

# The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wants You to Eat These Giant, Invasive Rodents

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As part of National Invasive Species Week, the agency is calling on Americans to “eat the invaders,” including swamp-dwelling nutria



[Sara Hashemi](#) - Daily Correspondent

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Nutria have voracious appetites for vegetation, leading them to destroy wetland ecosystems. [Tambako The Jaguar](#) under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)

This [National Invasive Species Week](#), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is asking Americans to do their part for native ecosystems by eating giant, invasive rodents called nutria. “Please consider the following slogan: ‘Save a Swamp, Sauté a Nutria,’” the agency posted on [social media](#).

The recent plea is due to the rodents’ adverse effect on marshes. “Their nonstop munching and burrowing destroy the plants that keep marshes stable, leading to erosion, loss of habitat and wetlands that look like something out of a disaster movie,” the post continues.

Nutria are native to South America, but they were brought to the U.S. [for their fur](#) in the [late 19th century](#). When the fur market collapsed in the 1940s, many nutria were released into the wild, where they started to rapidly reproduce. Now, the rodents have spread widely and wreak havoc along the Gulf Coast, Southeast, Atlantic Coast, Pacific Northwest and California.

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries estimates that nutria caused as much as [102,585 acres](#) of damage in the state before it implemented a control program. The large rodents can [consume a quarter of their body weight](#) in vegetation every day, and they can

destroy an area up to ten times that size.

“As an exotic invasive species in our North America wetlands, they can be especially destructive, since plant species did not evolve with this forager,” explained [Thomas Gehring](#), an ecologist at Central Michigan University, to Rachel Ross at [Live Science](#) in 2023.

If you’re not sure how to cook up a nutria dinner, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries has got you covered with a recipe for [nutria gumbo](#). The department also offers [additional resources](#) for consuming the rodents, including recipes for [nutria jambalaya](#) and [“heart healthy Crock-Pot nutria.”](#) The animal’s meat is “[lean, mild and tastes like rabbit](#)” or the dark meat of a turkey, according to the federal agency.

Controlling invasive species [by eating them](#) is an idea that’s [already](#) gained traction in some areas. [Lionfish](#), voracious hunters of native fish in the western Atlantic, have no native predators in the region—so [humans are stepping up](#) to consume them. In New England, some are eating [European green crabs](#) and [Asian shore crabs](#).

The Fish and Wildlife Service also [recommends](#) making meals of other invasive species, like northern snakehead fish, [invasive carp](#), green iguanas and feral hogs. People in Florida are already concocting dishes out of their invasive iguanas, which are sometimes referred to as “chicken of the trees.”

“If you’re going to participate in killing them, [iguana] is good enough, healthy enough and tasty enough that you should absolutely take the time to cook it, too,” Brittany Peters, who cooked iguana on a trip to Florida, told the [Associated Press](#) in 2018.

When hunting invasive species for food, make sure to follow any local regulations and to prepare the food in a safe manner. Since nutria [look similar](#) to native beavers and muskrats, it’s also important to ensure you’ve properly identified the animal before killing it.

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