



Have you seen me? © DEBBIE CRANE/TNC

In North Carolina, nutria are well established in the northeastern corner of the state. But, they have been seen as far south as New Hanover County. It is unclear how nutria arrived in North Carolina. Some sources cite a 1941 escape from a fur farm on Cape Hatteras. Others say they migrated here after they were released further north in an effort to control water weeds. The Nature Conservancy has found nutria in its Nags Head Woods Preserve on the Outer Banks. They are also routinely seen in nearby wildlife refuges.

No matter how they got here, they are here. The goal is to keep them from destroying North Carolina's wetlands and marshes.

Property owners should be on the lookout for nutria and their signs. Nutria aren't hard to identify. Adults are 15 to 20 pounds. About a third of their body is comprised of round scaly bristly tail, rather than a beaver's flat tail. They have large front teeth, which are often bright orange. Nutria create deep burrows as they forage for food.



Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

The Nature Conservancy  
Nags Head Woods Ecological Preserve  
(252) 441-2525

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission maintains a list of licensed trappers who can rid your property of nutria.

*The list is available at:*

[www.ncwildlife.org/Nuisance\\_Wildlife/Nuisance\\_Licensed\\_Trapper.htm](http://www.ncwildlife.org/Nuisance_Wildlife/Nuisance_Licensed_Trapper.htm)

The Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management has information about trapping as well.

[icwdm.org](http://icwdm.org)

This brochure was paid for with a grant from the Mid-Atlantic Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species (MAPAIS) funding through the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife and Heritage Service [www.midatlanticpanel.org](http://www.midatlanticpanel.org).



Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

## Nutria: eating out on your coast



Nutria © DEBBIE CRANE/TNC

Thanks to their voracious appetites, nutria have destroyed tens of thousands of acres of marsh and wetlands on the Gulf and Atlantic coasts. Nutria are established in North Carolina, but have not yet had a major impact here. We want to keep it that way.

Keep our coast looking like this.  
Be on the lookout for nutria.



Nutria are large rodents that are native to South America. In the late 1800s and throughout the early 1900s, they were imported to create nutria fur ranches. But, nutria fur never caught on in America. After World War II, it was clear that nutria ranching was not going to make people wealthy. Some farmers released nutria into the wild. Other nutria escaped when storms hit farming areas. Still other nutria were intentionally released into the wild to serve as "weed cutters," eating unwanted aquatic vegetation.

Nutria thrive in the Wild. Adult nutria weigh up to 20 pounds and they consume 25 percent of their body weight in a single day. Nutria are not picky and will eat almost any plant. When they eat, they eat a plant through to its roots. This burrowing behavior, often called an "eat out", not only destroys the entire plant, but removes the root mats from the soil.

These root mats are important for holding soil in place, particularly in sensitive wetlands and marshlands. Once the root mats are gone, waves wash away the soil.

Nutria are prolific. They give birth two to three times a year. Baby nutria begin to eat plants within 24 hours of birth. This ability to reproduce quickly and consume large quantities of plants helps the nutria live up to its Latin American name "coypu," which means "water sweeper."

In addition to opening marshlands and wetlands to erosion, nutria also create swimming channels, fragmenting the area and making it less useful habitat for other animals. Nutria destruction results

in habitat loss for waterfowl and other birds. It also reduces valuable nursery areas for fish, shrimp and other species.

There really isn't anything good to be said about nutria in the United States. They eat themselves and a lot of other critters "out of house and home." Many people think of nutria as a Gulf Coast problem, but they are established along the east coast and have caused huge problems, particularly on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. It is estimated that the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge in Maryland lost more than 7,000 acres as the result of nutria feeding.

Although their meat is supposed to be low in fat, nutria has never taken off as a food source. Their fur has little value. On the Blackwater Refuge, a project costing more than \$8 million has successfully eradicated close to 60,000 nutria.