

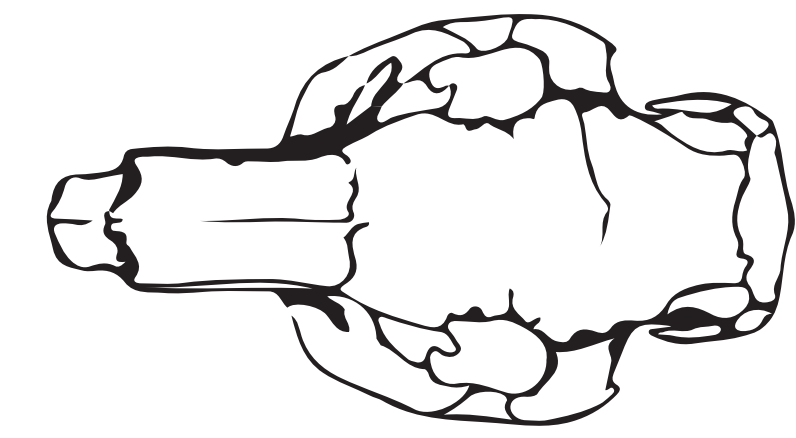
# The World's Largest Rodent

## CAPYBARA (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*)

BY: JOHN HOBGOOD

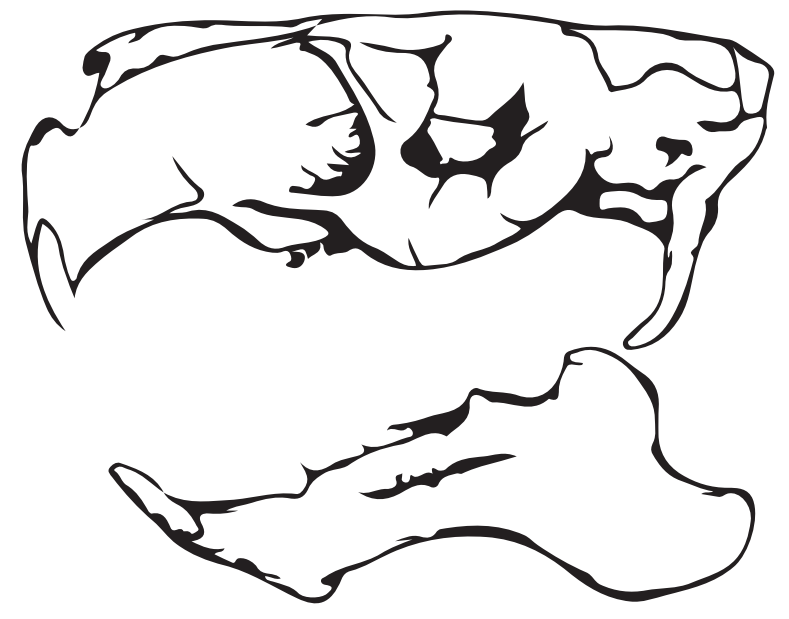


**MORRILLO**  
Capybaras dispense an odor via their morrillo, which is a sebaceous gland located on top of their heads in between the snout and eyes. The morrillo is most noticeable on the dominant male and is less developed on subdominant males and even less so on females.



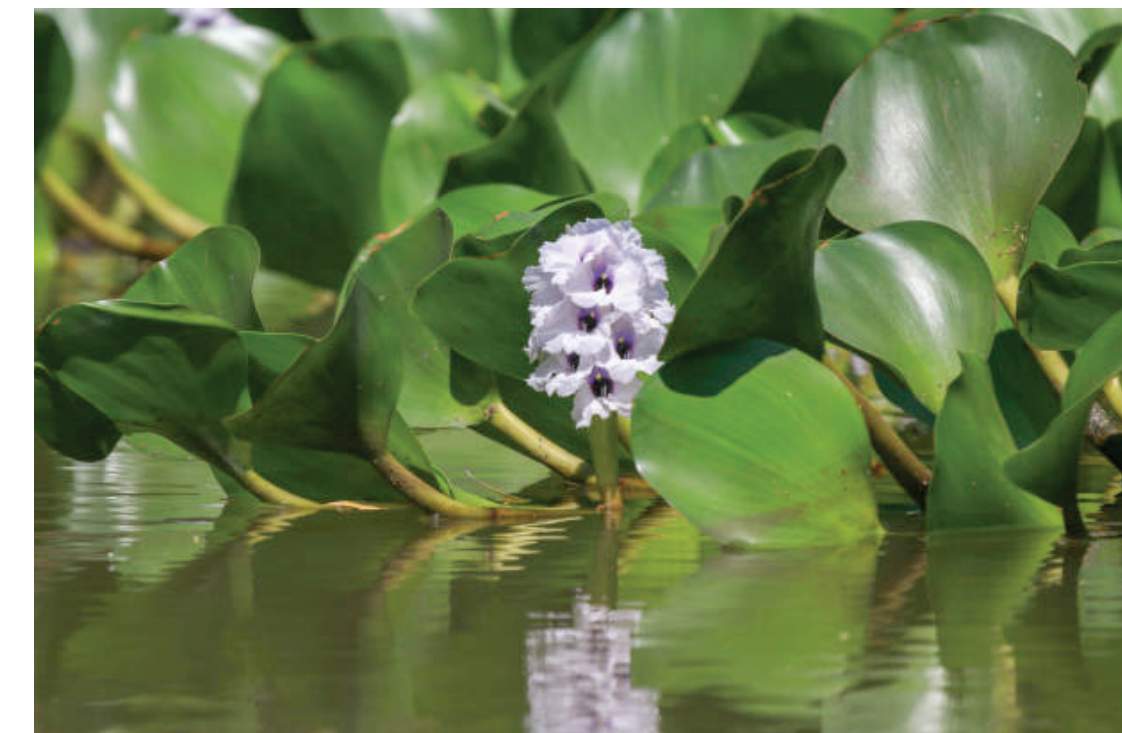
### HEAD CHARACTERISTICS

The eyes, ears and nostrils are positioned more dorsally on top of the head, another adaptation for semiaquatic activity.



### SKULL CHARACTERISTICS

Dental formula is 1/1, 0/0, 1/1, 3/3, utilizing brachydont, low crown height indicative of softer diets, and display a toxodont molariform pattern.



### DIET

80% of their diet consists of 5 species of grasses in addition to water hyacinth. Monogastric herbivore, containing a simple stomach with a well-developed cecum where anaerobic microbial fermentation occurs. Because grasses are silica rich and difficult to digest, Capybara utilize coprophagy to extract as much nutrients as possible.



### HABITAT

Capybaras congregate near marshy, swampy, nutrient-rich muddy rivers that are plentiful with aquatic grasses.

### LOCOMOTION

The forelegs are representative of a digitigrade foot posture while the hind legs function in a plantigrade form. This limb combination is conducive to both ambulatory and natatorial movement with some short bursts of cursorial capability.

### PELAGE

Long, coarse, sparse hair aids in drying out after being in the water. Thin hair makes sunburn an issue, so they regularly cake themselves in mud.

### EARS

Cartilaginous fold that can close the ear canal when going underwater.



### FEET

Webbed feet display a distinctive star-shaped footprint.

### REPRODUCTION

Polygynous breeding, almost exclusively breed in the water. Litters of 4-5 precocious pups that are fully furred with complete dentition. Capybaras are eusocial, raising young cooperatively (alloparental care).



Conservation Status: **LEAST CONCERN**



### RANGE

Inhabits a large range of South America from Panama to northern Argentina, east of the Andes in Peru to the Atlantic coast of Brazil. A small population of capybaras can also be found in Florida, where they escaped commercial farming operations.