



BENT'S OLD FORT

RESOURCE BRIEF

Mammals

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Importance

The American Southwest may have the greatest diversity of mammal species in the country. Information, however, is lacking on most mammal species. Many of the mammals in the southwest, such as shrews, pocket gophers, and pikas, are vulnerable to local extirpation due to their having geographic ranges that may be restricted to a single mountain top or other isolated island of habitat. Concern is also increasing for several species of mammals adaptive to arid habitats, such as kangaroo rats and pocket mice, and for several species of bats, many of which are now considered sensitive species.

Status and Trends

Prior to 2001, few inventories had examined vertebrate species, including mammals, at Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site (BEOL). However, biological inventories conducted by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program in 2001 and 2002 targeted the site's mammals in all areas of BEOL. The inventories provide baseline information for future inventory and monitoring efforts. The surveys documented 21 species, 38% of those on a master list of mammals for the site. Figure 1 shows the number of species of small mammals ($\leq 400g$), medium-sized mammals ($>400g$ and $\leq 50kg$), and large mammals

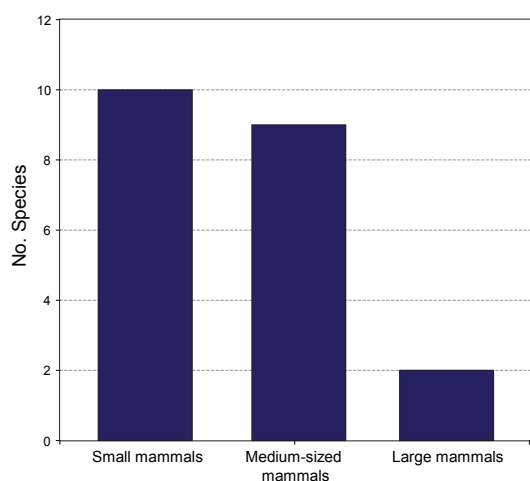


Figure 1. Number of mammal species in each category recorded during 2001 & 2002 surveys at Bent's Old Fort NHS.



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Desert cottontail

($>50kg$) documented. Small mammals caught in the greatest numbers were the deer mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*), Hispid cotton rat (*Sigmodon hispidus*), white-throated woodrat (*Neotoma albigula*), and Hispid pocket mouse (*Chaetodipus hispidus*), respectively. The most commonly observed medium-sized mammals were the desert cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) and the black-tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*); other species observed include the raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), and common muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*). The mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) and white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) were the only large mammals documented during the inventory. Bats were also seen during sampling, but they avoided capture and were not identified.

Discussion

Many of the species on the BEOL mammal master list would not be expected to be found on-site for various reasons (e.g., an adequate amount of suitable habitat is not available, or more costly methods would have been more effective at documenting wide-ranging and/or elusive species [e.g., many carnivores]). NPS staff and volunteers could increase the number of species documented at BEOL by finding and vouchering animal carcasses, skulls, tracks, scats, and other signs.



PHOTO: JOHN GOOD

Deer mouse

