

Capybaras

Capybaras are the largest living rodents in the world. They look like giant guinea pigs and can weigh up to 140 pounds. (In contrast, an adult guinea pig weighs between 5 and 10 pounds.) Adult capybaras are more than four feet long. On average, females are slightly larger than males. These large rodents have slightly webbed feet and do not have tails. They are usually reddish-brown in color.

Capybaras are semi-aquatic mammals, meaning that they spend a lot of time in or near water. They are native to South America and are found in thick forests where there are lakes, rivers, ponds or swamps. Capybaras live in social groups of 10 to 30 or more animals. Each group is led by a dominant male that has a large scent gland on his nose that he uses to mark the group's territory.

A capybara's teeth never stop growing. This is typical of rodents, and like other rodents, capybaras constantly chew on grass and plants which helps to trim their teeth. They are herbivores and eat plants, tree bark, grass and fruit. Capybaras chew their food by grinding it back and forth instead of chewing from side to side.

In order to communicate with each other, make several different sounds. They whistle, grunt, squeal and make clicking noises. They also purr, and when they are alarmed, capybaras bark to warn each other of danger. When it is very hot, capybaras stay in the water to keep cool. They are great swimmers and can stay underwater for up to five minutes. Sometimes, capybaras sleep in the water, with just their noses above the surface so they can breathe. They do not sleep much and usually graze (eat) late in the day when it is cooler. They nap on and off any time of day and often eat straight through the night!

Capybaras are gentle giants that will let humans pet them and feed them by hand. They are often found in zoos... but they are a bit large to be kept as common house pets!

Capybaras Questions

1. A capybara is the largest living
 - a. rodent.
 - b. guinea pig.
 - c. Both of these
 - d. Neither of these

2. Which characteristic suggests that capybaras are semi-aquatic?
 - a. Their teeth never stop growing.
 - b. They do not have tails.
 - c. They have slightly webbed feet.
 - d. They do not sleep much.

3. Capybaras are
 - a. omnivores.
 - b. carnivores.
 - c. herbivores.
 - d. scavengers.

4. Capybaras are native to
 - a. South America.
 - b. North America.
 - c. Africa.
 - d. zoos.

5. What does the dominant capybara use to mark the group's territory?
 - a. scent glands on its ear
 - b. scent glands on its nose
 - c. urine
 - d. its claws

6. How does a capybara keep its teeth trim?

Name _____



Date _____

Capybaras Answers

1. a
2. c
3. c
4. a
5. b
6. They constantly chew on grass and plants.
7. d
8. whistle, grunt, squeal, click, purr, bark
9. They bark.
10. a