

Creature Feature: The Capybara (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*)

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The largest rodent in existence today, capybara can grow to 1.2m (over 4ft) in length and 0.6m (1.6ft) tall and weigh 35-66kg (100lbs). A semi-aquatic species, the capybara has partially webbed feet and is known to dive underwater for up to five minutes! Its normal range includes densely vegetated areas near the rivers, ponds, lakes, swamps, and marshes of Panama and the northernmost countries of South America. To help it get around in these aquatic environs, the capybara's eyes, ears, and nostrils are on the top portion of its head. However, the capybara may also live in arid grasslands. They prefer to munch water plants and grasses, but will eat fruit and bark occasionally.

The capybara is highly social and lives in groups averaging ten individuals, in which the females are closely related and a male dominates the group. The capybara mate in water and after a 150 day gestation period, a litter of two to eight capybaras are born. The young are able to graze within one week of birth and their parental care is provided by all members of the group including predator watch and suckling which continues for three months.