Myocastor coypus

Taxon	Family / Order / Class / Phylum
Myocastor coypus Molina, 1782	Myocastoride / Rodentia / Mammalia / Chordata

COMMON NAMES (English only)
Coypu
Nutria

SYNONYMS
Mus coypus Molina, 1782
Myocastor coypus Kerr, 1792
Myopotamus bonariensis Geoffroy St.-Hilaire, 1805
Mastonotus popelairi Wesmael, 1841

SHORT DESCRIPTION
Large semi-aquatic rodent that lives along rivers, lakes, and marshes. The weight is often between 2-4 kg but adult males can reach 7-8 kg. Superficially it is rat-like, with short legs and a long cylindrical tail, the first four digits of the hind feet are webbed; the pelage is brown. It is herbivorous except for occasional feeding on mussels.

***Myocastor coypus* is a South American rodent strictly linked to freshwater habitat.**

Photo: Riccardo Scalera

BIOLOGY/ECOLOGY

Dispersal mechanisms
Coypus are good swimmers and fast colonizers, able to rapidly occupy suitable vacant habitats using freshwater as a pathway.

Reproduction
Coypus can breed throughout the year. The age of first parturition is 3-8 mo. Prenatal embryo losses (up to 50-60%) and abortion of litters could influence productivity. Mean litter size at birth is 4.5-5.4 (Italy, England). In good habitats females may have 2.7 litters/year with a mean of 15 young/year.

Known predators/herbivores
Alligators, canids and large felids are the main predators in America and Russia. In Europe predation by foxes, dogs, and marsh harriers is probably more limited. Young are more vulnerable and taken more by predators than adults.

Resistant stages (seeds, spores etc.)
None.

HABITAT

Native (EUNIS code)
Aquatic habitats.

Habitat occupied in invaded range (EUNIS code)
C1: Inland surface water habitats, D1: Mire, bog and fen habitats.

Habitat requirements
It can adapt to a wide variety of aquatic habitats, from freshwaters and lakes to drainage canals. They usually live in the lowlands, but can reach 1,200 m in the Andes. Cold winter reduces breeding success and influences population dynamics.

DISTRIBUTION

Native Range

The coypu is native to the Patagonian subregion of South America and occurs in the northern part of Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, southern Brazil, and Chile

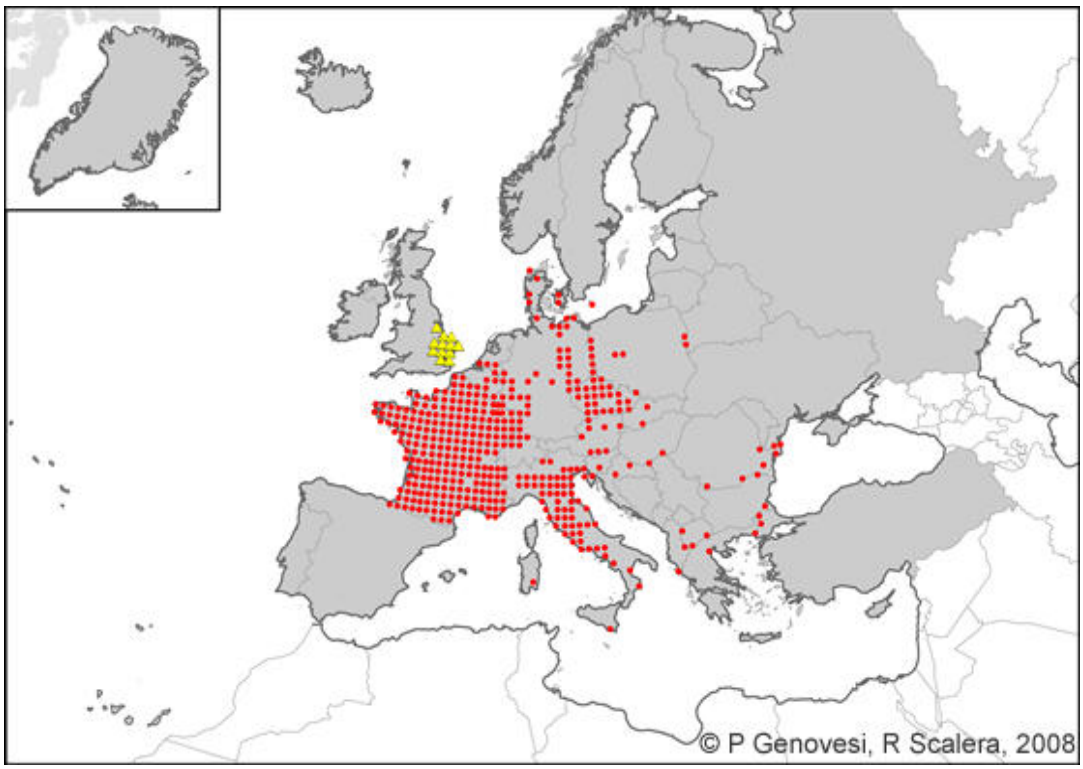
Known Introduced Range

Naturalized populations occur in North America, Europe, central and northern Asia, Japan, East Africa and the Middle East. In East Anglia (England) the species was eradicated after an 11-years removal campaign.

Trend

Despite that in America and Europe there are many control programs to reduce spreading and population densities, distribution ranges and population densities are increasing in many countries.

MAP (European distribution)



Legend

	Known in country		Known in CGRS square		Known in sea
	Eradicated		Eradicated		Extinct

INTRODUCTION PATHWAY

Often naturalized after escapes or releases from fur farms. In other cases animals were intentionally released into the wild with the aim of harvesting their furs. Spreading populations could invade other countries (e.g. in Spain coypus are entering from France).

IMPACT

Ecosystem Impact

The impact on wetlands through feeding on aquatic vegetation could be severe. Selective feeding by coypu caused massive reduction in reedswamp areas, and eliminated plants of *Rumex* spp. and *Nuphar lutea* over large areas. It destroys nests and preys on eggs of several aquatic birds, including some endangered species.

Health and Social Impact

It has been hypothesized that the species has a role in the epidemiology of leptospirosis, although its role is probably less important for the spread of the bacteria in the environment compared to rats.

Economic Impact

The species is considered a pest for its feeding on crops, such as sugar beets and maize, and for its burrowing activity that disrupts riverbanks and dikes. In Italy during 1995-2000, despite control activities involving the

removal of 220,688 coypus with a cost of 2,614,408 €, damage to the riverbanks exceeded 10 million € and impact on agriculture reached 935,138 €.

MANAGEMENT

Prevention

Where farming is still active, fences and security should be verified and improved. In some small areas, buried or partially buried fences have been used to avoid burrowing by animals to protect crops.

Mechanical

Shooting is effective for population control when environmental conditions force the animals into the open, while cage trapping has also been used in the English eradication program.

Chemical

In some countries like France and United States, baits with toxicants are used. North Americans use zinc phosphide on carrots or sweet potatoes.

Biological

Unknown.

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