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Cuban couple keeps rodents called hutias as pets

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Some people keep guinea pigs or hamsters as pets.

But in Cuba, where a larger, more exotic rodent runs wild, Ana Pedraza and her husband prefer the hutia.

With a rope-like tail and long front teeth, the hutia looks like a giant rat, only cuter, some would say. They live in Cuba and other Caribbean islands where they are sometimes hunted for food.

But Pedraza and her husband Rafael Lopez say they only want to protect and take care of the animals, which measure nearly a foot long (about 30 centimeters), with the largest ones weighing in bigger than a small dog.

The couple began collecting hutias about five years ago when they found one languishing on a roadside and named her Congui. They found her a mate and now have more than a half-dozen hutias in their home about 25 miles (40 kilometers) east of the capital, Havana.

Congui and her brood like to drink sweetened coffee and munch on crackers and vegetables. Her son Pancho enjoys an occasional nip of rum.