

# Species Spotlight

## Southern Grasshopper Mouse

**KINGDOM** Animalia  
**PHYLUM** Chordata  
**CLASS** Mammalia  
**ORDER** Rodentia  
**FAMILY** Muridae  
**GENUS** Onychomys  
**SPECIES** torridus

### *A Wolf in Mouse Clothing?*

illustration by Rachel Ivanyi

**A** WOLF, SHRUNKEN TO Lilliputian proportions, might find itself at home in the company of southern grasshopper mice.

These predatory rodents form family packs, maintaining territorial scent posts as they search for prey.

Grasshopper mice even howl like wolves, standing on hind legs, heads thrown back. Their ghostly, prolonged squeal wavers over southwestern desert scrub, often just before a kill, perhaps conveying information to other family members, perhaps in spontaneous delight.

Parents teach young how to hunt, sometimes stalking pocket and harvest mice—and then dispatching them with a swift bite to the neck. Coming across the outlandish clown beetle—standing on its head prepared to blast a foul liquid from repugnatorial glands—the southern grasshopper mouse is unfazed. In a quick snap of paws, it shoves the toxic abdomen of the beetle into the sand and then makes a leisurely meal of the more palatable head and thorax. While their diet does consist of many grasshoppers, even scorpions are not safe from the grasshopper mouse. With a practiced feint, the mouse circles its quarry, disables the stinger-bearing tail, and dines.

The behavior of this tiny carnivore has led ecologists to speculate that the dynamics of hunting are universal—regardless of size. ☾



*Text by Joshua Brown, Wild Earth's assistant editor. Rachel Ivanyi is a freelance illustrator in Tucson, Arizona. She specializes in natural history subjects, with an inordinate fondness for reptiles and amphibians. Her clients include National Geographic Magazine, Scientific American, the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, and The Nature Conservancy. These illustrations were created in graphite and colored pencil.*

