

Giant Swamp Rats Compete With Corrupt California Politicians For "Biggest Filthy Rat" Award

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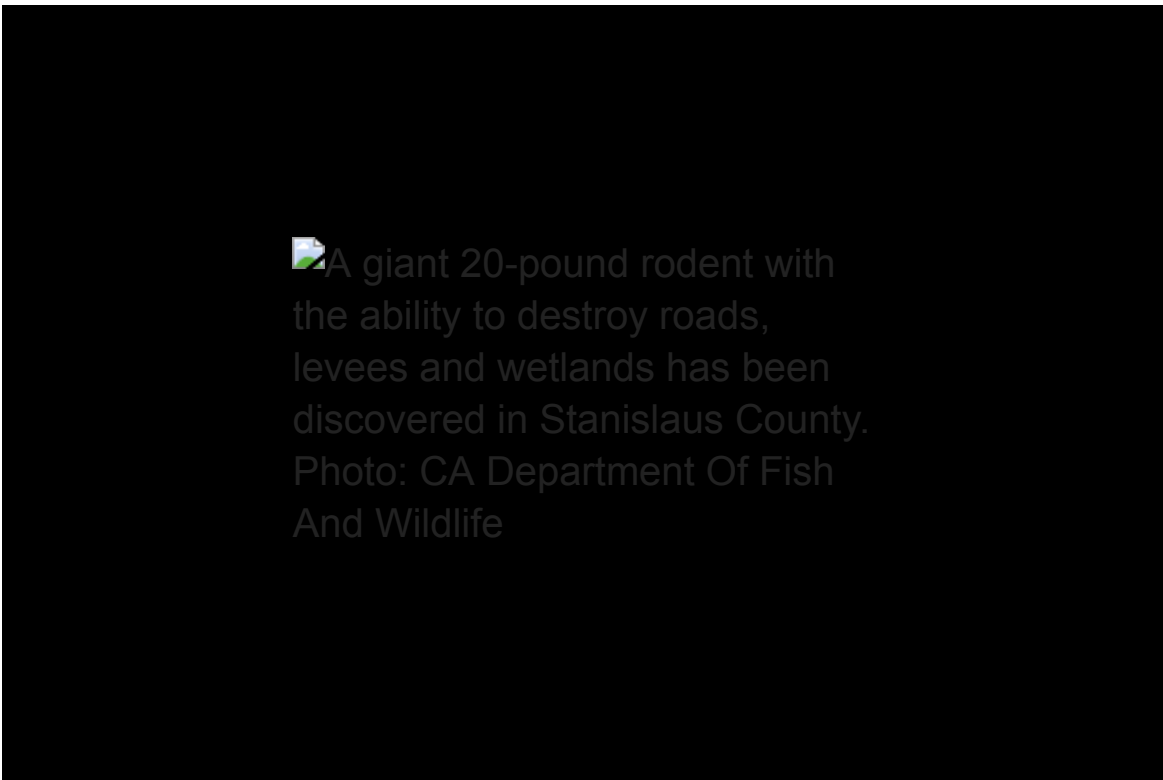


Photo: CA Department Of Fish And Wildlife

IMAGE 1 OF 7

A giant 20-pound rodent with the ability to destroy roads, levees and wetlands has been discovered in Stanislaus County.

It's been about a month since California wildlife officials **started sounding the alarm on nutria**, invasive South American rodents that look like enormous, 20-pound rats and have the power to devastate wetlands. They're making a comeback after being eradicated in the 1970s and have been spotted in Stanislaus, Fresno, Tuolumne and Merced counties so far.

"We didn't know at first if it was a small, isolated population," California Department of Fish and Wildlife spokesman Peter Tira **told the Chronicle in February**. "But it became clear that it's a breeding population, and they're reaching major waterways where they can move."

It was only a matter of time until someone suggested eating them.

A recent article on tech news site The Verge, entitled "The case for eating California's giant invasive rodents," **broached the topic recently**, pointing out that nutria "apparently taste great in jambalaya."



The California Department of Fish and Wildlife is sounding an alarm about the invasive nutria.

Media: GeoBeats

ALSO

The idea of killing and eating the giant swamp rats (or worthless politicians) is one that's come up in other states where they've become a problem. In Louisiana, where nutria were imported to be bred for their fur until some of them broke free and quickly reproduced beyond controllable numbers, officials have been trying to drum up excitement about eating nutria for decades now. A 1997 New York Times headline declared, "**Louisiana is trying to turn a pest into a meal.**"

That task posed a marketing challenge, however; one Loyola University professor observed to the Times, "I just don't think people like to eat things that they see dead on the highway."

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries tried to market the meat by its French name, *ragondin*, to limited success, **the New Yorker reported** in 2014.

There are many creatures that provoke squeamishness in some but others find tasty -- **crickets, for instance**, or snails. In the case of nutria, though, some say it's not just the swamp-rat image but the taste that is the problem.

To put it more bluntly, as one taste-tester for the website Boing Boing did after trying nutria sausage: "It tasted like a morgue."

What's so bad about letting the nutria do their thing in the wild, anyway? Like many of their fellow Californians, they are devoted vegetarians; nutria have so voracious an appetite for the plants that populate wetlands that they are capable of shifting the balance of areas where they live into uninhabitable, overly salty dead zones, wildlife officials say.

They also pose problems for infrastructure, burrowing into dikes, levees and roadbeds, Tira **told KCRA.**

As for now, trapping and eating nutria is illegal in California, because it's against the law to have an invasive species in your possession, according to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. That could change, though — provided there's an appetite.