

ROUS Foundation Research Project on Capybara Growth Rates

What is the ROUS Foundation?:

The ROUS Foundation (RF) (rousfoundation.com) is a non-profit charity in conjunction with Texas A&M University(<http://vetmed.tamu.edu/giving/opportunities/rous>). The goal of the RF is to improve the health and veterinary care of captive capybaras.

Overview of the Capybara Growth Rate Project:

The goal of this project is to expand and enhance knowledge of growth rates of captive capybaras and to compare those with existing data on capybaras in the wild or in semi-wild ranches or research facilities within their native range.

Additional aspects of the participating student's responsibilities will be:

- The RF pays for necropsies of capybaras shipped to the A&M Veterinary School. The student will be expected to track these animals to make sure that they are handled correctly during the entire process. A similar service is funded for tissue samples.
- Compilation of previous necropsies

Qualifications:

- We expect this work to span multiple years, so we would like a student who anticipates an ongoing involvement
- An interest in capybaras and other rodents, specifically caviés
- An interest in veterinary research as well as practice
- Good communication skills
- Expertise with Excel or the Apple equivalent
- Good foundation in statistics
- Skilled in creating professional documents in Microsoft Word including footnotes, graphs, and indexes
- Proficiency in Spanish and/or Portuguese
- Previous research experience

Detailed Background:

The RF has been gathering data on growth rates of privately held capybaras for about eight years. This data has been gathered from about 35 animals generally kept as pets, breeders, or in small zoos. Because it is much easier to weigh a small capybara than a large one, most of the accumulated data is from young animals. Our data on adult capybaras is very limited.

This project is expected to build on that knowledge by contacting zoos throughout North America to get relevant information. A Yellow Paper concerning capybaras kept in AZA zoos should be available, although we have only seen a copy of an early draft.

We expect the newly acquired data to include:

- Age and sex
- Current weights

- Reproductive status
- Births and deaths within a specific time frame
- Weights and ages of capybaras at time of death

The student will also be expected to scan current research for up-to-date information. Some of this information is likely to be in either Portuguese or Spanish

This data will be combined with the RF data to create a more detailed and substantiated chart of expected weights for capybaras based on age.

Various internet sources site a life expectancy of captive capybaras as 10-12 years. However, it is known to us that at least a few capybaras from a single breeder have lived to 17, and many capybaras die when juveniles. We are expecting this research to provide a more accurate life expectancy.

Proposed Research Timeline open to revision as the project advances):

- Spring 2019:
 - Formal research proposal including methods, goals, and timeline
- Fall 2019:
 - Completed analysis of original RF growth data including development of a spreadsheet and initial tables and charts
- Spring 2020:
 - Data gathering from 10 -20 zoos
 - Incorporation of zoo data into existing spreadsheet
- Fall 2020
 - Data analysis
 - Preparation for publication

The student will be required to provide monthly updates on project progress