



Guardians of the Dunes



Beach mice forage for food and dig their burrows in the dunes at night and rest in them during the day.

Beach Mice

Beach mice are small nocturnal mammals that play a key role in beach dune ecology and are found only on the beaches of Alabama and Florida. Two sub-species of beach mice are found in Gulf Islands National Seashore: The Santa Rosa Beach Mouse and the Perdido Key Beach Mouse. Seldom seen during the day, the beach mouse has large eyes which enable it to come out at night to look for food.

Little Mouse, Big Benefit

Beach mice live in burrows, which they dig in the sand dunes of gulf coast beaches. They sleep, reproduce, and store their favorite foods such as the seeds and fruits of plants that grow on the dunes. Other animals, including camel crickets and gopher frogs will use these burrows as their own. When the mice move around the dunes at night they drop and spread seeds through their feces across the dunes, helping to grow the dune plants whose roots keep the sand in place. Beach mice play an integral role in the coastal dune ecosystems throughout Florida and Alabama beaches and barrier islands. The coastal dune ecosystem, in turn, protects human development from storms.



Walking on sand dunes causes them to crumble, erodes the vegetation, and cause beach mouse burrows to collapse.

Mice in Peril

Beach mice are in danger of becoming extinct due to both natural and man-made threats. Hurricanes often sweep over their barrier island habitats, washing away the sand dunes, flooding their burrows, wiping out their food source, and drowning the mice. Coastal development impacts pristine beach mouse habitat by turning it into a fragmented landscape with condos and hotels. Beach mice are natural prey for owls, snakes, bobcats, and other native predators, however; non-native predators, such as domestic cats, foxes, and coyotes increase the predation pressures by prowling the dunes searching for unsuspecting mice. Artificial lighting from hotels, condominiums, homes and businesses light up the beach at night, interfering with the beach mouse's usual nighttime activity. People walk on the sand dunes, destabilizing them and destroying their burrows.

They Need Your Help!

You can help protect beach mice and ensure they survive. The beach is no place for cats and dogs, always keep dogs on a leash and keep cats indoors. Turn off your lights at night, so the mice can forage in the dark, as normal. If you live near the beach, grow native plants in your yard to encourage sand dune formation and improve habitat for all coastal species, maybe a beach mouse will even move in. **Most importantly, don't walk on the dunes!**



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