

THE ISTHMIAN CAPYBARA IN THE CANAL ZONE

In January 1947, Mr. Henry Van Horn, river supervisor for the Santa Rosa Station of the Gorgas Memorial Laboratory, shot a capybara, *Hydrochoerus isthmius* Goldman, on the east bank of the mid-basin of the Chagres River about one mile below Juan Mina, Canal Zone. Neither he, nor the other inhabitants of the area, had ever before seen an animal like it. Dr. Herbert C. Clark, who has camped and hunted since 1909 on the headwaters of the Chagres as well as on the middle Chagres area has never seen or heard of an authentic record of this animal there. This record is thus the first for the species west of the Tuyra River in Darien (the type locality) and the first for the species in the Canal Zone. The single specimen collected was unfortunately eaten, but the skull was saved and has been deposited in the U. S. National Museum (No. 282370). A second capybara was seen feeding

in company with the one collected and has been observed at the same place subsequently. The river bank here is overgrown with heavy emergent grasses, with a stand of tall bamboo behind.

Whether the capybara has succeeded in extending its range up the Chucunaque River (the main western tributary of the Tuyra River) and across the divide to the Bayano drainage and hence to the Chagres, or whether the individuals now appearing along the Chagres River are escapes from some unknown collector is uncertain. In any event, the formation of Gatun and Madden lakes, as a consequence of the construction of the Panama Canal, has created numerous favorable habitats for the capybara. The habitat in which they are now being observed on the Chagres River is similar to that from which the species was described in Darien. The species is still thriving in the vicinity of the type locality near El Real de Santa Maria, Darien Province, as a group of almost a dozen was observed there recently (March 1947) grazing with cattle along the bank of the Tuyra River.

Dr. Remington Kellogg has kindly compared the skull of the Chagres River capybara with the type of *Hydrochoerus isthmius* Goldman and finds it slightly larger, but smaller than specimens from northern Colombia and with less inflated bullae.

We do not contemplate further efforts to collect the other individual seen, as might be desirable for comparative purposes, until it is evident that the species has become established in this new locality.—HAROLD TRAPIDO, *Gorgas Memorial Laboratory, Apartado 1252, Panamá, Republica de Panamá.*