Capybara
(Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris)

This article is a combination of my own personal methods, experiences and opinions.

Housing:

Capybaras can be kept in enclosures much like goats or sheep. They can jump surprisingly high for their size/weight but they do not dig or climb fences. They will, however, try to push through and under any openings or holes in the wire so any weak points will be found quickly. I do not recommend using flexible wire fencing with adults unless it is attached to sturdy posts and reinforced at the ground level to prevent animals from pushing under and escaping. I prefer to use wood fencing and feedlot panels with either 4"x4" or 2"x4" wire spacing. Minimum fence height should be 4'. They need to have plenty of shade, a pool (preferably deep enough for them to completely submerge), a mud wallow, a small drinking water source that is separate from their swimming water and housing that will allow them to escape wind, rain or any other inclement weather. They are very adaptable and can handle both hot and cold environments but I do recommend that they are given access to heat lamps and plenty of hay bedding when temperatures drop below 45 degrees.

Diet:

Capybaras are true herbivores, their diet in the wild consists almost exclusively of various grasses. In captivity, their diet should consist primarily of guinea pig or livestock feed and plenty of fresh grass or hay. Like guinea pigs and primates, capybaras do not naturally produce adequate amounts of vitamin C and they can develop scurvy as a result of vitamin C deficiencies. In the wild, the large amounts of fresh grass they consume provides the extra vitamin C they need. In captivity, their diet must contain either plenty of fresh grass for grazing or a vitamin C supplement. Most commercial guinea pig diets will contain a vitamin C supplement but these can be very costly if you are feeding multiple adult capybaras. Mazuri and LabDiet guinea pig formulas are available in 25lb and 50lb bags and can be found or special ordered at most feed stores. A much cheaper alternative is livestock or rabbit feed. These will work fine but if used as a staple diet extra vitamin C should be added. The easiest method I've found of doing this is to dust or mix their feed with ascorbic acid powder. I DO NOT recommend feeding fruits, veggies, dog food, cat food, sweets or other items containing large amounts of sugar on a daily basis. Fruits are fine for treats/training but there is some evidence that diets containing large amounts of sugar, even from healthy sources, can cause liver and heart problems. They have evolved as grazers, feeding primarily grass/hay and guinea pig food is the best way to mimic their natural diet.
**Health/Medical issues:**

Capybaras are generally very hearty animals, they do not require any vaccinations or special medical care. They have powerful immune systems and a naturally high resistance to bacteria. Adults will sometimes have small dominance fights and occasionally nip at each other, not to mention the fact that they can be rather clumsy and play very rough among themselves, so small cuts and scrapes are common, these can be cleaned twice daily with betadine or a chlorhexidine solution and left unbandaged to heal. I’ve also had good luck using Farnam Wound-Kote antiseptic spray on injuries that can’t be cleaned directly by hand. Access to swimming water/mud will need to be restricted for any deeper wounds or bites to reduce the risk of infection and speed up the healing process. They will occasionally break teeth, one broken incisor is not uncommon but frequent tooth breakage is a sure sign of vitamin C deficiency. Runny noses and runny eyes are very common and not usually cause for concern as capys are very sensitive to dust and allergens. I do recommend worming at least twice a year. Ivermectin can be used to control intestinal and ectoparasites such as mange mites. Ivermectin 1% injectable solution may be given orally at a dose of .02 cc per lb of body weight, no more than once a week. This can either be squirted directly into their mouths with a feeding syringe or mixed with food.

**Hand Rearing:**

Babies should be left with mom for 2-3 days so they can get as much colostrum as possible. If hand rearing for outreach/education I pull them at that point and feed Esbilac at a rate of 15%-25% body weight per day. Babies should also have 24/7 access to a small water source, a heat source, guinea pig feed and fresh grass/hay. If babies must be pulled at birth under special circumstances bovine colostrum supplement can be added to their formula for the first 3-4 days.