



## Klamath Network Featured Creature

### May 2012

### Red Tree Vole (*Arborimus longicaudus*)

#### General Description:

The red tree vole is a member of the rodent family Cricetidae and is split into two subspecies: the Oregon red tree vole and the Dusky tree vole. Their fur is long, thick and can be described as a reddish-brown or cinnamon color. They weigh an average of one ounce and are only about 3 to 4 inches long not including their lengthy tail.



Red tree vole ©Stephen DeStefano (ARKive)

#### Habitat:

These rodents are quite unique as they spend their life in their nests within conifer or mixed conifer canopies. They prefer Douglas-fir and studies have found that their population density is higher in older forests. This can connote late-successional, large, mature or structurally complex forests. This preference for older forests may be due to the more supportive branches for their nests or the denser canopy cover which makes them less susceptible to predation.

Their nests are made using twigs, leftover resin ducts, fecal matter, needles and lichen. One nest can even encircle an entire tree trunk.



Tree vole nest ©2011 Chris Wemmer

#### Where to see it in the Network:

The tree vole may be sighted in Oregon Caves National Monument and Redwood National and State Parks.

#### Diet:

Red tree voles and their subspecies feed almost exclusively on Douglas-fir needles, but on occasion will opt for western hemlock, lowland white fir, grand fir and sitka spruce. Their foraging process occurs at night and includes chewing off branch tips and pulling them back to their nests. The excised tips are cached and then consumed during the day in their nests.

Their eating behavior may remind you of how we eat corn! With Douglas-firs they remove the resin ducts along the edges so as only to eat the remaining, fleshy portion of the needle. They can use the surplus resin ducts to construct or even strengthen their nests. They remain hydrated by eating the moisture-rich needles, supplemented by licking the dew or condensation off of the vegetation. Hence their penchants for humid forests!

#### Predation:

Their main predator is the Northern Spotted owl; in some regions the red tree vole comprises half of the owl's diet! Other owls such as the Saw-whet, Long-eared, Great-horned and pygmy owls will also prey upon the tree vole. They are additionally vulnerable to weasels, fishers, ring-tailed cats and red-tailed hawks and potentially raccoons, marten and the Steller's Jay.

#### Reproduction:

The red tree vole's litter sizes range from one to four juveniles following a month-long gestation period. They are able to begin post-partum mating immediately after giving birth, however they have very low reproductive potential. Females raise their young in the nest for two months as they develop and teach them climbing and food harvesting skills. Their slow development, small litters and overall low productivity contribute to the sensitivity of the species to habitat changes and disruption.

#### Distribution:



Range Map ©2000 BLM

The red tree vole is endemic to the moist coniferous forests of Western Oregon and the Northwestern portion of California. Their range is estimated to cover about 16.3 million acres.