

Capybaras: Habitats and Behaviour

Instructions: Read the text about capybaras. Look for the science vocabulary in bold. Then answer the questions.

Capybaras

Capybaras are the largest living **rodents** in the world. They are mammals that are related to guinea pigs. Capybaras live in Central and South America and are **semi-aquatic**, which means they spend a lot of time both on land and in water. Their eyes, ears, and nostrils sit high on their heads, helping them stay aware while most of their body is underwater.

Capybaras have brown, coarse fur and slightly webbed feet. They are strong swimmers and often enter water to cool down, rest, or hide from danger. A capybara can stay underwater for several minutes when escaping a predator.

Habitat and staying safe

Capybaras live near **wetlands**, rivers, ponds, lakes, and marshes. Water is very important to them because it helps them stay cool and gives them a quick place to escape. If a jaguar, caiman, or anaconda comes near, a capybara may dive into the water and stay very still.

They also rest in tall grasses or under plants near the water's edge. Their brown fur can help them **camouflage** with muddy banks and dry grasses.

Capybara



Wetland habitat



Capybaras are often most active at dawn and dusk, when the weather is cooler.

Diet and digestion

Capybaras are **herbivores**. They mostly eat grasses and water plants, but they may also eat reeds, bark, and fruit. Their front teeth grow continuously, so chewing tough plants helps wear their teeth down.

Capybaras have a special way of getting extra nutrients from their food. They sometimes eat their own droppings, which helps them digest rough plant material more completely. This may seem strange, but it is useful for animals that eat lots of fibre.

Social groups

Capybaras are very **social** animals. They often live in groups of about 10 to 20, although some groups can be larger when water is scarce. Living in a group helps them watch for danger and protect their young.

They communicate with each other using barks, whistles, clicks, and purrs. If one capybara notices danger, it can make a sound to warn the others. Young capybaras, called pups, stay close to adults for safety.

Young and life cycle

A female capybara usually has one litter of pups each year. The babies can walk and nibble grass soon after birth, but they still need adults to

Grazing capybara



Capybara group



Capybara pups

protect them. Because young capybaras are smaller and slower, they are at greater risk from predators.

Capybaras are not endangered worldwide, but some local groups are threatened by habitat loss and hunting. Protecting wetlands helps capybaras and many other animals that depend on water.



Glossary

Word	Meaning
Rodent	A mammal with front teeth that keep growing, such as a mouse, beaver, or capybara.
Semi-aquatic	Living partly in water and partly on land.
Wetlands	Areas of land that are very wet, such as marshes and swamps.
Camouflage	Colours or patterns that help an animal blend in with its surroundings.
Herbivore	An animal that eats plants.
Social	Living with others and interacting as a group.
Predator	An animal that hunts other animals for food.
Habitat loss	When an animal's natural home is damaged or disappears.

Questions

1. What kind of animal is a capybara, and what is special about its size?

2. What does **semi-aquatic** mean, and how does the text show that capybaras are semi-aquatic?

3. Give two ways water helps capybaras survive.

4. Name two habitats where capybaras may live.

5. How does a capybara's body help it stay safe while it is in the water?

6. What does the word **camouflage** mean in this text, and how does it help capybaras?

7. What do capybaras mostly eat?

8. Why do capybaras need to chew tough plants?

9. How does living in a group help capybaras?

10. List two sounds capybaras use to communicate.

11. Why are young capybaras at greater risk from predators?

12. What does the word **herbivore** mean?

13. When are capybaras often most active?

14. What is one threat to capybaras mentioned in the text?

15. What is the main message of the final paragraph?

Answer Key

1. A capybara is a rodent, and it is the largest living rodent in the world.
2. Semi-aquatic means living partly in water and partly on land. The text shows this because capybaras swim, cool down, rest, and hide in water but also graze and rest on land.
3. Water helps capybaras stay cool and escape from predators. It also gives them a place to rest.
4. Any two of: wetlands, rivers, ponds, lakes, marshes.
5. Its eyes, ears, and nostrils are high on its head, so it can stay mostly underwater while still seeing, hearing, and breathing.
6. Camouflage means colours or patterns that help an animal blend in with its surroundings. It helps capybaras hide near muddy banks and dry grasses.
7. They mostly eat grasses and water plants.
8. They need to chew tough plants to help wear down their front teeth, which grow continuously.
9. Living in a group helps capybaras watch for danger and protect their young.
10. Any two of: barks, whistles, clicks, purrs.
11. Young capybaras are at greater risk because they are smaller and slower than adults.
12. A herbivore is an animal that eats plants.
13. They are often most active at dawn and dusk.
14. One threat mentioned is habitat loss. Hunting is also mentioned.
15. The final paragraph explains that capybaras need wetland habitats, and protecting those habitats helps capybaras and other animals survive.