Natal Dispersal Of Juvenile Pygmy Rabbits: Preliminary Results[TWS]

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Natal dispersal is an important aspect in maintaining wildlife populations. Habitat fragmentation and a tendency for populations to exhibit local extinctions make knowledge of dispersal capabilities of pygmy rabbits (*Brachylagus idahoensis*) critical for conservation planning. However, due to logistical constraints, natal dispersal has not been studied in pygmy rabbits. We studied movements of juveniles from shortly after emergence from

natal burrows (May-July 2004) through early January 2005 as part of an ongoing study of juvenile dispersal. We trapped 12 males and 14 females at approximately 0 to 4 weeks post emergence. We attached 1-g glue-on radio transmitters to fur between the shoulder blades. Glue-on transmitters were replaced with 5-g radio collars after juveniles reached body mass of ~300 g. Individuals were radio-tracked twice/week until mid August, after which rabbits were tracked once every two weeks. Preliminary data suggested that both male and female juveniles tended to be relatively sedentary until about 6-8.5 wks of age when many made rapid long-distance movements ranging from 0.8 to 6.2 km for males and 2.9 to11.8 km for females. However, movements of several juveniles of both sexes during that time period were $\leq$ 200 m. Median natal dispersal distances for males and females >8.5 weeks of age were 1.1 and 4.8 km, respectively. Mortality rates for males and females through January 2005 were 67 and 64 percent, respectively. Although preliminary, these results indicated that pygmy rabbits regularly disperse farther than previous movement data suggest, increasing the potential for connections among populations.