

Nutria Fact Sheet

- The nutria, *Myocastor coypus*, is a large semi-aquatic rodent.
- The name is derived from two Greek words (mys, for mouse, and kastor, for beaver) that translate as “mouse beaver”.
- Nutria are native to coastal and lake marshes of Argentina.
- In most of the world the animal is called coypu, but in North America the animal is called nutria.
- A nutria is smaller than a beaver but larger than a muskrat; unlike beavers or muskrats, it has a round, slightly haired tail.
- They can grow up to 102 cm (40 in) which is nearly as large as a beaver.
- They weigh an average of 12.0 pounds (5.4 kg)
- They breed throughout the year.
- Female nutria give birth to two to twelve young per litter, and have two or three litters per year.
- The life span of nutria is approximately 6.5 years in the wild, although the record life span of nutria in captivity is 12 years.
- Nutria is almost completely nocturnal.
- They live in burrows that are approximately one meter long. These burrows are usually open on each end, with one entrance toward a river or body of water.
- In Louisiana, nutria live in freshwater and partly salty, brackish, marshes and sometimes swamps.
- They are herbivores, and feed on the roots and stems of plants on land and in the water.
- In winter, they predominately feed on the base of plant stems and dig for roots and rhizomes.
- One nutria can eat about 1.1 kilograms of vegetation per day, which is approximately 25% of its total body mass.
- They destroy about 10 times more plant matter than they eat by gnawing on the roots and stems with their long, orange-colored teeth.
- Nutria eat so much, they eat all of the vegetation causing an eat out on about 100,000 acres of Louisiana coastal wetlands each year.
- Their teeth have special enamel that includes iron which makes the enamel stronger and also makes the orange color.
- In 1976, the nutria fur harvest peaked at 1.8 million pelts, which generated about \$15.7 million in revenue. In 1981, the price for a nutria pelt peaked, reaching \$8.59 per pelt.
- Due to a sudden drop in the demand for nutria pelts in the 1980s, hunters were forced to stop relying on nutria trapping as a way to support their families. This caused the nutria population to increase and caused damage to Louisiana’s wetlands.
- In 2002 the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) introduced the Coastwide Nutria Control Program (CNCP) and offered \$4.00 per nutria tail as an incentive to get more trappers to hunt nutria and reduce the nutria population.

- The state encourages harvesting 400,000 nutria each year and now (2012) pays \$5.00 per tail.
- Since the program was introduced, over ten years damage from nutria has been reduced from 100,000 acres to 4,200 acres per year.
- Females have four pairs of mammary glands that are located on the side of the body rather than on the belly. This allows the young to nurse with their nose above the water surface while the mother is floating.
- Nutria is an herbivore
- Scientists estimate nutria populations and damage through aerial surveys.
- A nutria is considered old at 4 years of age.
- Nutria's whiskers are about 4 inches long.
- Nutria have 20 teeth.
- Nutria adults are about 14 inches long with a 12-17-inch tail and can weigh up to 25 pounds.
- Nutria are valued furbearers. A popular fur for linings and trims. It is frequently dyed in a variety of colors.
- The fur is characterized by dense grayish underfur and long glossy guard hairs.
- Wild nutria vary in color from dark brown to yellowish brown. Underfur is very soft and plush.
- Their nests are made of grasses, reeds and sedges built up in large piles similar to a muskrat. These are built on land among the marsh vegetation and close to the water's edge.
- When established near gardens, they take cabbage readily; they are also fond of carrots and sweet potatoes.
- The gestation period is from 127 to 132 days.
- They mature rapidly, increasing at the rate of about 400 grams per month during the first year, and reach sexual maturity at the age of 4 or 5 months.
- Females sometimes give birth to their first litter when they themselves are 8 or 9 months old.
- The maximum length of life for nutria kept in captivity is 12 years, but the life span in the wild probably is considerably less.
- They were introduced in Texas as a "cure-all" for ponds choked with vegetation. They do reduce many kinds of aquatic plants, but they will not eat "moss" (algae) and many of the submerged plants. At times they do the job too well.
- Once nutria are established in a lake, their high reproductive capacity soon results in overpopulation. There are so many nutria that the available food supply will not satisfy them, and then trouble begins.
- The animals move into places where they are not wanted or where they destroy vegetation that is valuable for such wildlife as waterfowl and muskrats.

