

## Feral Coypu *Myocastor coypus* (Rodentia, Mammalia) in Yugoslavia Prostoživeče nutrije *Myocastor coypus* (Rodentia, Mammalia) v Jugoslaviji

Purger J. J., B. Kryštufek

Accepted (sprejeto): 1991-10-25

---

Descriptors: Rodentia / *Myocastor coypus* / Yugoslavia

**Abstract.** Presented and mapped are fifteen localities where feral coypus were found. Singular escapes or ephemeral populations are mainly in question, but in three cases stable feral populations were recorded.

Dekriptorji: Rodentia / *Myocastor coypus* / Jugoslavija

**Izveček.** Podanih in kartiranih je petnajst nahajališč, kjer so bile nutrije najdene v prosti naravi. Pri večini primerov gre za posamične pobege ali efemerne populacije, na treh mestih pa se je razvila stabilna prostoživeča populacija.

---

### Introduction

*Myocastor coypus* (Molina, 1782) is a large caviomorph rodent, native to South America. Due to a high commercial value of its pelage, it was introduced into various parts of the world to be bred at fur farms, from which it sometimes manages to escape, or is deliberately released. Feral populations have been reported from North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Middle East (STUBBE 1982).

The coypu was never introduced intentionally into open country in Yugoslavia, but is relatively common at fur farms throughout the country. In Slovenia, first such farms date back to the thirties of this century. None of the faunal lists considers feral coypus in Yugoslavia (e.g. NIETHAMMER 1963, STUBBE 1982), and the species is regarded as being reared only in captivity (e.g. MIRIĆ 1970). There are, however, some earlier references reporting two cases of its short appearance in feral conditions in eastern Slovenia. New data indicate that feral populations are to be found in different regions of Yugoslavia. Although the evidence is still scarce, we are publishing these records since they are the first of their kind to come from Yugoslavia.

---

Jane J. PURGER — Institute of biology  
YU-21000 Novi Sad, Trg Dositeja Obradovića 2  
Boris KRYŠTUFEK — Slovene Museum of Natural History  
YU-61001 Ljubljana, Prešernova 20, P.O. Box 290

---

## Material and Methods

The data were obtained from the literature, museum specimen labels, personal communication, and by observations of tracks and characteristic excrements. The coypu is frequently known by local people as “dabar” (Serbo-Croatian for a beaver, *Castor fiber*), a species now exterminated in Yugoslavia. We attempted to draw a distinction between individual escapes and established feral populations. The identifying numbers in the text correspond to Fig. 1.

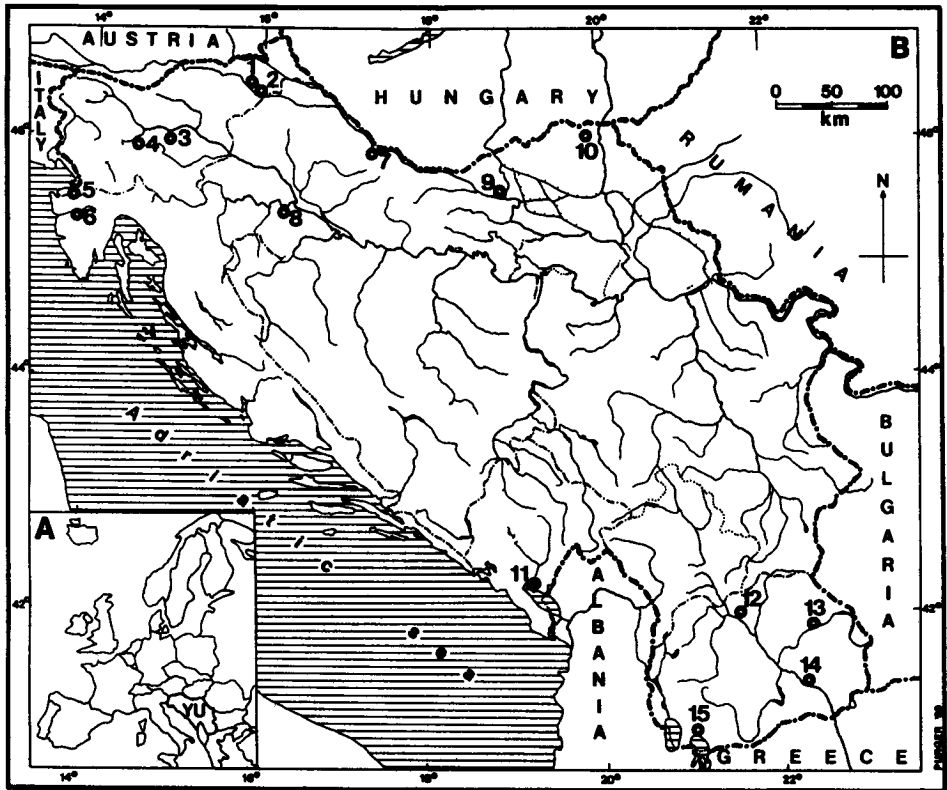


Figure 1. Localities where coypu *Myocastor coypus* (Molina, 1782) has been found in Yugoslavia. See text for identifying numbers.

Slika 1. Nahajališča nutrije *Myocastor coypus* (Molina, 1782) v Jugoslaviji. Razlaga je v tekstu.

## Results and Discussion

Discussed hereafter are fifteen Yugoslav localities where coypu has been bound.

### SLOVENIA

1. Pobrežje (near Ptuj). One adult coypu (weight 7 kg) was killed in 1937. It must have escaped from a fur farm owned by a certain Seifrid-Reiter (ANONYMOUS 1937a).

2. Stojnci and its surrounding. In November 1936, two specimens appeared in Žabovci, where they survived the winter. Next year, three coypus were killed or captured at Stojnci, Bukovci, and Hajdina (ANONYMOUS 1937b). The local hunters endeavoured to protect the species to enrich their hunting grounds with a new game animal. However, the feral population did not survive there.

3. Polšnik (near Litija). One completely white adult female (weight 4 kg, head-and-body length 410 mm, tail length 340 mm, condylobasal length 97.0 mm) was found dead on 9th February 1988 (specimen in the Slovene Museum of Natural History, No. 5841; leg.: I. Sivec & B. Horvat). Since the habitat was not suitable for the coypu (rocky canyon of the Sava river), and no further records being available from this region, we believe that a single run-away animal was in question.

4. Ljubljansko barje near Notranje Gorice. According to personal communications by local hunters, feral coypus appeared in the Ljubljansko barje marshy area near Notranje Gorice in 1989/90. They survived over the winter there and even reproduced next spring. Their appearance may be connected with the existence of several small fur farms at Notranje Gorice.

5. Rižana river near Bertoki. A coypu was observed in the Rižana river on 4th April 1990 (B. Marčeta, personal communication). In 1955, a large fur farm was established at the spring of this river (VRBNIK 1956), some 10 km to the east of Bertoki, but the farm was abandoned a long time ago.

### CROATIA

6. Motovunska šuma (on the Mirna river). A large feral coypu population was discovered on the Mirna river in 1989 (L. Lipej and B. Marčeta, personal communication). According to the information by the local people, feral coypus have been living there for a decade or so.

7. Pitomača (on the Drava river). A large adult coypu (condylobasal length of the skull 115.3 mm) was killed in February 1991. (N. Tvrtković, personal communication).

8. Bojani near Petrinje (on the Kupa river). A male was shot on 13th January 1990 (D. Kovačić, personal communication).

9. Kopački rit. Between 1959 and 1969, a hunting and forest management cooperative "Jelen" ran a coypu farm at Zlata Greda, which makes part of the Kopački rit. According to some personal and unverified communications of the local hunters, several coypus were killed in the wild between 1959 and 1960. The collection of the Zoological Museum of Kopački rit includes four skulls, yet, however, they are not labelled. As their occipital region is damaged, they most likely originate from the farm where they were killed by a knock on the head. Kept at this Museum were also three stuffed coypus whose history was unknown (J. Mikuska, personal communication).

## VOJVODINA

10. Lake Ludoško jezero and the Kereš river. According to personal communication by M. Acin from Hajdukovo (in 1989), coypus have been regularly observed in these two localities for the last 10 years.

## MONTENEGRO

11. The river Morača south of Titograd. One white coypu was killed in 1985. The specimen was determined by the late B. Knežević from Titograd (G. Džukić, personal communication). There is no evidence as to a permanent feral population in the Morača river.

## MACEDONIA

12. Aračinovsko blato near Skopje. According to the local people, this area is populated by the feral coypu which escaped from the Zoological Garden of Skopje (V. Vasić, personal communication). The employees of the Zoological Garden confirmed to one of the authors (in 1991) that such escapes were not uncommon.



Figure 2. Artificial fish pond with extensive reed at Bistrenci near Demir Kapija (point 14 in Fig. 1). Habitat of feral coypu and muskrat (photograph by B. Kryštufek).

Slika 2. Umetni ribniki z obsežnim pasom trsta v Bistrencih blizu Demir Kapije (točka 14 na sliki 1). Habitat je poseljen s prostoživečo populacijo nutrij in s pižmovkami (Foto B. Kryštufek).

13. Kočansko pole field. Runaway coypus were recorded in the rice fields and reeds of the Kočansko pole in 1985. The local people called them "džinovski staorec" ("giant rat" in Macedonian); they were said to weight over 5 kg. What has become of this population is not known.

14. Demir Kapija, Bistrenci (Fig. 2). A feral population living in artificial fish ponds. According to the personal communication (in 1990) by an employee working there for 8 years, the coypus were present throughout that period. The same person was familiar also with the muskrat *Ondatra zibethicus*, which was said to be common in this locality.

15. Lake Prespansko Ezero. According to a certain H. Salieski from the village of Asamati (the eastern shore of Lake Prespa), feral coypus were living in the fish pond Resen. The local people referred to the animals as "giant rats" (V. Vasić, personal communication).

Four out of fifteen localities reported above are based on a single killed coypu. Most probably, these reports do not indicate the existence of a feral population but simply the proximity of a fur farm from which coypus occasionally escape. As known of two localities (1 and 2), the feral populations there were of short duration and disappeared quite soon. Of another three localities (6, 10, and 14), it can be said with reasonable certainty that stable feral coypu populations live there. All these localities belong the lowlands (altitude below 200 m). The habitats are as follows: slowly running rivers, steppe lakes, and artificial fish ponds. Reed was abundant in all three localities. Extensive fen, reed swamp and similar marshlands are common habitats of the coypu also in other parts of Europe (e.g. CORBET & SOUTHERN 1977). The three populations, as mentioned above, are from different life zones (cf. MATVEJEV 1961). The basic ecological conditions appear to be similar, namely low elevation, large water surface and extensive reed. It seems that a large feral population of coypus may establish itself in any lowland region with large water surfaces and swamps abounding in reed.

### Acknowledgements

Our thanks are due to all persons mentioned in the text, who communicated the data about coypus to us or provided us with the material.

### Povzetek

Nutrija *Myocastor coypus* (Molina, 1782) je velik kaviomorfen glodavec, katerega domovina je Južna Amerika. Zaradi kvalitetnega krzna ga je človek zanesel v mnoge dele sveta, kjer ga bodisi redi na farmah ali pa živi v prosti naravi. Prostoživeče populacije so sicer poznane tudi iz Evrope, vendar velja nutrija v Jugoslaviji le za farmsko žival. Članek poroča o pojavljanju nutrije v prosti naravi v Sloveniji, Hrvaški, Vojvodini, Črni Gori in Makedoniji. V večini primerov gre za posamične pobege ali pa efemerne populacije. Vsaj v treh primerih (točke 6, 10 in 14 na sliki 1) pa gre za stabilno populacijo. Čeprav so ta nahajališča iz različnih biogeografskih območij (Istra, Vojvodina, Makedonija), jim je skupna majhna nadmorska višina (pod 200 m), obsežne vodne površine in gosta zaraščenost s trstom. Prostoživeče populacije nutrij se v tem delu Evrope verjetno lahko pojavijo v kateremkoli nižinskem območju z omenjenimi ekološkimi pogoji.

**References**

- ANONYMOUS 1937a: Redek lovski plen. Lovec, Ljubljana, 24: 75.
- ANONYMOUS 1937b: Močvirski bober v ptujski okolici. Lovec, Ljubljana, 24: 451.
- CORBET G B & H N SOTHERN 1977: The Handbook of British Mammals. Sec. ed. Blackwell Sci. Publications, Oxford, 520 pp.
- MATVEJEV S 1961: Biogeografija Jugoslavije. Biološki institut NR Srbije, Beograd. Posebna izdanja, 9: 1—232.
- MIRIĆ D 1970: Ključi za določevanje živali, V. Sesalci — Mammalia. Inštitut za biologijo Univerze v Ljubljani, Ljubljana, 132 pp.
- NIETHAMMER G 1963: Die Einbürgerung von Säugetieren und Vögeln in Europa. Verlag Paul Parey, Hamburg, 319 pp.
- STUBBE M 1982: *Myocastor coypus* (Molina, 1782) — Nutria. In: J NIETHAMMER & F KRAPP (eds.) Handbuch der Säugetiere Europas, Bd. 2/1. Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, Wiesbaden, pp. 607—630.
- VRBNIK S 1956: Bobri in fazani ob izvirku Rižane. Lovec, Ljubljana, 39: 295—296.