

Arizona Trip Report

By Ellen Linton

In terms of top mammalwatching spots in the US, Arizona is surely in the top three. With it's incredible mammal list and the accessibility of mammalwatching in the state, it is a must-visit destination for any mammalwatcher. So of course my excitement could not be contained as we planned our trip to explore Arizona this past June, plus a bit of Nevada and a teensy detour to New Mexico. My targets for the trip were: **Ringtail**, **Collared Peccary**, **White-nosed Coati**, **Kit Fox**, **White-sided Jackrabbit**, plus both **Hooded** and **Hog-nosed Skunk**.

Tonopah:

We saw our first mammal of the trip, **Pronghorn**, shortly after leaving Reno plus a few more along the highway to Tonopah. We also made a stop at Miller's Rest Stop, but the only mammal was a **White-tailed Antelope Squirrel**, which my dad said he'd seen often near the restrooms on prior birding excursions. More birding at the Tonopah high school produced several **Desert Cottontails**. It was nice to get a few species on the trip list, but I must admit it was rather unexciting mammalwatching. Luckily, Tonopah had much more to offer once night fell. We started our night drive on Veterans Memorial Highway and began the night with a **Coyote**. We then drove along Crescent Dunes Road and saw a **Great Basin Pocket Mouse** just off the side of the road. Then we had a great look at a **Southern Grasshopper Mouse** which froze in it's spot in a bush once we spotlit it. Unfortunately the bloody bush was in the way of the photos, but rodent photography is hard enough, so we'll count this as a win. After that sighting, we drove on to the end of the road and then walked around the dunes there hoping to find a **Pale Kangaroo Mouse**. We did have a great encounter with a confiding **Merriam's Kangaroo Rat** we found in

the thermal. We then saw another **Southern Grasshopper Mouse** although this one had quite the scare. After we spotlit it, it realized it had run into the dunes and had no cover. And so began a spectacle of this tiny mouse sprinting in random directions but instead of evading us, it ran into us! At one point it was practically on my shoe and of course I had not grabbed my camera in the heat of the chase. Eventually, the poor guy just gave up and stood still in the spotlight. I imagine it was quite perplexed when we just stared at it and then walked off. We then had a **Kit Fox** along Pole Line Road, which was an immediate highlight of the trip for me as this wasn't just a most wanted mammal for the trip, but one of my most wanted North American mammals. There was a full moon on this very successful night, perhaps it played a role. The next day we added a **Gray Fox** to the trip list after spotting it at the high school.



Merriam's Kangaroo Rat, courtesy of Alexander Linton



Southern Grasshopper Mouse, courtesy of Alexander Linton

Mount Charleston:

The drive to Mount Charleston from Tonopah was quite long, and it was made even longer by the birders incessant need to stop and stare at birds. Things picked up once we got into Mount Charleston and we first visited Deer Creek Picnic Area looking for **Palmer's** and **Panamint Chipmunks**. Both my dad and Alex managed to see a **Palmer's Chipmunk** which I did not get onto in time. I did see another chipmunk, but it was too brief and distant to be sure of

the ID. Our chances were hurt as we only arrived in the evening, and the sun was starting to set during our chipmunk crusade.

And so we returned the next morning and quickly found two **Panamint Chipmunks**. One thing to note about this area is that the parking lot for the picnic area is across the road from the entrance. Next to the parking lot is a valley and a bridge runs across it which you drive over to access this area. It was in this valley directly next to the parking lot that we saw the **Panamint Chipmunks**. Once we actually entered the picnic area, we saw **Palmer's Chipmunks** and recorded seven of them. We also saw a lot of **Common Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels**. Dad and Alex also spotted a **Common Rock Squirrel** up high in the rocks. We tried a night drive in the area but found nothing except some **Mule Deer**. Now I am going to admit something scandalous. I did have a bird ambition on this trip, and I was as eager to see this bird as I was to see my target mammals. I do think I deserve some leeway on this bird as it is simply the greatest bird to ever exist. And that bird is the Burrowing Owl. I had never seen one, not even in a zoo, and there had been many opportunities for me to spot one but alas, they were never there. So arriving to Rainbow Owl Preserve and seeing the Burrowing Owl in all his majesty standing up, with eyes that looked like he'd witnessed every horror of mankind and suffered PTSD from it was simply incredible. I named him Thompson, and it was a highlight of the trip.



Common Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel, courtesy of Paul Linton



Palmer's Chipmunk, courtesy of Paul Linton



Thompson the Burrowing Owl, courtesy of Paul Linton

Phoenix:

From Las Vegas, on we drove to Phoenix. I had finally arrived in Arizona and was immediately regretting my decisions when I realized the temperature was 120 degrees. Kill me now. Still I braved the Desert Botanical Gardens to see a **Round-tailed Ground Squirrel**. My journey was perilous, from hiding in the bathrooms as they were the only building with air-conditioning to walking down paved paths while hallucinating oases. Still I saw the **Round-tailed Ground Squirrel** (along with several adorable baby quails) and my victory over Phoenix

was both sweet and short-lived as I immediately began the long walk back to the bathrooms and the greatest invention in the history of humankind: AC.



Round-tailed Ground Squirrels, courtesy of Paul Linton



Round-tailed Ground Squirrel, courtesy of Alexander Linton

Tucson:

We had only made a brief stop in Phoenix before carrying on to Tucson. We got out early the next morning and visited Sweetwater Wetlands. This is a well-known site amongst mammalwatchers because of the opportunity to spot **Arizona Cotton Rats**. And this location did not disappoint! We saw a **Cotton Rat** within a minute of arriving, hanging out near the reeds. We continued to wander around and saw several **Desert Cottontails** and three **Coyotes**. I was also hoping to run into a **Bobcat** but no luck here. There was another **Round-tailed Ground Squirrel** in the parking lot of the wetlands along with two more **Arizona Cotton Rats**! A very successful morning which continued on our visit to Mount Lemmon. We parked at the Rose Canyon public

parking which is past all the campsites and then quickly found an **Abert's Squirrel** near the amphitheater. We then walked to the nearest campsite from the parking lot and saw five **Cliff Chipmunks**. We also saw four more **Abert's Squirrels** in the forest behind the campsite although they were much more skittish than the chipmunks. Our last location to hit for the day was Colossal Cave Mountain Park and we took their standard cave tour. Our guide showed us a large group of **Townsend's Big-eared Bats** which were so cute I thought I might melt into a puddle from the sheer force of their adorable faces. While watching the bats, one started flying around which lacked the big ears of the Townsend's. Our guide told us that along with the Townsend's, the other most common bat that roosted in the caves is the **Cave Myotis** and they were sometimes huddled up with the Townsend's. He didn't want to shine his flashlight near them too long because he didn't want to disturb them so we couldn't do a proper scan, but we felt confident that this bat must've been a **Cave Myotis** due to the lack of prominent ears. There have been other bats roosting in the cave, but our guide said they were much more occasional, so I've gone with probability and I'm recording it as a **Cave Myotis**. The cave tour was both very fun and interesting, but I was most excited about my five lifers in one day!



Arizona Cotton Rat, courtesy of Alexander Linton



Arizona Cotton Rat, courtesy of Paul Linton



Cliff Chipmunk, courtesy of Paul Linton

Madera Canyon

Before we visited Madera, we made two stops. First, we visited Patagonia Lake State Park, and we came here to, you guessed it, bird. But we did see two **Rock Squirrels** and several **White-tailed Deer**. Other than that, the most interesting event that occurred was being assaulted by several loud and psychopathic bugs and I truly considered jumping into the lake to end my misery.

Next was Paton's Center for Hummingbirds. There were tons of pocket gopher burrows here, but I either couldn't access them, or the accessible ones were older looking. I tried opening two, but no gopher came to seal the hole. We did see both an **Arizona Gray Squirrel** and a **Rock Squirrel** at their bird feeders. After chatting with the very friendly volunteers, they let us know they often saw **White-nosed Coati** along Blue Haven road and that **Collared Peccaries** often cooled down in the nearby creek. We did try for both but didn't see either. I also ended up with heat exhaustion which was just so fun. Arizona was really living up to the stereotype of being so hot it could boil you alive.

Finally, we arrived in Madera Canyon. The owner was very helpful and put up a feeder that night for me to stake out in hopes of seeing a **Ringtail**. He also put a feeder for the bats, and they were so close to my head I could feel the wind from their wings! The two species regularly recorded here are **Mexican Long-tongued** and **Lesser Long-nosed Bat**, so I've recorded both of them based on past records. The owner also gave me some great info. He said Coatis were hit or miss this season and that he had seen less skunks and **Yellow-nosed Cotton Rats** than usual. He also informed me of a huge **Puma** he'd caught in a camera trap near his house a few weeks ago. He then proceeded to strike fear into my heart when he told me about Cinnamon. Apparently, Cinnamon the Black Bear was a local menace who regularly showed up to his feeders and tore

them down in the dead of night. Considering I was planning on hanging out next to said feeders in the dead of night, I dearly hoped I wouldn't run into him. His last piece of advice to me was about the **Ringtail**. He said I should be as quiet as possible, told me which area it would likely enter from, and to light up my spotlight directly on the animal while covering it a little to see how it handled the light. Then he left me alone as the birders were off chasing a rare nightjar. I admit it was very eerie standing there in darkness completely alone, but I rationalized that everything was fine, and a bit of nerves were worth it for an animal as cool as a **Ringtail**. Well all my careful **Ringtail** plans were foiled a few hours after I'd begun my stakeout. Cinnamon had decided that tonight's the night and rocked up in all his glory. There I was standing quiet as a mouse by the **Ringtail's** preferred feeder, when I notice out of the corner of my eye a big cinnamon colored mass ambling towards said feeder. To add some context to this, the Madera feeders are slightly lower than the viewing platform to the feeders but not by much and you could easily walk up from the feeders to the viewing area. This was something I rapidly realized as Cinnamon continued his walk towards me. I carefully turned around and walked away calmly, and once I was past the reception I booked it back to my casita. Meanwhile in the birder's world, they had found an **Antelope Jackrabbit** and seen a **Desert Red Bat**, so happy days for them. I recounted my tale to them when they came back and they promised they would stay with me the next night, because obviously I had to try for the **Ringtail** again.

The next morning began with my dad and I getting up early and heading to the feeders looking for **Yellow-nosed Cotton Rats**. All we saw was an **Arizona Gray Squirrel** and a **Rock Squirrel**. The rest of the day was quiet until our dusk drive along East Box Canyon Road, which is where we saw **Antelope Jackrabbit**. After we got back from our drive, a different but younger **Black Bear** was hanging out in the feeders. We took the owner's advice and threw rocks near it

to scare it off. Initially this worked in scaring it to jump onto a tree and bear hug it, but it eventually ran off. We did another **Ringtail** stakeout but didn't see it 😞 At least dad and Alex had fun watching the bats they'd missed the night before. We ended up doing a night drive after our stakeout and found some night roosting **Pallid Bats** in some bathrooms.



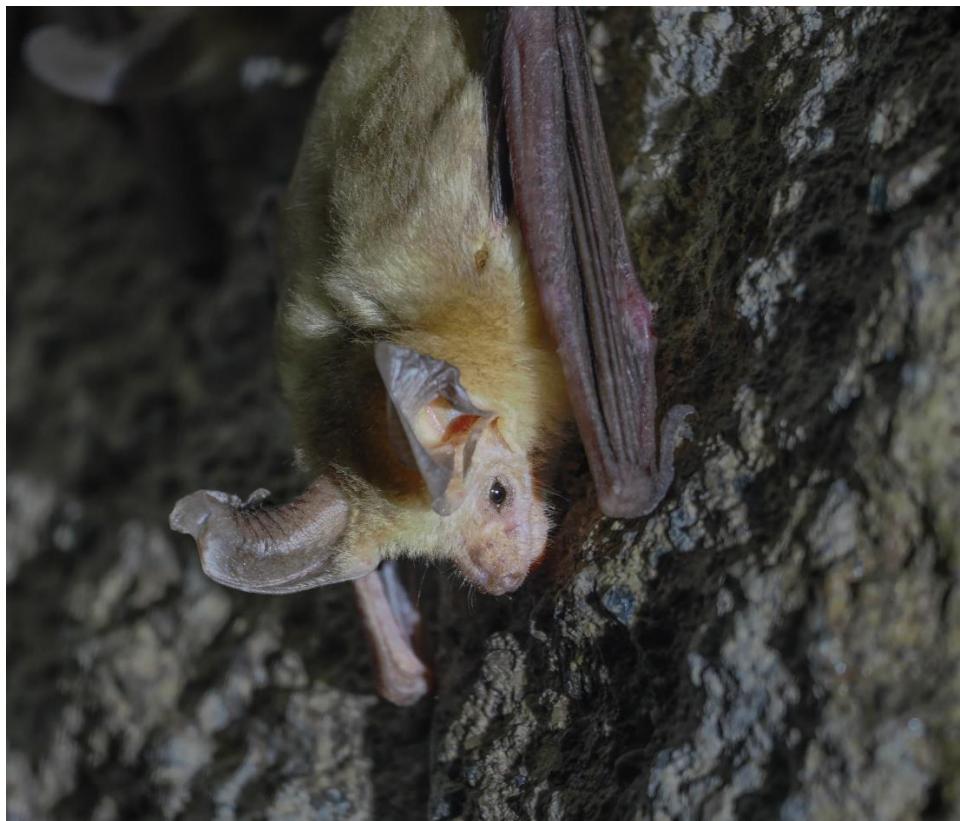
Antelope Jackrabbit, courtesy of Paul Linton



Arizona Gray Squirrel, courtesy of Alexander Linton



American Black Bear, courtesy of Paul Linton



Pallid Bat, courtesy of Alexander Linton



Common Rock Squirrel, courtesy of Paul Linton

Chiricahuas:

Before we visited the Chiricahuas, we spent some time in Sierra Vista. This didn't add to the mammal list at all with the exception of a pocket gopher. Dad and Alex were birding at Ash Canyon and saw a **Fulvous Pocket Gopher**, a recent split from Botta's. I came back with them and opened up the gopher's tunnel, but he never returned. I wasn't too upset about it since I had seen Botta's and it wasn't split at the time, but the hope was that I'd see another one during the trip as I assumed they would be split.

We then carried on to the Chiricahuas, and we stayed at Four Bar Cottage, which was a really nice place and very close to Cave Creek. The owner chatted with us about mammals and

told us about the pond he'd made due to the severe drought hitting the area. My dad went for a wander around and saw a **Desert Cottontail** and a **Black-tailed Jackrabbit**. We went night driving along South Cave Creek Road and around Sunny Flats Campground. We also drove up South Fork trying for a **Ringtail**. We didn't see anything mammalian on this portion of the drive although we did encounter a Whiskered Screech-Owl. We decided to drive up to the Southwest Research Station and then drove along Herb Martyr Road. We found a **Robust Cottontail** along Herb Martyr, and I see why it is named Robust because it was a bloody big cottontail. Then we drove back to the station and on the road alongside the station we saw a **Hooded Skunk**! Returning to South Cave Creek Road, we saw both a **Striped** and another **Hooded Skunk**. We also tried our luck at Stewart Campground for **Hog-nosed Skunk** but didn't see anything. On our drive back to the cottages, we watched carefully for **Banner-tailed Kangaroo Rats**, as we were staying right by where Venkat Sankar had seen one, but we didn't see any rats at all.

The next day was an early morning drive which produced fifteen **Desert Cottontails** and four **Black-tailed Jackrabbits** along West Portal Road. Along with this were quails galore which I did enjoy because quails are definitely winning the world's dumbest bird contest. They are outrageously delightful. Anyway, we turned onto South Cave Creek Road and stumbled upon nine **Collared Peccaries**. I was especially excited about them as they were not only a lifer but also a family lifer for me. We continued to Stewart Campground but only saw one **Cliff Chipmunk**. Dad and Alex went birding along South Fork Trail and saw a **Mexican Fox Squirrel**. Darn it. Next we visited a colony of **Harris's Antelope Squirrels** that we'd found on Inaturalist but didn't see any. My dad did try and walk in to the thorny plants to see if he could spot any and got a lot of thorns stuck in his shirt so that's fun. Once dusk came I grew extremely excited. It was time to go looking for a **White-sided Jackrabbit** on the road to Animas. Except

the first thunderstorms of the season rolled in that very night and the road became impassable. There were also several signs along the road warning us not to enter when flooded and prevent our deaths so that definitely deterred us quite a bit. We ended up seeing both a **Striped Skunk** and a **Silky Pocket Mouse** on the drive back so not a total bust.

The next day, I made the mistake of sleeping in while the birders headed out. Surely they wouldn't see anything good I naively thought to myself. They ended up seeing a **Mexican Woodrat** in Paradise the bastards. The day was overcast, and it's noted in my field guide that sometimes woodrats come out in overcast weather and hang out by their dens. This was a major blow to me as this is a very rare species. But I had to live with my idiotic decision of sleeping. The day continued with another attempt at **Harris's Antelope Squirrel** which was yet again unsuccessful. We also spent a lot of time driving around looking for a **Mexican Fox Squirrel** but did not see one. The day was worsened when we stopped in to Cave Creek Ranch and discovered we'd missed the resident Coati by literally two minutes. We hung around vainly hoping he would come back but he never did. That night we attempted the road to Animas again. We did leave early this time so that we could evaluate the road conditions easily. We got really far down Cloverdale Road before being stopped by an impassable section filled with mud and a fallen tree just ten miles from the **White-sided Jackrabbits**. It had been a disappointing and frustrating day filled with misses, so I didn't have high hopes for our night drive back to Four Bar. But this turned out to be one of the best moments of the trip and it was so exciting. We saw a **Silky Pocket Mouse**, three **Banner-tailed Kangaroo Rats**, one **Merriam's/Ord's Kangaroo Rat**, a **Southern Deermouse**, and a **Chihuahuan Grasshopper Mouse**. There were many, many more rodents we couldn't identify but we were pleased as punch with the ones we could. Thermal imagers are truly a game changer. The night continued to get better featuring two **Kit Foxes**, a

Bobcat, and a **Badger**. As for something perplexing, Alex and I got out the car and walked out to some rodent burrows in the hopes of tracking them down. We didn't but we did hear what could only be described as mournful wailing. According to my field guide, **Puma's** can make such a sound so I'm assuming that's what we heard. After I read that fun fact, I was extra happy that the wailing had been very distant.

Next was another day, another attempt at **Harris's Antelope Squirrel** and yet again, another failure. We returned to dad and Alex's **Mexican Woodrat** spot as it was overcast again but didn't see any woodrats this time. After that, we walked along the South Fork Trail to track down a **Mexican Fox Squirrel** which we finally found, and in very exciting news it was my 200th mammal! We did another night drive this time along the road to Paradise in hopes of finding a **Ringtail**. No luck, but we did see a **Kit Fox** hunting a **Desert Cottontail**, another **Kit Fox** running along the road, and a **Hooded Skunk**. We continued to night drive this time along Cave Creek Road and saw five **Brush Mice**. We tried at Stewart Campground for the **Hog-nosed Skunk** but nothing again. The next day yielded a triumphant moment when I finally glimpsed a **Harris's Antelope Squirrel**. And then to top off the morning, we ran into the **White-nosed Coati** at Cave Creek Ranch. My view was of it's backside running away, but good enough for me. And then it was time to say goodbye to the Chiricahuas and continue our journey.



Banner-tailed Kangaroo Rat, courtesy of Alexander Linton



Mexican Fox Squirrel, courtesy of Paul Linton



Fulvous Pocket Gopher, courtesy of Paul Linton



Fulvous Pocket Gopher, courtesy of Alexander Linton



Collared Peccary, courtesy of Paul Linton

Flagstaff:

On the drive to Flagstaff, we stopped at Woods Canyon Lake to hopefully find **Gray-collared Chipmunk**. We saw a lot of **Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels** and happily a **Gray-collared Chipmunk**. We saw the chipmunk along the elevated path beginning at the visitor's parking lot and continuing alongside the lake. Just as an fyi, day visitors have to pay \$10 to enter and they only accept cash. Then it was onto Flagstaff.

We headed out early from Flagstaff and easily found **Gunnison's Prairie Dogs** at the Foxglen Trail. In fact, we saw a ton of them from the parking lot. Then we went to Kachina Village to try and track down a **Mogollon Vole**. We wandered around for a while but there was no evidence of rodent activity. From there, we drove to the Grand Canyon.



Common Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel, courtesy of Paul Linton



Gunnison's Prairie Dog, courtesy of Paul Linton

Grand Canyon:

We drove up to the Grand Canyon and saw some **Bison** along the entrance road. We visited the North Rim and saw loads of **Uinta Chipmunks**. There seems to be debate about whether **Colorado Chipmunk** also occurs here. I've recorded all our chipmunks here as Uinta, but I've included lots of chipmunk photos including one that might be Colorado and if someone has more info on the chipmunks at the Grand Canyon I would love to hear it. We also tried hard for **Fremont's Squirrel** here but never managed to track one down. We were walking on the trail to the campsite at the North Rim looking for **Fremont's Squirrel**, but we only saw some **Least Chipmunks**. I decided to turn back early and look around the North Rim some more while dad and Alex walked on. I was very glad about my decision because on the walk back I had a fabulous encounter with a **Fulvous Pocket Gopher**! It was running in and out of its burrow, unusual behavior for a pocket gopher, but it gave me an incredible look at this hilarious animal. Later we went night driving along BLM Road 1065 and saw **Merriam's/Ord's Kangaroo Rats** and happily two **Chisel-toothed Kangaroo Rats**, my target for this area.

We also made a brief detour to Zion National Park in Utah on our drive home, but we didn't see any mammals. We'd visited so dad and Alex could look for California Condors but discovered it is very difficult to see them once we'd arrived in the park. We left and visited another location to see the condors. Even I can admit the views from this spot were incredible and a condor is a great bird. I'll be linking the ebird trip list if you're interested in looking at the birds seen and you'll be able to find the condor location in there.

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/386241>. We only had one more new mammal for the trip which was some **Bighorn Sheep** we saw along the highway driving home. This was a nice last mammal as it was a lifer for Alex. <https://ebird.org/tripreport/386241>



Uinta Chipmunk (potentially Colorado), courtesy of Paul Linton



Uinta Chipmunk, courtesy of Paul Linton



California Condor (an objectively cool bird), courtesy of Paul Linton

Conclusion:

This trip was incredible with 52 species seen and 30 lifers for me. Arizona absolutely lived up to the hype, and this has been my most successful trip to date. My family and I had so much fun, and this is my favorite trip I've taken so far. The only targets I missed were **Ringtail**, **White-sided Jackrabbit**, and **Hog-nosed Skunk**. We only missed the jackrabbit due to bad luck with the weather, but we also were generally unlucky with **Ringtail** as I tried very hard for it. **Hog-nosed Skunk** was the most difficult of my targets, but I was still hoping to luck into one.

Happily, I'll be going back next May, and I'm determined to catch up on these species then. As always, if you have any questions feel free to email me at ellenlinton1212@gmail.com.

Trip List (Lifers in Bold):

1. Pronghorn
2. White-tailed Antelope Squirrel
3. Desert Cottontail
4. Coyote
5. Black-tailed Jackrabbit
- 6. Great Basin Pocket Mouse**
- 7. Southern Grasshopper Mouse**
8. Merriam's Kangaroo Rat
- 9. Kit Fox**
10. Northern Gray Fox
- 11. Panamint Chipmunk**
- 12. Palmer's Chipmunk**
13. Common Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel
14. Common Rock Squirrel
15. Mule Deer
- 16. Round-tailed Ground Squirrel**
- 17. Arizona Cotton Rat**
- 18. Abert's Squirrel**
- 19. Cliff Chipmunk**
- 20. Townsend's Big-eared Bat**
- 21. Cave Myotis**
22. White-tailed Deer
- 23. Arizona Gray Squirrel**
- 24. Fulvous Pocket Gopher**
- 25. Mexican Long-tongued Bat**
- 26. Lesser Long-nosed Bat**
27. American Black Bear
- 28. Harris's Antelope Squirrel**
29. Desert Red Bat
- 30. Antelope Jackrabbit**
- 31. Pallid Bat**
- 32. Robust Cottontail**
- 33. Hooded Skunk**
34. Striped Skunk
- 35. Collared Peccary**

- 36. Mexican Woodrat
- 37. Mexican Fox Squirrel**
- 38. Silky Pocket Mouse**
- 39. Southern Deermouse**
- 40. Chihuahuan Grasshopper Mouse**
- 41. Bobcat
- 42. Banner-tailed Kangaroo Rat**
- 43. American Badger
- 44. Brush Deermouse**
- 45. White-nosed Coati**
- 46. Gray-collared Chipmunk**
- 47. Gunnison's Prairie Dog**
- 48. American Bison
- 49. Uinta Chipmunk
- 50. Least Chipmunk
- 51. Chisel-toothed Kangaroo Rat**
- 52. Bighorn Sheep