



## Endangered Species of The Bahamas



### SCIENTIFIC NAME

*Geocapromys ingrahami*

### DESCRIPTION

The Bahamas hutia is a plump, brown, rabbit-sized member of the rodent family. Hutias are unique to the West Indies. The average hutia weighs just over one and a half pounds. Hutias are nocturnal and are the only land mammal native to The Bahamas.

### DIET

Hutias are herbivores (plant eaters), feeding on the leaves and twigs of a variety of succulent shrubs. Some of their food sources are bay cedar (*Suriana maritima*), buttonwood (*Conocarpus erecta*) leaves and twigs, and swamp bush (*Forestiera segregata*).

### REPRODUCTION

There is no defined mating season for the Bahama hutia. Restricted breeding seasons in animals are adaptations to seasonal changes in climate and food supply. No such restrictions exist for the Bahama hutia. The period of gestation lasts for approximately 85-120 days. The Bahama hutia bears one live young at a time.

### HABITAT

Bahama hutias occur naturally only on East Plana Cay located between Acklins and Mayaguana. Historically however, they were found on ten Bahamian islands, East Plana Cay is hot and dry and may be described, as "semi-desert." It is covered with woody shrubs that have small succulent needle-shaped leaves, characteristic of desert plants. Bahama Hutias are dominant animal species on East Plana Cay. In a move to protect the species, a small Bahama hutia population was transplanted to two locations- Little Wax Cay and Warderick Wells. These three locations now host the only known populations of this particular species in the whole world.

## **STATUS**

Many years ago Bahama hutias were an important food source of the Indian inhabitants of The Bahamas. But over the centuries their population became so depleted that, prior to 1966 when they were "rediscovered" on East Plana Cay, the Bahama hutia was thought to be extinct. Although the current populations are thriving, the hutia is still considered an endangered species. The hutia is protected under the Wild Animals (Protection) Act. Additionally, it is recorded as "rare" in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red Lists of 1990. It is illegal to harm, capture or export this animal.

## **THREATS**

Besides being consumed by local populations, other historical predators included the extinct Alco, a Lucayan domesticated dog, and Chickcharnie owl (*Tyto pollens*). Its present isolation on three small cays makes it especially vulnerable to natural disasters such as hurricanes. The introduction of any predator to the three known populations could easily upset the population balance and the Bahama hutia could suddenly become extinct.

## **INTERESTING FACTS**

- Hutias have adapted to their environment by obtaining water from the moisture of the vegetation in their diet.
- Males define territory by urine markings,
- Usually rodents become aggressive when they are living in crowded conditions. Bahama hutias, however are capable of living together in high population densities.



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