short-tailed shrew

Blarina brevicauda

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Chordata - vertebrates
Class:	Mammalia
Order:	Insectivora
Family:	Soricidae

Features

The short-tailed shrew is between four and five inches long, including the tail. It is grayish-black with a short, furred tail. There are no external ears. The tiny, black eyes are capable of light perception, but probably see only 2/20 on an optician's scale compared to 20/20, which is normal for humans.

Natural History

The short-tailed shrew lives in forests and grasslands. It is extremely active and requires lots of food. Its diet includes insects, worms, birds, roots, nuts, and fruits. It is active day and night throughout the year. It makes "runs" above ground or tunnels underground. It is not a good climber but can swim. The senses of touch, smell, and hearing are extremely sensitive, while its vision is poor. Secretions from glands are used to mark territories. During periods of low temperatures, the shrew's body temperature, metabolism, and activity rates drop. It is believed that this shrew breeds from March through October. The gestation period is three weeks. Young are born pink and helpless and are placed in a nest of leaves and grasses.

The southern subspecies is found in the southwest corner of Iowa and the northern subspecies in the remainder of the state.

Habitats

bottomland forests

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

statewide

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001. *Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats* CD-ROM.