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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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MINIATURE DEER ARE FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

The rare, diminutive key deer--named for the Florida keys they inhabit--show an estimated population of 94 this year, the Fish and Wildlife Service announced today.

A recent census conducted by the Service revealed about 25 adults and 5 young on Big Pine Key, 21 adults and 2 young on Big Torch Key, and the following adults: 9 on No-name Key; 8 on Little Pine Key; 6 each on Middle Torch Key, Summerland Key, and Cudjoe Key; 4 on Ramrod Key; and 2 on Knockemdown Key.

Smallest of all American deer species, the key deer is about the size of a collie when full-grown. The average adult is 27 inches tall, 38 inches long, and weighs 30 pounds. The young are no bigger than cottontail rabbits.

Protection measures by the Fish and Wildlife Service and other conservation agencies have thus far saved these unique animals from extinction. Biologists claim, however, that a herd of 200 is the minimum that will assure survival of the species.

Once abundant on the keys, these tiny deer have suffered a decline in numbers over the years, due to illegal hunting, highway fatalities, and the general encroachment of civilization. Because the species can retain its identity only in the habitat provided by the Florida keys, no attempt has been made to transfer key deer to other localities. The establishment of new breeding colonies, a practice often used with rare animals, has thus been ruled out in connection with key deer conservation efforts.

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