

Riparian Brush Rabbit (*Sylvilagus bachmani riparius*)

Status - Federal: Endangered California: Endangered

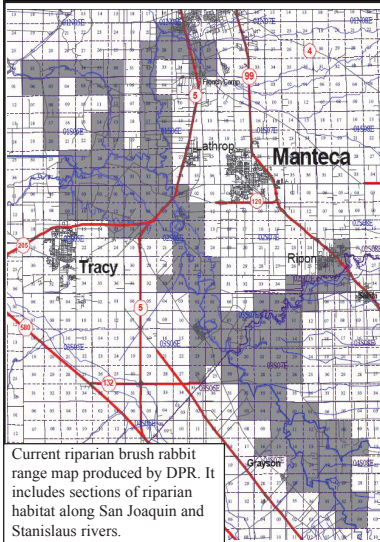


The riparian brush rabbit is a medium-sized (about 1 foot long, weighs less than 2 lbs) cottontail. It can be distinguished from the desert cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*), by size and some coloration patterns. The tail of the brush rabbit is small and inconspicuous compared to the desert cottontail, and its ears are uniformly colored. The tail of the desert cottontail shows much white viewed from behind, and the inner tips of the ears are black. When looked at from above, the cheeks of the brush rabbit protrude whereas those of the desert cottontail are slightly concave. Riparian brush rabbits are known to have occurred in riparian forests along the San Joaquin River and Stanislaus rivers in Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties. They probably also -

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- occupied streamside communities along the other tributaries of the San Joaquin River on the Valley floor. Currently, they are known to occur in Caswell Memorial State Park, and nearby riparian areas along the San Joaquin and Stanislaus rivers, in parts of San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties.

Habitat & Behavior: Historically, riparian brush rabbits inhabited dense, brushy areas of Valley riparian forests, marked by extensive thickets of wild rose (*Rosa* spp.), blackberries (*Rubus* spp.), and willows (*Salix* spp.).

Thriving mats of low-growing vines and shrubs serve as ideal living sites where they build tunnels under and through the vegetation. For the most part, riparian brush rabbits remain

hidden under protective shrub cover. They seldom venture more than 1 meter (3.3 ft) from cover and refrain from too much movement. They are active throughout the year, and especially during twilight hours near dawn and dusk. Depending on the season, they are active from two to four hours.

Food: Riparian brush rabbits feed at the edges of shrub cover rather than in large openings. Their diet consists of herbaceous vegetation, such as grasses, sedges, clover, forbs, and buds, bark, and leaves of woody plants.

Reproduction: Breeding occurs from January to May. Although males are capable of breeding all year long, females are only receptive during this period. After 27 to 30 days, the female gives birth to a litter of 3 or 4. In favorable years, females may produce 3 or 4 litters, resulting in 9 to 16 young. It is not until 4 or 5 months after birth that they are mature. Although these rabbits have a high reproductive rate, five out of six rabbits typically do not survive to the next breeding season.