**Overview**

Short description of *Myocastor coypus*, Coypu

The coypu is a large aquatic rodent, resembling a small beaver but with a rounded, not flattened tail. The fur is coarse and dark brown, with a whitish patch on the muzzle. Large orange incisor teeth are usually visible.

**Description of Myocastor coypus, Coypu status in GB**

The coypu was well established in eastern England by the early 1960s, with a peak population of around 200,000, but was finally eradicated in 1989.

**Habitat summary: Myocastor coypus, Coypu**

GB distribution was extensive along river systems and in wetlands, especially those with large areas of reeds, rushes or other aquatic plants.

**Overview table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment:</th>
<th>Terrestrial and Freshwater</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Species status:</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native range:</td>
<td>Brazil, Southern South America, Argentina Distrito Federal, Bolivia, Aisén, Antofagasta, Atacama, Biobío, Coquimbo, Desventurados Is., Juan Fernández Is., La Araucania, Los Lagos, Magellanes, Maule, O'Higgins, Santiago, Tarapacá, Valparaíso, Paraguay, Uruguay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Functional type:</td>
<td>Herbivore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status in England:</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status in Scotland:</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
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<tr>
<td>Status in Wales:</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location of first record:</td>
<td>Horsham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of first record:</td>
<td>1932</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Invasion history: Myocastor coypus, Coypu**

**Origin**

The native range is in South America, from Peru and southern Brazil south to the Straits of Magellan.

**First Record**

Coypu were first brought to GB for fur farming in 1929, and escapes into the wild were first documented in Sussex in 1932.

**Pathway and Method**

Coypu were imported to be kept for their fur but escapes were noted from half of the 49 fur-farms that held them during 1929–39.
Species Status
Coypus have been released into wetlands in many countries, both accidentally and deliberately in an attempt to reduce clogging of waterways by aquatic plants. Feral populations are established in many North American states from southern Canada to northern Mexico, widely across Europe with the exceptions of Iberia and Scandinavia, and in Kenya. Coypu farming is practised widely in Asia.

Ecology & Habitat: *Myocastor coypus*, Coypu

Dispersal Mechanisms
The species demonstrated rapid dispersal along watercourses. Between 1937 and 1945, coypu spread along 65 km of Norfolk’s rivers.

Reproduction
Coypu breed year round and are extremely prolific. Males reach sexual maturity between 4 and 9 months. Females reach sexual maturity at 3–9 months and give birth to litters averaging 4–5 young at intervals as short as 130 days. Nest chambers are made in long tunnels dug in river banks.

Known Predators/Herbivores
None known.

Resistant Stages
None.

Habitat Occupied in GB
Habitats occupied in GB included all kinds of freshwater marshland and other bodies of fresh water with suitable banks for burrowing and aquatic vegetation for food. Coypu also visited arable land, gardens and allotments in search of food.

Distribution: *Myocastor coypus*, Coypu
At its peak, the now-eradicated GB distribution centred on Norfolk and east Suffolk but extended into Essex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Lincolnshire. Escapes were also recorded elsewhere in eastern England, and in Scotland and Wales.

Impacts: *Myocastor coypus*, Coypu

Environmental Impact
Grazing in waterways and on marshland can severely damage or destroy areas of emergent or marsh vegetation, such as reedbeds, removing important habitats for native animals such as Bittern and other marshland birds. Local populations of the rare flowering rush *Butomus* were eradicated by coypu activity.

Health and Social Impact
Coypu carry a nematode parasite that can cause dermatitis in humans ("nutria itch").

Economic Impact
The species now has little value for its fur but is traded for meat in some countries. Burrowing by coypus undermines river banks and flood defences, damages irrigation systems, and can cause serious flooding. Wooden structures may be damaged by gnawing. They are reported to have reduced the supply of Norfolk reed for thatching. The total cost of the successful eradication from GB has been estimated at £2.5m.

References & Links: *Myocastor coypus*, Coypu

Identification

Management and impact


General
