

Feral February Episode 7 – Keeping one jump ahead

Description

Throughout the month of February, which I am calling “Feral February,” I am going to do something a little bit different – I’m going to create a series of theme posts every week day about my favourite things in the world: Animals.

Today’s animal is Merriam’s kangaroo rat!

Rats and other rodents get a bit of a bad rap, especially the ones found around the house. But those are only one or two species of rats, and there are many more rodents found around the world – including the beaver, hamster, and lemming.

Merriam’s kangaroo rat, named after famed American zoologist and naturalist Clinton Hart Merriam, is only a few inches in length, with a long tufted tail that can easily be as long, if not longer, than the length of the body. It also possesses large back legs and feet, like the kangaroo that it was partially named after, that propel it across the sand of the southwestern United States at great speed. But unlike other rodents, which run, Merriam kangaroo rats hop and jump, just like a kangaroo, and use their tail for balance.



Merriam’s kangaroo rat. Photo courtesy of Baiken. [Source](#).

Most kangaroo rats, and Merriam's is no exception, are nocturnal. Because of their small size, they tend to avoid the heat of the day and hunt for seeds in darkness.

Within their cheeks, they have pouches used to store food while they are out gathering, returning to their burrow every so often to eat a little and save the rest for later.

These animals also maintain extremely complex burrows systems, with multiple entrances/exits, so that protection from predators is never too far away while out gathering food. These burrows are also well-organized, with separate chambers for babies, sleeping, and food storage.

Daily dose of trivia:

Merriam's kangaroo rats can jump as far as six feet, and thanks to their tails, can even change direction in mid-air, as the tail acts as a rudder to help steer the animal.

Category

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Tags

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