



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Sacramento Fish & Wildlife Office  
Species Account  
RIPARIAN BRUSH RABBIT  
*Sylvilagus bachmani riparius*



CLASSIFICATION: Endangered  
Federal Register 65:8881; February 23, 2000  
[http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/federal\\_register/fr3524.pdf](http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/federal_register/fr3524.pdf)

CRITICAL HABITAT: None designated

RECOVERY PLAN: Final  
Recovery plan for the upland species of the San Joaquin Valley, California, September 30, 1998  
[http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/recovery\\_plan/980930a.pdf](http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/recovery_plan/980930a.pdf)  
[Visit our riparian brush rabbit recovery page](#)



In a partnership with the Bob Gallo family, the Service and the Endangered Species Recovery Program at CSU-Stanislaus released more than two dozen captive-bred rabbits into the wild. The new releases on privately owned ranch land mark the beginning of an effort to establish a new self-sustaining population rabbits in their native habitat along rivers in the San Joaquin Valley.  
[News Release](#)

## DESCRIPTION

The riparian brush rabbit is a medium to small cottontail in the Leporidae family. Its colors vary from dark brown to gray above to white underneath. Adult rabbits are about 300 to 375 millimeters long (about 11 to 13 inches). They weigh 500 to 800 grams (1 to 2 pounds).

There are 13 subspecies of brush rabbit, distributed from the Columbia River to the tip of Baja California. The riparian subspecies can be distinguished by its relatively pale color, gray sides and darker back. When viewed from above, its cheeks protrude outward rather than being straight or concave, as in the other subspecies. Brush rabbits can be distinguished from desert cottontails by their smaller, inconspicuous tail and uniformly colored ears (i.e., no black tips).

Habitat for the riparian brush rabbit consists of riparian communities dominated by willow thickets (*Salix spp.*), California wild rose (*Rosa californica*), Pacific blackberry (*Rubus vitifolius*), wild grape (*Vitis californica*), Douglas' coyote bush (*Baccharis douglasii*) and various grasses.

Brush rabbits have small home ranges that usually conform to the size of available brushy habitat. Avoiding large openings in shrub cover, they frequent small clearings, where they feed on a variety of herbaceous vegetation, including grasses, sedges, clover, forbs, shoots and leaves. Grasses and other herbs are their most important food. Green clover (*Trifolium wormskioldii*) is their favorite.

Riparian brush rabbits breed from around January to May, putting them at a disadvantage to desert cottontails, which breed year round. Litters average three or four young, with each female can have three or four litters per year.

Find lots more information in the [Draft Habitat Assessment Guidelines & Survey Protocol](#) for the Riparian Brush Rabbit and the Riparian Woodrat

## DISTRIBUTION

Because the subspecies was not described until after it is believed to have been extirpated from most of its historic range, definitive information on its former distribution is lacking. Today, the only known native populations are at Caswell Memorial State Park on the Stanislaus River and along an overflow channel of the San Joaquin River.

## THREATS

Potential threats to this species include habitat conversion to agriculture, wildfire, disease, predation, flooding, clearing of riparian vegetation, and the use of rodenticides.

There has been a statewide reduction of riparian communities by nearly 90 percent due to elimination and modification of riparian forests along valley floor river systems to urban, commercial, and agricultural development, wood cutting, reclamation and flood control activities, heavy groundwater pumping, river channelization, dam building, and water diversion. The species is at risk from the lack of elevated mounds with protective cover to serve as flood refuges within remaining riparian habitat.

## REFERENCES FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

NOTE: There is a special riparian brush rabbit species account for 4th, 5th & 6th grade students: [www.fws.gov/sacramento/es/animal\\_spp\\_acct/riparian\\_brush\\_rabbit\\_kf.htm](http://www.fws.gov/sacramento/es/animal_spp_acct/riparian_brush_rabbit_kf.htm)

Basey, G.E. 1990. Distribution, ecology, and population status of the riparian brush rabbit (*Sylvilagus bachmani riparius*). Turlock, CA: California State Univ., Stanislaus. M.S. thesis.

McQuillen, H. 2003. [Progress in riparian brush rabbit recovery](#) (PDF). Endangered Species Bulletin. 28(4):32-33.

Sandoval, T.M., D.F. Williams, and G.W. Colliver Endangered Species Recovery Program. [Species account](#)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1998. *Recovery plan for the upland species of the San Joaquin Valley, California*, September 30. 1998. Portland, OR.

Credits: Riparian brush rabbit photo, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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