

Patagonian Cavy (Patagonian Mara)

Dolichotis patagonum

Class: *Mammalia*

Order: *Rodentia*

Family: *Caviidae*

Characteristics: The Patagonian mara is a distinctly unusual looking rodent that is about the size of a small dog. They have long ears with a body resembling a small deer. The snout and large dark eyes are also unusual for a rodent. The back and upper sides are brownish grey with a darker patch near the rump. There is one white patch on either side of the rump and down the haunches. Most of the body is a light brown or tan color. They have long, powerful back legs which make them excellent runners. The back feet are a hoof like claw with three digits, while the front feet have four sharp claws to aid in burrowing ([Encyclopedia of Life](#)).

Behavior: The Patagonian mara is just as unusual in behavior as it is in appearance. These rodents are active during the day and spend a large portion of their time sunbathing. If threatened by a predator, they will escape quickly by galloping or stotting away at speeds over 25 mph. The cavy can be found in breeding pairs that rarely interact with other pairs ([Arkive](#)). During breeding season, maras form large groups called settlements, consisting of many individuals sharing the same [communal dens](#). Some large dens are shared by 29-70 maras ([Animal Diversity](#)).

Reproduction: This species is strictly [monogamous](#) and usually bonded for life ([BBC Nature](#)). The female has an extremely short [estrous](#), only 30 minutes every 3-4 months. The gestation period is around 100 days in the wild. Litters of maras range in size from 1 to 3 pups. The mother will visit the den for about an hour at a time, because she must split time with other nursing mothers in the same den. Pups are weaned at 75-78 days of age. At first, the pups will stay close to the den. They will then begin to follow the parents. Most young leave when they are weaned ([Animal Diversity](#)).

Diet: Wild: Grasses, other shrubs and plants, and cacti
Zoo: Fruits, vegetables, greens, monkey chow, rodent pellet, and hay.

Conservation: [IUCN Redlist](#) of endangered species lists the Patagonian cavy as near threatened. They justify this classification because populations are declining at a rate close to 30 percent over 10 years. Major threats to the population include habitat loss, introduction of other herbivores, and hunting.

FYI: In the monogamous pair, the male fiercely defends the female. He follows and guards her wherever she goes.

Females usually aggressively reject interloping pups by lunging, chasing, biting and shaking, or throwing them away from her. Some pups make frequent attempts to steal milk and many have tattered and damaged ears from these [fierce rejections](#) ([Animal Diversity](#)).



Range & Habitat:

The species occurs in lowland habitats, including forest and creosote bush flats in northwestern Argentina.



Lifespan: up to 14 years in captivity, unknown in the wild.

Special Adaptations: This species has evolved to be monogamous to take advantage of the very short estrous period.

IUCN Conservation Status:
Near Threatened

