



BROWN LEMMING

Lemmus trimucronatus



Appearance

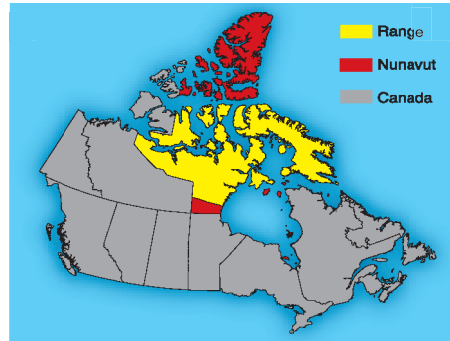
The brown lemming is a small, soft rodent. It has a reddish brown back and rump with a grey head and shoulders. During the winter its coat is longer and greyer. It has a plump little body, small head and appears to have no neck. It has beady little eyes and its small ears are almost hidden by its fur. It also has a small tail. The claws on its furry feet are adapted for digging. The soles of its feet and its toes are covered with long stiff bristles. Considering the size of the brown lemming, it has a very large skull. The average length of a female is 14.5cm and average weight is 68g. The average length for the adult male is 15 cm and average weight is 78g.

Food And Feeding

Brown lemmings feed mostly on tender grass shoots. In addition, they eat tundra grass and sedge, as well as moss, bark and twigs from dwarf willows and dwarf birch, berries, lichens and roots.

Behaviour

Although lemmings live close together in colonies, they are not always very nice to each other. During mating season and when populations are very high, they fight amongst themselves. They squeal, box and may even flip themselves onto their backs and try to bite their opponent. They swim easily, floating high in the water due to their soft, thick fur. They remain active during the 24-hour daylight periods, digging tunnels through the moss and tundra. During the winter, they are active beneath the snow. Spring and autumn are dangerous times for them as they are more exposed to their many predators.



Range

The ideal dwelling place for brown lemmings are wet tundra areas covered with grasses and sedges. They also live along stream-banks, lakeshores and grassy slopes, meadows and rocky places.

Habitat

The brown lemming can be found in the southern Baffin region, the northern Kivalliq region and the southwestern Kitikmeot region.

Reproduction

Females may have 1 to 3 litters a year. During high litter seasons, breeding may take place under the snow in the winter as well as during the summer from mid-June to September. After a gestation period of 23 days the female gives birth to between 4 and 9 young.

Status Survival and Management

According to the Nunavut Wild Species Report 2000, the status of brown lemmings is considered secure. The populations' peaks and falls are directly related to a lack of food brought on by the large populations in the peak years. Brown lemmings generally live 1 or 2 years in the wild and up to 3 years in captivity. Predators in Nunavut include carnivores, birds and even caribou.

Did You Know?

Any opening that is big enough for a lemming's head is big enough for the whole body. Although they have fat little bodies, they can squeeze through amazingly small openings.

