

LOWER KEYS MARSH RABBIT

Sylvilagus palustris hefneri

Order: Lagomorpha

Family: Leporidae

FNAI Ranks: G5T1/S1

U.S. Status: Endangered

FL Status: Endangered



Description: A small rabbit (14 - 16 in. = 350 - 400 mm) with dark brown dorsal fur and grayish underside. Ears are relatively small for a rabbit (1.75 - 1.92 in. = 44 - 49 mm). Tail is inconspicuous, dark brown above, gray underneath.

Similar Species: No other rabbit overlaps the range of Lower Keys marsh rabbit. Eastern cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) has gray dorsal fur and white underside.

Habitat: Higher elevations within salt marsh or freshwater marsh; occasionally uses mangrove communities and shrubby edges to wetlands, but depends on herbaceous plants for food and cover.

Seasonal Occurrence: Active year-round.

Florida Distribution: Lower Keys from Big Pine Key to Boca Chica.

Range-wide Distribution: Same as Florida distribution. Other subspecies occur from coastal Alabama to southeastern Virginia.

Conservation Status: Limited to small populations on just a few Keys; thought to be declining. Two-thirds of known habitat is on public land.

Protection and Management: Reduce traffic in areas known to support marsh rabbits. Control exotic plants and animals, including domestic cats.

References: Brown 1997, Humphrey (ed.) 1992, USFWS 1999b, Whitaker 1996.



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