

### THE ISTHMIAN CAPYBARA IN THE TOCUMEN SAVANNAS, PANAMA

The distribution of the Isthmian Capybara, *Hydrochoerus isthmius* Goldman, in the Panama region has been a matter of special interest to the staff of the Gorgas Memorial Laboratory for a number of years due to the extreme susceptibility of this large rodent to equine trypanosomiasis (Clark, H. C., and Dunn, L. H., Amer. Jour. Trop. Med., 13, no. 3: 273-281, 1933). Until the recent report from the Chagres River in the Canal Zone (Trapido, H., Jour. Mamm., 28: 408-9, 1947) this species was known only from the drainage of the Tuyra River in Darien, in extreme eastern Panama.

It has recently been possible to establish that the capybara is actually quite common in the Pacific coastal swamps into which the Tocumen, Cabuya, and the Cabra rivers empty, about fifteen miles east of Panama City. While the species is abundant there its distribution is apparently somewhat restricted, as it has never been reported from the coastal marshes farther east another fifteen miles where the members of the La Juagua Hunt Club have hunted for a number of years.

On April 14, 1948, while walking along a game trail in the swamp south of the eastern end of the new Tocumen international airport, with Sr. Pedro Galindo, our attention was drawn by a heavy rustle in the tall grass. At this time of year, the end of the dry season, the water in the area is reduced to a number of deep pools in which we were observing a concentration of caimans. What we at first supposed to be a caiman cut off from the water, rushed through the grass and dashed up the game trail on which we stood, brushed against Sr. Galindo, knocked him to one side, and passed some four feet in front of me. The animal was plainly a capybara. A survey of the area then disclosed numerous droppings. A little later we encountered a group of natives hunting caiman and described the animal to them. They promptly recognized it as a "poncho," the common name which is also applied to *Hydrochoerus* in Darien. These men who hunt this savannah regularly informed us that the "poncho" was a common inhabitant of the area and had been there as long as they could remember. It seems unlikely, therefore, that the capybara there is a recent introduction, but rather that the opening of the area with the new roads to the airport has brought them to our attention.—HAROLD TRAPIDO, Gorgas Memorial Laboratory, Panama, Republica de Panama. Received June 28, 1948.