

Coypu

Scientific Name: *Myocastor coypus* **Irish Name:** Cadhpú



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The Coypu is a mammal native to South America. It is semi-aquatic, living in and around rivers, lakes, marshes and other wet areas. This nocturnal animal is actually a large rodent, measuring 1 metre from head to tail. It has two large orange-yellow front teeth, which are a characteristic of the animal. It looks something between a beaver and a large rat and is sometimes confused with an otter. In fact, another name for it is the River Rat. With webbed hind feet, the Coypu is an expert swimmer and can stay under water for up to five minutes. In the wild, its predators include alligators, turtles, large snakes and birds of prey.

Coypu have lots of babies. They have two to three litters per year, with an average of five young per litter. They are born with full fur and with their eyes open. They mature quickly and have a life span of about 8 to 10 years.

FACT FILE

Length: 1 metre long

Weight: 5 - 9 kg

Colour: Brown body, lighter underneath, white snout

Diet: Mostly herbivorous, eating aquatic plants and roots. It does however eat mussels and snails in some habitats.

Habitat: Rivers, lakes, marshes and other wet areas.

A Metre-long Rodent on the River Lee in Cork!

There was a recent sighting of a highly invasive species of rodent on the River Lee in Cork. From a footbridge in the City, a passer-by saw a 1 metre South American Coypu. This is a highly invasive, non-native species and their burrowing and clearing of vegetation can cause a lot of damage to river banks. Over the last few years, 10 Coypus have been removed from a nearby river. It is believed two or three of these animals were released into a river two years ago and have begun breeding.



By José Reynaldo da Fonseca (CC-BY-SA-3.0 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ARatao_do_banhado_1_REFON.jpg)

Invasive Species

Coypu have been introduced in many countries around the world, to be farmed for their fur. They have a soft fur known as Nutria, and it is by this name that the animal is known in North America. Farm escapees have formed feral populations. Feral means living in the wild but descended from captive or domestic animals. These feral animals can be very destructive in their non-native homes and it is feared that if a feral population in Ireland takes hold, they will cause huge damage to our habitats (see page 9).

Relatives

The South American Coypu is the only member of the Myocastoridae Family. It is related to a bigger group of animals, known as Rodents, which includes such animals as the beaver, rats, mice, squirrels and hamsters.



By Steve, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:American_Beaver.jpg (CC BY-SA 3.0)

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The Beaver (left) has a bigger, shorter and flatter tail, while the Coypu's is more rat-like. The Rat (right) is much smaller than the Coypu and has a longer snout.