

# CAPYBARA

(HYDROCHOERUS HYDROCHAERIS)

IUCN STATUS: LEAST CONCERN\*



**WE ARE MAMMALS**

with a lifespan of 4-10 years in the wild, 10-15 years in captivity



**Distribution:** Native South America, found across most of the continent from Panama down to Argentina and Uruguay.

**Habitat:** Densely forested areas and savannahs near bodies of water, such as lakes, rivers, swamps, ponds and marshes.

**Diet:** Their diet consists primarily of grazing on grasses and aquatic plants and leaves. Occasionally they will also eat other vegetation like reeds and bark.

**Threats:** Naturally threatened by jaguars, pumas, caimans and anacondas, young can also be predated on by smaller cat species and harpy eagles. Their main threat are humans - being hunted extensively for their meat and hide (for leather), as well as losing suitable habitat to deforestation.

\*The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2016. Downloaded 24.03.2026



Length (head to tail)

**1-1.3m**



Weight (can reach 91kg)

**35-66kg**



Activity Cycle

**Crepuscular**

## DID YOU KNOW?

**Capy-who?** The name "capybara" comes from a Tupi word meaning "grass eater," while their scientific name roughly translates to "happy water pig."

**Scent signals:** They have scent glands on their snout and near the rear, which - especially in males - are used to mark territory, signal dominance, and communicate with others.

**Unusual diet:** Capybaras practise coprophagy, re-eating special droppings to extract extra nutrients and beneficial microbes from their grass-based diet.

**Barking alarm:** Adults produce a loud barking call to warn the group of danger, often triggering a quick retreat into the water for safety.

## ADAPTATIONS

Capybaras are the world's largest rodents, related to guinea pigs and rock hyraxes. Their semi-aquatic lifestyle makes them well suited to water, with partially webbed feet, coarse fur that dries quickly, and eyes, ears, and nostrils on top of the head. This lets them stay mostly submerged, sleep on water, and hold their breath for up to five minutes to avoid predators.

Highly social, capybaras use seven vocalisations—including barks, chirps, purrs, clicks, whistles, squeals, and teeth-chattering—to signal contact, alarm, distress, and bonding. These sounds help coordinate group interactions, alert members to danger, and show contentment.

## REPRODUCTION & BEHAVIOUR

They live in groups of 10-40, led by a dominant male with subordinate males and females with young. Males have strict hierarchies, while females cooperate in breeding and nursing. During the dry season, groups may gather at shrinking water sources, sometimes over 100 individuals.

Gestation lasts 130-150 days, producing 3-8 pups. Young are precocial, grazing by one week old and weaned by 3-4 months. Females mature at one year and usually stay in their birth group, while males mature at 15-24 months and leave to join or form new groups.

**PLEASE DO NOT FEED THE CAPYBARAS**