

12(6): 3p July-August 1985.

CONSIDERATIONS OF THE RODENT FAUNA
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The Republic of Panama has a rich and diverse rodent fauna consisting of about 54 species segregated into six families. They represent 27% of the total mammalian species estimated for this country, and their number is superseded only by the bats, of which there are around 105 recorded species.

In Panama the medical and economical importance of rodents is remarkable, since some species are involved in the ecology of Chagas' disease, leishmaniasis, toxoplasmosis, echinococcosis, leptospirosis and other health problems affecting humans. It is also known that many of them are important agricultural pests and consume a variety of crops. The destruction caused by the commensal rodents is not only limited to food material but also involves the deterioration of buildings, furniture, clothing, books and other items. The domestic rats are also predators of eggs and chickens causing much damage in poultry farms; in addition, other animals raised for food or industrial purposes may be destroyed by them.

Despite the negative facts outlined above, the positive role of rodents, as a group, in the ecological network of this nation is significant. Some of them contribute to the natural restoration of forests as disseminators of seeds. Many species represent food of wild carnivores, snakes, birds of prey and other predators, while a variety of them are also an important source of animal protein for indians, peasants and other persons.

Rodents are found in pristine and disturbed forests, cultivated fields, grasslands, along river and lake shores, as well as near other natural sources of water. However, the domestic rodents are unwelcome dwellers in the proximity of mankind. Most of our rodents are very shy, nocturnal creatures that sleep during the daytime or

are slightly active under piles of leaves and sticks, behind fallen logs, inside burrows or in tree holes and other areas offering them shelter and security. Our squirrels, however, display much activity during daylight, adding charm and cheerful sounds to the forest landscape.

Nature has also bestowed some of our rodents with exceptional attributes. Among the more remarkable of them is the Capybara, *Hydrochaeris hydrochaeris*, a semi-aquatic animal which is the world's largest rodent species, and the Climbing Rat, *Tylomys watsoni*, which is illustrated here, an arboreal species provided with an efficient prehensile tail.



At the present time in this country, the future of many indigenous rodents and other animals is seriously threatened mainly by the steady reduction of the forests through clearing and burning for crops, habitations, roads, cattle raising and other purposes. It is urgent to develop an effective national environmental education program in order to at least minimize the accelerated rate of the destruction of nature.