarily nocturnal, spending the daylight hours in burrows.

### **Lifespan**

Perdido Key beach mice typically live for nine months to a year. They can live up to six years in human care.

### **Conservation**

Perdido Key beach mice are protected as an endangered species since 1985 by the Endangered Species Act and as a federally designated endangered species by Florida's Endangered and Threatened Species Rule.

Loss of habitat to development is considered to be the main factor which led to the decline of the species. Hurricanes have also taken their toll on the endangered mouse. The beach mouse population on Perdido Key was nearly made extinct in the mid-1990s when hurricanes Erin and Opal ravaged the Key's beaches. Numbering less than 40 after the storms, the mice have regenerated with current population estimates near 500. While populations appear to be growing, the mouse will probably never be delisted because of continued habitat loss and degradation. Their populations are also at risk from introduced predators, such as domestic cats and red foxes. Conserving beach mouse habitat helps sea turtles, shorebirds and other coastal species.

### **Help this Species**

- Be a responsible pet owner and keep pets indoors or under restraint when outside. Never release animals that have been kept as pets into the wild.
- Stay off the dunes and other protected habitat areas.

### **Sources:**

1. Smithsonian's National Zoo & Conservation Biology Institute – online
2. Florida State Parks – online