

Chipmunk's disappearance signals changing Sierra

By Tom Knudson, Sacramento Bee

With button-brown eyes, striped cheeks and a bushy orange-black tail, the Inyo chipmunk has darted among the gnarled pines of the Sierra Nevada for centuries.

But it has apparently vanished.

"We have not been able to find it anywhere," said James Patton, a retired UC Berkeley professor of zoology who has scoured parts of the high Sierra over the past two years in search of the elusive species.

No one knows why – or when – the species vanished. There is talk about air pollution and competition from other chipmunk species. But most of the speculation centers on climate change, which has brought warming temperatures, earlier snowmelt and changing forest conditions to the region over the past century.

Read the whole story