



PEARY LAND COLLARED LEMMING

Dicrostonyx groenlandicus



Appearance

The Peary land collared lemming is the only rodent that turns white in the winter, at which time it looks like a big cottonball. It has wide feet with heavily furred soles and long stiff hairs sticking out around the toes. During the summer, its shoulders, chest and legs are light to dark brown. It has a grey back with a black stripe down the middle and a light brown belly. Its fur is long and thick. The average length for males and females is between 13 and 16 cm and the average weight is between 45 and 113g.

Food And Feeding

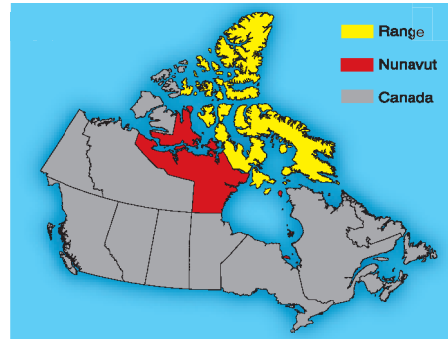
The collared lemming feeds mainly on dwarf willow leaves and forbs although it will also eat sedges, grasses, berries, buds and twigs. Clumps of willows may be completely stripped after a year of high lemming populations.

Behaviour

This species has many of the same behaviours as brown lemmings. For example, they also hop around and shadow box when cornered. Collared lemmings are active throughout the winter beneath the snow in their tunnels. During the summer they dig tunnels in the sod. These may be up to 2.5m long, between 10 and 20cm below ground and between 5 to 7.5cm in diameter. The family bonds are strong and both parents care for the young. The whole family usually stays together until the young reach sexual maturity, at which time fathers may mate with their daughters.

Range

The Peary land collared lemming inhabits the arctic tundra zone. In the summer, it lives in higher, rockier, drier areas than the brown lemming but this really depends on the moisture conditions.



Habitat

The Peary land collared lemming is found throughout the Baffin region and in the northeast portion of the Kitikmeot region.

Reproduction

The breeding season usually begins in early March and lasts until early September. However, during a short time when their snow tunnels melt and they are busy digging their summer tunnels, they may not breed. Under the right winter conditions, breeding may start as early as January. Females are very aggressive during the breeding period. Gestation is between 19 to 21 days but can be as long as 26 days due to delayed implantation. There are between 1 and 7 offspring with an average of 5 per litter. They are born blind and deaf and weigh about 3.8g. By the end of the second week their eyes and ears are functional and they appear above ground shortly after. Males are mature at 46 days, and females at 27 to 30 days.

Status Survival and Management

According to the Nunavut Wild Species 2000 report, the status of the collared lemming is considered undetermined. Few collared lemmings live more than a year in the wild and just over 3 years in captivity. Predators in Nunavut include carnivores and birds.

Other Species Found in Nunavut

Other species of lemmings found in different parts of Nunavut that differ in appearance and range but have many similarities to the Peary land collared lemming include the Victoria collared lemming and Richardson's collared lemming.

Did You Know?

Lemming tunnels include different chambers. The ones used for nesting are lined with dry grasses and sometimes feathers and muskox wool. Some chambers are used as toilets.

