NEWS LESSON

The Capybaras Were There First. What Happens Now?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. How would you react to a capybara outside your front door?
2. What wildlife do people welcome near their homes?
3. When do people start calling an animal a problem?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**landscaped**	☐	A	completely and in great detail
2	**semi-aquatic**	☐	B	the state of living or existing together peacefully
3	**vegetation**	☐	C	a way of fixing a problem
4	**remedy**	☐	D	making something firmer or less willing to change
5	**legitimate**	☐	E	spending part of its life in water and part on land
6	**hardening**	☐	F	plants in general, especially those growing in one place
7	**comprehensively**	☐	G	fair and reasonable, with a good reason behind it
8	**coexistence**	☐	H	designed and planted to look attractive, as a garden or park is

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Capybaras graze on the lawns of a gated community near Buenos Aires, on land that was once wetland. Who should adapt when homes are built in an animal's habitat?

1 Capybaras graze on the landscaped lawns of Nordelta, a gated community outside Buenos Aires, as if the gardens had been planted for them. The residents enjoy artificial lakes and the promise of orderly, well-managed living. Yet the neighbourhood is also home to large numbers of carpinchos, the semi-aquatic rodents known internationally as capybaras, whose unhurried presence disrupts that carefully arranged environment.

2 The animals are not newcomers in any meaningful ecological sense. They are native to the wetlands on which the development expanded, and the waterways and vegetation created for human enjoyment have proved attractive habitat for the original inhabitants. What some residents describe as an invasion is better understood as the survival of wildlife within a landscape that has been comprehensively rebuilt around it.

3 It is worth recalling what the animal in question actually is. Capybaras are the largest living rodents on earth, group-dwelling relatives of the guinea pig that depend on water and graze on open vegetation. A family of them cropping a Nordelta lawn is not aberrant behaviour but entirely ordinary wetland behaviour, performed in an extraordinary setting.

4 The resulting tension is not entirely imaginary, and it would be unfair to pretend otherwise. People have raised concerns about road accidents, damage to property and unpredictable interactions with pets. The dispute nonetheless took a disturbing turn in September 2026, when footage emerged of a resident firing at capybaras. Complaints and an investigation followed, drawing renewed attention to the limits of private control over a shared ecosystem. A gated community may be able to regulate its hedges and its parking, but it cannot issue instructions to a wetland.

5 Campaigners advocate better habitat protection, ecological corridors and forms of coexistence that acknowledge how thoroughly the development has reshaped the wetland. Residents seeking practical safety measures have legitimate interests too, and dismissing them outright achieves nothing beyond hardening the argument. Relocation, often proposed as the obvious remedy, depends on there being somewhere suitable to move the animals to, which is precisely what the development has done away with. The challenge is to separate evidence-based management from the comfortable assumption that wildlife ought to disappear the moment it becomes inconvenient.

6 The argument also exposes a linguistic trap worth noticing. Terms such as "pest", "invasion" and "wildlife problem" quietly suggest that nature has intruded upon a settled human order. Often the building came after the animals. Roads and homes broke up their habitat, leaving them to find food and space in a landscape people had changed. Language of that sort does a good deal of work before the argument has formally begun, and whoever controls the vocabulary is halfway to controlling the policy that follows.

7 Nordelta's capybaras may look amusing in photographs, but they pose an uncomfortable question for cities everywhere. When property development manufactures a desirable address by transforming natural land, how much responsibility should fall to the people who benefit from it, and how much to the creatures that simply stayed where they were? The answer will matter wherever suburbs continue to expand into land that was never empty in the first place.

Sources: El País Argentina. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The writer implies that the capybaras' behaviour on the lawns is typical of the species. T F NG
2. The writer treats relocation as an easy solution. T F NG
3. The investigation into the shooting has concluded. T F NG
4. The writer considers the word "invasion" misleading in this case. T F NG
5. Nordelta's artificial lakes make the area less attractive to capybaras. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

acknowledge **advocate** **Dismissing** **disrupts** **intrude** **manufactures** **reshaped** **sustain**

1. The minister refused to _____ that the original forecast had been wrong.
2. Several economists _____ phasing in the tax over a decade rather than overnight.
3. A single signal failure routinely _____ the whole rail timetable.
4. A clever marketing team _____ a sense of scarcity to drive up demand.
5. _____ the objections without reading them only angers those who made them.
6. Decades of erosion have _____ the coastline beyond recognition.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The _____ of habitat has pushed many species towards extinction. (FRAGMENT)
2. Critics called the decision _____ and said it ignored the scientific evidence. (RESPONSIBLE)
3. Their _____ of the risks left them badly exposed when costs soared. (ESTIMATE)
4. Conservationists welcomed the _____ of a protected zone around the lake. (ESTABLISH)
5. Her _____ to compromise made the negotiations far harder. (WILLING)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. At C1, collocations are fixed: change one word and the phrase sounds wrong, such as strike a balance, not make a balance.

bear	drew	pose	raised	strike	vested	weigh

1. Rising sea levels _____ a serious threat to coastal communities.
2. Local people have _____ concerns about the noise from the new airport.
3. The speaker's remarks last week _____ a good deal of criticism.
4. Planners must _____ a balance between growth and conservation.
5. Developers with a _____ interest in the land opposed the ban.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. If homes are built in an animal's habitat, who should adapt?
2. Would you accept a less tidy garden to leave more room for wildlife?
3. What would make sharing a neighbourhood with wild animals workable?

9 Role-play: a capybara on the lawn

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the resident

Capybaras keep eating your garden and you're worried about your dog. Explain the problem and ask what the community will do. You can accept a plan, or ask for something different.

Student B · the wildlife campaigner

You think the animals were here first. Listen to the resident, then suggest ways to share the space. Try to find a plan you both accept.

Useful phrases

I'm worried about my dog.
They were here long before the houses.
What do you suggest we do?
I'd be happy to try that.
That isn't fair to the animals.
Can we meet halfway?

Afterwards, tell the class: what plan did you agree, and who gave up more?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 H · 2 E · 3 F · 4 C · 5 G · 6 D · 7 A · 8 B

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 acknowledge · 2 advocate · 3 disrupts · 4 manufactures · 5 Dismissing · 6 reshaped

6 Word forms

1 fragmentation · 2 irresponsible · 3 underestimation · 4 establishment · 5 unwillingness

7 Language focus

1 pose · 2 raised · 3 drew · 4 strike · 5 vested

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