

## SANIBEL ISLAND MARSH RICE RAT

*Oryzomys palustris sanibeli*

**Order:** Rodentia  
**Family:** Cricetidae  
**FNAI Ranks:** G5T1Q/S1  
**U.S. Status:** none  
**FL Status:** Threatened



**Description:** A medium-sized rat (total length 9.25 in. = 23.5 cm) with a tail about as long as the body (4.8 in. = 123 mm). Dorsal fur is orange-brown, whitish below. Tail slightly darker than upperparts. Ears fairly small and round.

**Similar Species:** Geographic location (Sanibel Island) is enough to separate this insular form from related mainland subspecies. The insular cotton rat (*Sigmodon hispidus insulicola*) is similar in size but darker overall and with more streaks in the fur, and its tail is typically distinctly shorter than body length. Black rats (*Rattus rattus*) are longer (up to 15 in. = 38.1 cm total length), darker overall, and have a tail longer than the body length.

**Habitat:** This subspecies has been detected in freshwater marshes, coastal swales, coastal hammock, and mangrove swamp (Hamilton 1955, Humphrey et al. 1986, Boone et al. 2021). Freshwater marshes were dominated by cattail (*Typha* sp.), sand cordgrass (*Spartina bakeri*), and/or sawgrass (*Cladium jamaicense*) (Hamilton 1955, Humphrey et al. 1986, Boone et al. 2021). Boone et al. (2021) found that *O. p. sanibeli* preferred wetlands with sand cordgrass and other native grasses, but were deterred from wetlands encroached by woody shrubs.

**Seasonal Occurrence:** Active year-round (Boone et al. 2021).

**Florida Distribution:** Endemic to Sanibel Island, Lee County.

**Range-wide Distribution:** Endemic to Sanibel Island, Lee County, Florida.

**Conservation Status:** Protected on J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge and conservation lands owned by the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation. This species appears to be declining due to declining habitat quality.

**Protection and Management:** Manage freshwater wetlands by removing encroaching woody shrubs with a combination of hand removal or herbicide application and prescribed fire. Allow prescribed fires to naturally enter and extinguish within wetlands. Control invasive shrubs such as Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolia*). Remove invasive domestic cats (*Felis domesticus*) and black rats (*Rattus rattus*) from Sanibel and Captiva Islands.

**References:** Boone et al. 2021, Hamilton 1955, Humphrey et al. 1986



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