

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

TOWNSEND'S POCKET GOPHER

Thomomys townsendii

Family: GEOMYIDAE
M082

Order: RODENTIA

Class: MAMMALIA

Written by: P. Brylski
Reviewed by: H. Shellhammer
Edited by: R. Duke

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

The Townsend's pocket gopher is restricted to a few valleys of the northern Great Basin. The California subspecies (*T. t. relictus*) is found only in the western part of Honey Lake Valley. According to Thaeler (1968), *T. t. relictus* ranges from about Susanville to near Doyle. Found in wet meadow habitat along the western edge of Honey Lake Valley and in alkali desert scrub habitat to the east. Its eastern range correlates somewhat with distribution of saltgrass (Thaeler 1968).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: No data found. Probably feeds on roots, bulbs, seeds, tubers, and stems of grasses and forbs. Feeds from underground tunnels and snow tunnels on ground surface during winter. Caches food extensively in burrow.

Cover: Burrows are excavated in areas of fluvial and lacustrine deposits where the soil is deep and relatively moist (Davis 1937). Snow also serves as cover during winter.

Reproduction: A nest of dried plant parts is made in underground nest chambers.

Water: Probably obtains water from succulent vegetation .

Pattern: Confined to deep lacustrine and fluvial soils of Pleistocene lake bottoms and streams.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Active year-round. Mainly nocturnal above ground, but active throughout the day in burrow.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: None reported.

Home Range: No data found.

Territory: No data found, but probably territorial, as are other *Thomomys*.

Reproduction: Breeds from spring to early summer. Litter size averages 6.8 (range 3-10) young.

Niche: *Thomomys townsendii* is a relict species in California. Throughout the Pleistocene, when lakes covered much of northern California, *T. townsendii* apparently had a more continuous distribution across California and Nevada. As the waters receded, these gophers probably moved toward the remaining lakes and streams (Davis 1937). Tolerates a surprising

range of habitats. The ecology of this gopher is poorly studied. Potential predators include raptorial birds, coyotes, bobcats, weasels, and snakes.

REFERENCES

- Davis, W. B. 1937. Variation in Townsend pocket gophers. *J. Mammal.* 18:145-158.
- Horn, E. E. 1923. Some notes concerning the breeding habits of *Thomomys townsendii* observed near Vale, Malheur County, Oregon, during the spring of 1921. *J. Mammal.* 4:37-39.
- Thaeler, C. S., Jr. 1968. An analysis of the distribution of pocket gopher species in northeastern California (Genus *Thomomys*). *Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool.* 86:1-46.

M082

Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F.Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. *California's Wildlife*. Vol. I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.