

Big Eared Bats and Kangaroo Rats

by Dennis Payton Knight

Hush, child. Lay your head on the pillow and hear the mourning doves coo. Listen closely, night is upon us, and Colorado's nocturnal creatures will soon be hooting, chirping with their leg, and howling at the moon. And do they ever sing. That old nightingale has over two hundred songs in his book. Darkness brings out not just the birds of night, but amphibians, reptiles, mammals, even fish. They crawl, swoop, fly, climb, burrow, skitter, slither and swim. Our time to sleep is their time to work, and they manage a pretty good living in this pointy place we call Colorado. Let me tell you about two you've probably never heard of.



Townsend's Big Eared Bat has big, flexible ears. When it is relaxed, its ears lay back, extending down to the middle of its body. When it's at work, the ears point out. They like to hang out in pine forests, caves and abandoned mines, any large spaces for roosting. They weigh seven to twelve grams, not even half an ounce, and measure around four inches including a two inch tail, and its wingspan is about eleven inches. They mate in late fall, and gestation lasts up to two months. Pups are born without the ability to fly.

In the summer, males and females have roost separately, the females forming maternity colonies of twelve to two hundred in tight clusters where they safely raise their pups. Males are typically solitary when not in hibernation.

This species has an average lifespan of sixteen years and loves to feed on moths, but its diet may include other small insects as well. It's a whisper bat, which means that it echolocates at lower intensities than other bat species, and might be difficult to catch even with a bat detector. They adapted that talent because some moths have the ability to hear bats and may even produce their own noise to jam the echolocation.

Townsend's Big Eared Bats are listed either as endangered or as a species of special concern due its numbers plummeting with human interference. It's exacerbated, experts point out, because this species quickly abandons roosting sites when human interference is detected. Shhhhh...

Ord's Kangaroo Rat has a long, thin tail and big back feet which it uses to bounce around on looking for food. It doesn't like the brightness of a full moon, so it waits for the crescent phase before it emerges after sleeping all day in its underground burrow. They are a cute little critter but are vulnerable prey for owls, rattle snakes, foxes and other predators in Colorado.

Ord's kangaroo rats live mainly in semiarid habitats. In Colorado, they are found in open areas with firm soil – firm because compacted soils are what they need for burrows, but not too tight or it's hard to dig.



Only one adult occupies a burrow system, except for a brief period during breeding activity. They defend their burrow entrances, but other than that, they aren't very territorial. In Colorado kangaroo rats are found in pinon-juniper forests, where they comprise about one fifth of the small animal population.

They like grains and herbs eating a variety of foods. In Colorado, seeds make up 74% of their diets, with a variety of forbs, grasses, sedges, arthropods, fungi and mosses making up the rest. They transport seeds in their cheek pouches to their burrows for consumption or hiding. A single Ord's kangaroo rat may make have hundreds of caches.

They are adapted to arid environments, and get most of their water from seeds and succulents. They will drink water when its available, but don't require free water to survive. Their predators include foxes coyotes, bobcats, badgers, owls, falcons, and snakes, and they live an average of 3 years. Can't you imagine them bouncing around like kangaroos?

And did you know... oh, but there is so much more to tell. Sleep well, child, we'll take this up another night.