

Cuniculus paca



Lowland paca¹

Conservation status



Scientific classification

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Mammalia

Order: Rodentia

Family: Cuniculidae

Genus: Cuniculus

Species: C. paca

Binomial Name

Cuniculus paca

(Linnaeus, 1766)

The lowland paca (*Cuniculus paca*), also known as the spotted paca, is a large rodent found in tropical and sub-tropical America, from east-central Mexico to northern Argentina, and has been introduced to Cuba and Algeria.²

The animal is called paca in most of its range, but tepezcuintle (original Aztec language name) in most of Mexico and Central America, tepesquintle in Guatemala, guardatinaja in Nicaragua, pisquinte in northern Costa Rica, jaleb in the Yucatán peninsula, conejo pintado in Panama, guanta in Ecuador, majás or picuro in Peru, jochi pintado in Bolivia, and boruga, tinajo, or guartinaja in Colombia.^{3,4}

The lowland paca has coarse fur without underfur, dark brown to black on the upper body and white or yellowish on the underbelly. It usually has three to five rows of white spots along its sides, against a dark grey background. It has thick strong legs, with four digits in the forefeet and five in the hind feet (the first and fifth are reduced); the nails function as hooves. The tail is short and hairless.⁵

Behaviour

Lowland pacas are solitary, nocturnal, territorial and monogamous. A mated pair shares a territory that can be up to 8.6 acres in size and may overlap with the territories of other mated pairs (Jrank.org, 2011). Absent mating, they live singly with each individual having their own burrows and paths.⁵

Most lowland pacas leave their burrows at night to forage for food along pathways and in the underbrush close to their burrows and a water source. They are less active and less seen in the day as they are thought to mostly sleep in their burrows.

Diet

Lowland pacas have been once described as “animated garbage pails” because of their tendency to eat large amounts of a huge variety of foods. Lowland pacas come out at night to forage for a wide array of plants, herbs, nuts, fruits, seeds, tubers and roots on which they feed. Locally, they have been known to feed on coco macaque, balata, wild chataigne, hog plum, pomerac, guava, avocado and mango (the last two mentioned being favorites). However, they lack the ability to hold up food with their paws to eat unlike other rodents.⁵