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= = Ecology = =

Capybaras are semi aquatic mammals found throughout almost all countries of South America ( except Chile ) . They live in densely forested areas near bodies of water , such as lakes , rivers , swamps , ponds , and marshes , as well as flooded savannah and along rivers in tropical forest . Capybara have flourished in cattle ranches . They roam in home ranges averaging 10 hectares ( 25 acres ) in high density populations .

Many escapees from captivity can also be found in similar watery habitats around the world . Sightings are fairly common in Florida , although a breeding population has not yet been confirmed . In 2011 , one was spotted in the Central Coast of California .

= = = Diet and predation = = =

Capybaras are herbivores , grazing mainly on grasses and aquatic plants , as well as fruit and tree bark . They are very selective feeders and will feed on the leaves of one species and disregard other species surrounding it . They eat a greater variety of plants during the dry season , as fewer plants are available . While they eat grass during the wet season , they have to switch to more abundant reeds during the dry season . Plants that capybaras eat during the summer lose their nutritional value in the winter and therefore are not consumed at that time . The capybara 's jaw hinge is not perpendicular and they thus chew food by grinding back and forth rather than side to side . Capybaras are autocoprophagous , meaning they eat their own feces as a source of bacterial gut flora , to help digest the cellulose in the grass that forms their normal diet , and to extract the maximum protein and vitamins from their food . They may also regurgitate food to masticate again , similar to cud chewing by a cow . As is the case with other rodents , the front teeth of capybaras grow continually to compensate for the constant wear from eating grasses ; their cheek teeth also grow continuously .

Like its cousin the guinea pig , the capybara does not have the capacity to synthesize vitamin C , and capybaras not supplemented with vitamin C in captivity have been reported to develop gum disease as a sign of scurvy .

They can have a life span of 8 ? 10 years on average , but live less than four years in the wild , as they are " a favourite food of jaguar , puma , ocelot , eagle and caiman " . The capybara is also the preferred prey of the anaconda .

= = Social organization = =

Capybaras are gregarious . While they sometimes live solitarily , they are more commonly found in groups that average 10 ? 20 individuals , with two to four adult males , four to seven adult females , and the remainder juveniles . Capybara groups can consist of as many as 50 or 100 individuals during the dry season when the animals gather around available water sources . Males establish social bonds , dominance , or , general group census . They can make dog like barks when threatened or when females are herding young .

Capybaras have two types of scent glands ; a morillo , located on the snout , and anal glands . Both sexes have these glands , but males have much larger morillos and use their anal glands more frequently . The anal glands of males are also lined with detachable hairs . A crystalline form of scent secretion is coated on these hairs and is released when in contact with objects like plants . These hairs have a longer lasting scent mark and are tasted by other capybaras . Capybara scent mark by rubbing their morillo on an object , or by walking over scrub and marking it with their anal glands . Capybara can spread their scent further by urinating ; however , females usually mark without urinating and scent mark less frequently than males overall . Females mark more often during the wet season when they are in estrus . In addition to objects , males will also scent

@-@ mark females .

= = = Reproduction = = =

When in estrus , the female 's scent changes subtly and nearby males begin pursuit . In addition , a female will alert males she is in estrus by whistling through her nose . During mating , the female has the advantage and mating choice . Capybaras mate only in water , and if a female does not want to mate with a certain male , she will either submerge or leave the water . Dominant males are highly protective of the females , but they usually cannot prevent all the subordinates from copulating . The larger the group , the harder it is for the male to watch all the females . Dominant males secure significantly more matings than each subordinate , but subordinate males , as a class , are responsible for more matings than each dominant male . The lifespan of the capybara 's sperm is longer than that of other rodents .

Capybara gestation is 130 ? 150 days , and usually produces a litter of four capybara babies , but may produce between one and eight in a single litter . Birth is on land and the female will rejoin the group within a few hours of delivering the newborn capybaras , which will join the group as soon as they are mobile . Within a week , the young can eat grass , but will continue to suckle ? from any female in the group ? until weaned at about 16 weeks . The young will form a group within the main group . Alloparenting has been observed in this species . Breeding peaks between April and May in Venezuela and between October and November in Mato Grosso , Brazil .

= = = Activities = = =

Though quite agile on land ( capable of running as fast as a horse ) , capybaras are equally at home in the water . They are excellent swimmers , and can remain completely submerged for up to five minutes , an ability they use to evade predators . Capybaras can sleep in water , keeping only their noses out of the water . As temperatures increase during the day , they wallow in water and then graze during the late afternoon and early evening . They also spend a lot of time wallowing in mud . They rest around midnight and then continue to graze before dawn .

= = Conservation and human interaction = =

Capybaras are not considered a threatened species ; their population is stable throughout most of their South American range , though in some areas hunting has reduced their numbers .

Capybaras are hunted for their meat and pelts in some areas , and otherwise killed by humans who see their grazing as competition for livestock . In some areas , they are farmed , which has the effect of ensuring the wetland habitats are protected . Their survival is aided by their ability to breed rapidly .

Capybaras have adapted well to the urbanization in South America . They can be found in many areas in zoos and parks , and may live for 12 years in captivity . Capybaras are gentle and will usually allow humans to pet and hand @-@ feed them , but physical contact is normally discouraged as their ticks can be vectors to Rocky Mountain spotted fever .

The European Association of Zoos and Aquaria ( EAZA ) tasked Drusillas Park in Alfriston , Sussex to keep the studbook for capybaras , to monitor captive populations in Europe . The studbook includes information about all births , deaths and movements of capybaras , as well as how they are related .

Capybaras are farmed for meat and skins in South America . The meat is considered unsuitable to eat in some areas , while in other areas it is considered an important source of protein . In parts of South America , especially in Venezuela , capybara meat is popular during Lent and Holy Week as the Catholic Church previously gave a special dispensation that allows for its consumption while other meats are generally forbidden .

Although it is illegal in some states , capybaras are occasionally kept as pets in the United States . The image of a capybara features on the \$ 2 coin of the Uruguayan peso .

