



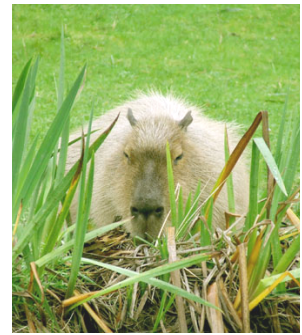
# CAPYBARA

## RODENTIA

**Family:** Hydrochaeridae

**Genus:** *Hydrochaeria*

**Species:** *hydrochaeris*



**Range:** Panama to NE Argentina east of the Andes

**Habitat:** near water in savannas, grasslands and rainforests

**Niche:** semi-aquatic diurnal herbivore

**Wild diet:** grasses and aquatic plants

**Zoo diet:** grass, fruits, vegetables, monkey and dog chow

**Life Span:** (Wild) 10

(Captivity) 12

**Sexual dimorphism:** male has highly developed scent gland on top of snout

**Location in SF Zoo:** Puente al sur

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## APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

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This is the largest of the living member of the rodents. Body is covered with long, coarse but sparsely haired coat. This coat is generally reddish brown to grayish on upper parts and yellowish brown on under-parts. Occasionally some black on face. Forelimbs are shorter than rear limbs. Head is relatively large and broad while ears are short and rounded. Muzzle is heavy and squared nose with an enlarged upper lip.

In a mature male a bare, raised area on top of snout contains greatly enlarged sebaceous glands to produce odorous secretions. There are four toes on front feet and three on hind feet that are slightly webbed and have short strong claws. Nostrils, eyes and ears are situated near top of head that allows the animal to remain submerged when swimming.

**Weight:** 110-154 lbs

**HRL:** 3.3-4.3 ft

**TL:** None

Incisors are large, white and shallowly grooved. They allow the animal to reach the shorter grasses. Due to the tooth ware of eating grasses the cheek teeth continue to grow throughout the animal's life.

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## STATUS & CONSERVATION

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In some areas they are hunted for meat and skins, or killed when competition with livestock. In other areas they are farmed, thus ensuring the protection of the wetlands in which they live thus protecting many of the other creatures that live there too. Overall, their population seems to be stable.

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## COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

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Infants and young produce a constant guttural purr. A coughing bark is given by the first member of the group to detect a predator. This cough is often repeated several times allowing for nearby animals to either stand alert or rush into the water.

During the wet season capybaras live in groups of up to 40 animals though 10 is the average adult group size. A typical group is comprised of a dominant male one or more females, several various aged young and a couple of subordinate males. Solitary male that try to enter a group are rebuffed by the groups males. Among males there is a hierarchy of dominance, maintained by aggressive interactions that consist of simple chases. Male anal glands are filled with easily detachable hairs coated with layers of hard crystalline calcium salts. The female's do not detachable and are coated with a greasy secretion. These secretions provides olfactory finger print that allow individual recognition of group members.

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## COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

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When a female becomes sexually receptive, a male will start a sexual pursuit that may last for an hour or more. The female will walk in and out of the water, repeatedly pausing while the male follows closely behind. Mating takes place in water with the male climbs on her back, sometimes pushing her under water with his weight. Copulation lasts only a few seconds but each pursuit involves several mountings. To give birth the female seeks cover away from the group several hours before young are born. The precocial young are able to eat grass soon after birth and return to the group 3-4 days after birth. By forming crèches the young are able to nurse from any lactating female.

Estrous: Polyestrous	Sexual Maturity: 18 months
Gestation: 104-160 days	Weaning Age: 4 months
# of Mammas: 5 pr	Weight at birth:
# of Young: up to 7 but 4 is the average	

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## MISCELLANEOUS

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The name Capybara means 'master of the grasses' in the language of the Guarani Indians of Paraguay.

Capybaras are eaten during Lent, but only in Venezuela, and even there not everywhere. However, its dried and salted meat is a traditional lenten dish

### Sources:

### Last Revision: 11.94

### Present Revision: 4/08

Brainard, ed. 1985; Grzimek 1990; MacDonald, ed. 1984; Nowak, ed. 1991

<http://www.rebsig.com/capybara/>

<http://www.bristolzoo.org.uk/learning/animals/mammals/capybara>