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The **capybara** (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*) is a large [rodent](/wiki/Rodent) of the genus *Hydrochoerus* of which the only other extant member is the [lesser capybara](/wiki/Lesser_capybara) (*Hydrochoerus isthmius*). The capybara is the largest rodent in the world. Close relatives are [guinea pigs](/wiki/Guinea_pig) and [rock cavies](/wiki/Rock_cavy), and it is more distantly related to the [agouti](/wiki/Common_agouti), [chinchillas](/wiki/Chinchilla), and the [coypu](/wiki/Coypu). Native to [South America](/wiki/South_America), the capybara inhabits [savannas](/wiki/Savanna) and dense forests and lives near bodies of water. It is a highly social species and can be found in groups as large as 100 individuals, but usually lives in groups of 10–20 individuals. The capybara is not a threatened species and is hunted for its meat and [hide](/wiki/Hide_(skin)) and also for a grease from its thick fatty [skin](/wiki/Skin) which is used in the pharmaceutical trade.[[1]](#cite_note-1)

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## Etymology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

Its [common name](/wiki/Common_name) is derived from [Tupi](/wiki/Tupi_language) *ka'apiûara*, a complex agglutination of *kaá* (leaf) + *píi* (slender) + *ú* (eat) + *ara* (a suffix for agent nouns), meaning "one who eats slender leaves", or "grass-eater".[[2]](#cite_note-2)The [scientific name](/wiki/Scientific_name), both *hydrochoerus* and *hydrochaeris*, comes from [Greek](/wiki/Greek_Language) **ὕδωρ** (*hydor* = water) + **χοίρος** (*choiros* = pig, hog).<ref name=msw3>[Template:MSW3 Woods](/wiki/Template:MSW3_Woods)</ref>[[3]](#cite_note-3)

## Classification and phylogeny[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

The capybara and the [lesser capybara](/wiki/Lesser_capybara) belong to the subfamily [Hydrochoerinae](/wiki/Hydrochoerinae) along with the [rock cavies](/wiki/Kerodon). The living capybaras and their [extinct](/wiki/Extinct) relatives were previously classified in their own family Hydrochoeridae.<ref name=r4/> Since 2002, molecular phylogenetic studies have recognized a close relationship between *Hydrochoerus* and *Kerodon*[[4]](#cite_note-4) supporting placement of both genera in a subfamily of [Caviidae](/wiki/Caviidae).<ref name=msw3/> Paleontological classifications have yet to incorporate this new taxonomy and continue to use Hydrochoeridae for all capybaras, while using Hydrochoerinae for the living genus and its closest fossil relatives, such as [*Neochoerus*](/wiki/Neochoerus).[[5]](#cite_note-5)[[6]](#cite_note-6) The taxonomy of fossil hydrochoerines is also in a state of flux. In recent years, the diversity of fossil hydrochoerines has been substantially reduced.[[5]](#cite_note-5)[[6]](#cite_note-6) This is largely due to the recognition that capybara [molar](/wiki/Molar_(tooth)) teeth show strong variation in shape over the life of an individual.[[5]](#cite_note-5) In one instance, material once referred to four genera and seven species on the basis of differences in molar shape is now thought to represent differently aged individuals of a single species, *Cardiatherium paranense*.[[5]](#cite_note-5)

## Description[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

[thumb|220px|Skeleton](/wiki/File:Die_vergleichende_Osteologie_(1821)_Hydrochaeris_hydrochaeris.jpg) The capybara has a heavy, [barrel](/wiki/Barrel)-shaped body and short head, with reddish-brown fur on the upper part of its body that turns yellowish-brown underneath. Its sweat glands can be found in the surface of the hairy portions of its skin, an unusual trait among rodents.<ref name=r4/> The animal lacks under hair, and guard hair differs little from over hair. Adult capybaras grow to [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) in length, stand [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) tall at the [withers](/wiki/Withers), and typically weigh [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert), with an average in the Venezuelan [llanos](/wiki/Los_Llanos,_Venezuela) of [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert).<ref name=Arkive>[Capybara](http://www.arkive.org/capybara/hydrochoerus-hydrochaeris/#text=Facts), Arkive</ref>[[7]](#cite_note-7)[[8]](#cite_note-8) The top recorded weights are [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) for a wild female from Brazil and [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) for a wild male from Uruguay.<ref name=r4/><ref name=r3/> The [dental formula](/wiki/Dental_formula) is [Template:DentalFormula](/wiki/Template:DentalFormula).<ref name=r4/> Capybaras have slightly [webbed](/wiki/Interdigital_webbing) feet and [vestigial](/wiki/Vestigiality) tails.<ref name=r4/> Their hind legs are slightly longer than their forelegs; they have three toes on their rear feet and four toes on their front feet.[[9]](#cite_note-9) Their muzzles are blunt, with nostrils, and the eyes and ears are near the top of their heads. Females are slightly heavier than males.

Its [karyotype](/wiki/Karyotype) has [2n](/wiki/Diploid) = 66 and [FN](/wiki/Fundamental_number) = 102.<ref name=msw3/>

## Ecology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]

Capybaras are semi-aquatic mammals[[8]](#cite_note-8) found throughout almost all countries of South America (except [Chile](/wiki/Chile)[[10]](#cite_note-10)). They live in densely [forested](/wiki/Forest) areas near bodies of water, such as lakes, rivers, [swamps](/wiki/Swamp), ponds, and [marshes](/wiki/Marsh),[[7]](#cite_note-7) as well as flooded [savannah](/wiki/Savannah) and along rivers in [tropical forest](/wiki/Tropical_forest). Capybara have flourished in cattle ranches.<ref name=r4/> They roam in home [ranges](/wiki/Range_(biology)) averaging 10 hectares (25 acres) in high-density populations.<ref name=r4/>

Many escapees from captivity can also be found in similar watery habitats around the world. Sightings are fairly common in [Florida](/wiki/Florida), although a breeding population has not yet been confirmed.[[11]](#cite_note-11) In 2011, one was spotted in the [Central Coast of California](/wiki/Central_Coast_of_California).[[12]](#cite_note-12)<gallery mode = packed heights = 130px> Yellow-headed caracara ([Milvago chimachima](/wiki/Milvago_chimachima)) on capybara (Hydrochoeris hydrochaeris).JPG|Yellow-headed caracara ([*Milvago chimachima*](/wiki/Milvago_chimachima)) on capybara White-throated kingbird ([Tyrannus albogularis](/wiki/Tyrannus_albogularis)) on Capybara.JPG|White-throated kingbird ([*Tyrannus albogularis*](/wiki/Tyrannus_albogularis)) on capybara </gallery>

### Diet and predation[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]

Capybaras are [herbivores](/wiki/Herbivore), grazing mainly on grasses and [aquatic plants](/wiki/Aquatic_plants),[[7]](#cite_note-7)[[13]](#cite_note-13) as well as [fruit](/wiki/Fruit) and tree bark.[[8]](#cite_note-8) They are very selective feeders[[14]](#cite_note-14) 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.[[15]](#cite_note-15) Plants that capybaras eat during the summer lose their nutritional value in the winter and therefore are not consumed at that time.[[14]](#cite_note-14) The capybara's jaw hinge is not perpendicular and they thus chew food by grinding back-and-forth rather than side-to-side.[[16]](#cite_note-16) Capybaras are auto[coprophagous](/wiki/Coprophagous), meaning they eat their own [feces](/wiki/Feces) as a source of bacterial [gut flora](/wiki/Gut_flora), to help [digest](/wiki/Digestion) the [cellulose](/wiki/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](/wiki/Cow).[[17]](#cite_note-17) As is the case with other rodents, the front teeth of capybaras grow continually to compensate for the constant wear from eating grasses;[[10]](#cite_note-10) their cheek teeth also grow continuously.[[16]](#cite_note-16) Like its cousin the [guinea pig](/wiki/Guinea_pig), the capybara does not have the capacity to synthesize [vitamin C](/wiki/Vitamin_C), and capybaras not supplemented with vitamin C in captivity have been reported to develop gum disease as a sign of [scurvy](/wiki/Scurvy).<ref name=r2/>

They can have a [life span](/wiki/Life_expectancy) of 8–10 years on average,<ref name=r6/> but live less than four years in the wild, as they are "a favourite food of [jaguar](/wiki/Jaguar), [puma](/wiki/Cougar), [ocelot](/wiki/Ocelot), [eagle](/wiki/Eagle) and [caiman](/wiki/Caiman)".[[10]](#cite_note-10) The capybara is also the preferred [prey](/wiki/Prey) of the [anaconda](/wiki/Eunectes_murinus).[[18]](#cite_note-18)

## Social organization[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]

[thumb|right|Capybara have a scent gland on their noses, called a 'morillo'](/wiki/File:Capybara_(Hydrochoerus_hydrochaeris)_alpha_male.JPG) Capybaras are [gregarious](/wiki/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.[[19]](#cite_note-19) Capybara groups can consist of as many as 50 or 100 individuals during the dry season[[17]](#cite_note-17)[[20]](#cite_note-20) when the animals gather around available water sources. Males establish social bonds, dominance, or, general group census.[[20]](#cite_note-20) They can make dog-like barks[[17]](#cite_note-17) when threatened or when females are herding young.[[21]](#cite_note-21) Capybaras have two types of scent glands; a morillo, located on the snout, and anal glands.[[22]](#cite_note-22) 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](/wiki/Estrus). In addition to objects, males will also scent-mark females.[[22]](#cite_note-22)

### Reproduction[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]

[thumb|right|Mother with typical litter of four pups](/wiki/File:Young_capybaras.jpg) When in estrus, the female's scent changes subtly and nearby males begin pursuit.[[23]](#cite_note-23) In addition, a female will alert males she is in estrus by whistling though her nose.[[17]](#cite_note-17) 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.[[17]](#cite_note-17)[[20]](#cite_note-20) Dominant males are highly protective of the females, but they usually cannot prevent all the subordinates from copulating.[[23]](#cite_note-23) 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.[[23]](#cite_note-23) The lifespan of the capybara's sperm is longer than that of other rodents.<ref name=r1/>

Capybara [gestation](/wiki/Gestation) is 130–150 days, and usually produces a [litter](/wiki/Litter_(animal)) of four capybara babies, but may produce between one and eight in a single litter.<ref name=r4/> 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](/wiki/Breastfeeding)—from any female in the group—until weaned at about 16 weeks. The young will form a group within the main group.[[10]](#cite_note-10) [Alloparenting](/wiki/Alloparenting) has been observed in this species.[[20]](#cite_note-20) Breeding peaks between April and May in Venezuela and between October and November in [Mato Grosso](/wiki/Mato_Grosso), Brazil.<ref name=r4/>

### Activities[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]

Though quite agile on land (capable of running as fast as a [horse](/wiki/Horse)),[[24]](#cite_note-24) capybaras are equally at home in the water. They are excellent swimmers, and can remain completely submerged for up to five minutes,[[7]](#cite_note-7) an ability they use to evade [predators](/wiki/Predator). Capybaras can sleep in water, keeping only their noses out of the water. As temperatures increase during the day, they [wallow](/wiki/Wallowing_in_animals) in water and then graze during the late afternoon and early evening.<ref name=r4/> They also spend a lot of time wallowing in mud.[[9]](#cite_note-9) They rest around midnight and then continue to graze before dawn.

## Conservation and human interaction[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

[thumb|Video of captive capybaras resting at](/wiki/File:Capybara_Ueno_Zoo_2009.ogv) [Ueno Zoo](/wiki/Ueno_Zoo) in Japan Capybaras are not considered a [threatened species](/wiki/Threatened_species);<ref name=iucn>[Template:Cite journal](/wiki/Template:Cite_journal)</ref> their [population](/wiki/Population) is stable throughout most of their South American range, though in some areas hunting has reduced their numbers.[[7]](#cite_note-7)[[10]](#cite_note-10) Capybaras are hunted for their meat and [pelts](/wiki/Pelage) in some areas,[[25]](#cite_note-25) and otherwise killed by humans who see their grazing as competition for [livestock](/wiki/Livestock). In some areas, they are [farmed](/wiki/Farming), which has the effect of ensuring the [wetland](/wiki/Wetland) [habitats](/wiki/Habitats) are protected. Their survival is aided by their ability to breed rapidly.[[10]](#cite_note-10) Capybaras have adapted well to the urbanization in South America. They can be found in many areas in [zoos](/wiki/Zoo) and [parks](/wiki/Park),[[16]](#cite_note-16) and may live for 12 years in [captivity](/wiki/Captivity_(animal)).[[10]](#cite_note-10) 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](/wiki/Rocky_Mountain_spotted_fever).[[26]](#cite_note-26) The [European Association of Zoos and Aquaria](/wiki/European_Association_of_Zoos_and_Aquaria) (EAZA) tasked [Drusillas Park](/wiki/Drusillas_Park) in [Alfriston](/wiki/Alfriston), [Sussex](/wiki/Sussex) to keep the [studbook](/wiki/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.[[27]](#cite_note-27) Capybaras are farmed for meat and skins in South America.[[28]](#cite_note-28) The meat is considered unsuitable to eat in some areas, while in other areas it is considered an important source of protein.<ref name=r4/> In parts of South America, especially in Venezuela, capybara meat is popular during [Lent](/wiki/Lent) and [Holy Week](/wiki/Holy_Week) as the [Catholic Church](/wiki/Catholic_Church) previously gave a special dispensation that allows for its consumption while [other meats are generally forbidden](/wiki/Fasting_and_abstinence_in_the_Catholic_Church).[[29]](#cite_note-29) Although it is illegal in some [states](/wiki/States_of_the_United_States),[[30]](#cite_note-30) capybaras are occasionally kept as pets in the United States.[[31]](#cite_note-31) The image of a capybara features on the $2 coin of the [Uruguayan peso](/wiki/Uruguayan_peso).[[32]](#cite_note-32)

## See also[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

[Template:Portal](/wiki/Template:Portal)

* [*Josephoartigasia monesi*](/wiki/Josephoartigasia_monesi), an extinct species identified as the largest rodent ever
* In medicine, see [Kurloff cells](/wiki/Kurloff_cells)

## References[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

[Template:Reflist](/wiki/Template:Reflist)

## External links[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]

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* [Template:Wikispecies-inline](/wiki/Template:Wikispecies-inline)

[Template:Wiktionary](/wiki/Template:Wiktionary) [Template:EB1911 poster](/wiki/Template:EB1911_poster)

* [Animal Diversity Web *Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*](http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Hydrochoerus_hydrochaeris.html)
* [Capybara information](http://www.capybarafacts.com)

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