



Guinea Pig

Cavia Porcellus



What is the history of my relationship to man?

Guinea Pigs are known from ancient times. The Incas farmed and selected them for food and used them as religious icons. Legends hold that Guinea Pigs are mystical beings that can heal the sick and assist the dying. Currently in Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador the roasted Guinea Pig is typical food. Guinea Pigs are used in laboratories and for pets.

Habitat / Climate

temperate forest
rain forest
temperate grasslands

Where am I from?

I am native to South America where today I still live in the wild. I live in grasslands and rocky areas near forests. I do not burrow for myself but instead will use abandoned burrows of other animals or live in the long grass.



Other family members:

Patagonian cavy
yellow toothed cavy
Chiacuan mara
Andean mountain cavy

Who are my relatives?

I am from the order *Rodentia* and the family *Caviidae*. The scientific name for my species *porcellus*, means little pig but I am not a pig and I do not come from New Guinea



Breeding Potential

Litter size? 1 - 13 , ave. of 4

Number of litters per year? 5

How am I born?

My gestation period lasts from 63-72 days and I will be well developed when I am born. I am so precocial that my mother doesn't even make a nest. I'm mobile from birth and able to eat solid food after a few days although I continue to nurse for up to three weeks. My mother may have eight or more pups but not all of us will live. She can become pregnant again in less than 12 hours after I am born. She will have a maximum of 5 litters each year.

How long does it take me to grow up, how big do I get and how long do I live?

I will be sexually mature at 3 months if I am a male. Females have been known to be fertile as early as three weeks but having a litter this young could seriously affect her growth. She will be ready to have babies at 2 months old. I am large for a rodent. When I am grown I will weigh between 1-3 pounds and measuring 10-15 inches long. I will live an average of 4-8 years.

Breeding Season

A N F M A M J J A S O N D
E B R R Y U L U G P T V C

Birth rates peak in the spring.

Names for:

Adult male- Boars
Adult female- Sows
Young- Pups
Group:- Group or herd

What kind of family life do I have?

My mother doesn't seem to form any special maternal bond with me but I will be part of the herd nursing from any of the mothers in the herd. As I get older I will try to challenge the dominant male in the group if I am a male and will probably have to leave to start my own family. The females never engage in fighting and get along very well

What do I eat and when do I eat?

I am a herbivore. I eat grass or what ever plants I come across. I have an unusual way of digesting my food. I do not have a long digestive tract needed to digest grass so I practice *coprophagy*, the eating of my own feces. I only eat special soft pellets that I produce which are called *cecotropes* and that contain the vitamin B and bacteria I need for proper digestion. Several different plants are poisonous to me some of which are the tomato plant leaves, lily of the valley, buttercup and ragwort.

I can not synthesize my own vitamin C and must get it from food. I am *crepuscular*, tending to be more active during dawn and dusk.

Who are my predators?

All carnivores.



Notes: