

Allegheny Woodrat (*Neotoma magister*)

Pennsylvania Threatened Mammal Species

State Rank: S3 (vulnerable), Global Rank: G3G4 (vulnerable/apparently secure)

Identification

The Allegheny Woodrat (*Neotoma magister*) is a relatively large member of this group, ranging from 14-17 inches in total length (including tail). The fur is brownish-gray with slightly darker coloration in the middle of the back. The belly and paws are white and the sides are buff. The Allegheny Woodrat has large ears and a furry, bicolored tail. The introduced exotic Norway rat (*Rattus norvegicus*) has a naked tail and overall brown coloration, which distinguishes it from the woodrat in Pennsylvania.

Habitat

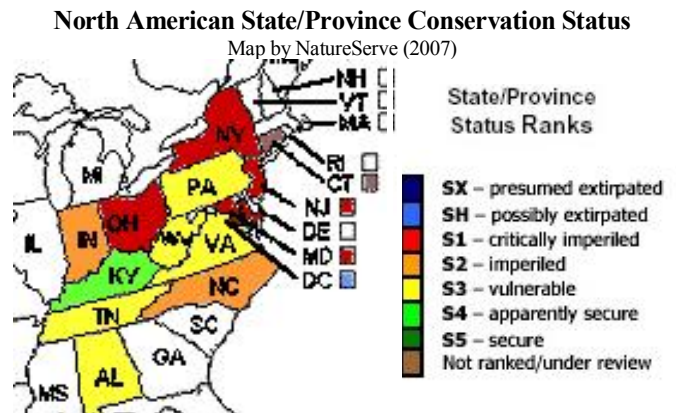
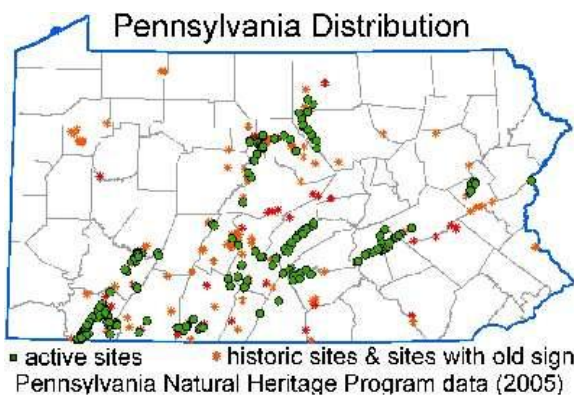
Another name for this species is cave rat because it sometimes inhabits limestone caves. It is also found along cliff faces, in boulder piles and talus slopes. Nests composed of shredded plant fibers are found in dry cave entrances, along narrow ledges and in rock crevices. This species feeds on nuts, seeds, bark, grasses, fruits, and berries. They are nocturnal and a relatively shy species that is often found by locating food caches and latrines.

Status

Distribution of the Allegheny woodrat is primarily along the Appalachian Mountains from New York to Georgia and west to Indiana. Populations in Pennsylvania appeared healthy during the 1940's and early 1950's. However, during bat surveys in 1978 and 1979, John S. Hall from Albright College noted an absence of woodrat sign in caves. Very few locations were occupied in the former range, and woodrats were only found in a few counties during that time. This led to its current status of Threatened in Pennsylvania. It is not clear why this species declined so suddenly



photo source: Cal Butchkowski



in Pennsylvania but it is likely due to a variety of factors.

Conservation Status

Increased habitat fragmentation, especially in the eastern portion of its range may be a major factor in the decline. Fragmentation from roads and development causes loss of habitat, isolation, and increased exposure to parasites. The once relatively isolated ridgetops where the woodrat thrived are not bisected by roads, allowing easy access for humans. These corridors also provide easy access for parasite hosts such as raccoons increasing the frequency of parasite infection among woodrats. Raccoon roundworm (*Baylisascaris*) is a dangerous and quickly spreading parasite that may be devastating to woodrat populations in the east. Intact forest ridges that provide habitat for this species must be protected from further fragmentation and development.

References

- Genoway, H.H. and F.J. Brenner. 1985. Species of Special Concern in Pennsylvania. Carnegie Museum of Natural History. Pittsburgh, PA. 430pp.
- Great Smoky Mountains National Park. All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory. Allegheny Woodrat Species Acct. Website: www.smokiesatbi.org/atbi/species/animals/Mammals/Neotoma_magister.html.
- Pennsylvania Game Commission. Endangered and Threatened Species. Eastern Woodrat Species Profile. Website: <http://www.pgc.state.pa.us/pgc/cwp/view.asp?a=486&q=152547>
- NatureServe. 2007. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 6.2. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>. (Accessed: September 4, 2007).

