

## PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: RODENTS OF UNUSUAL SIZE

January 20, 2026

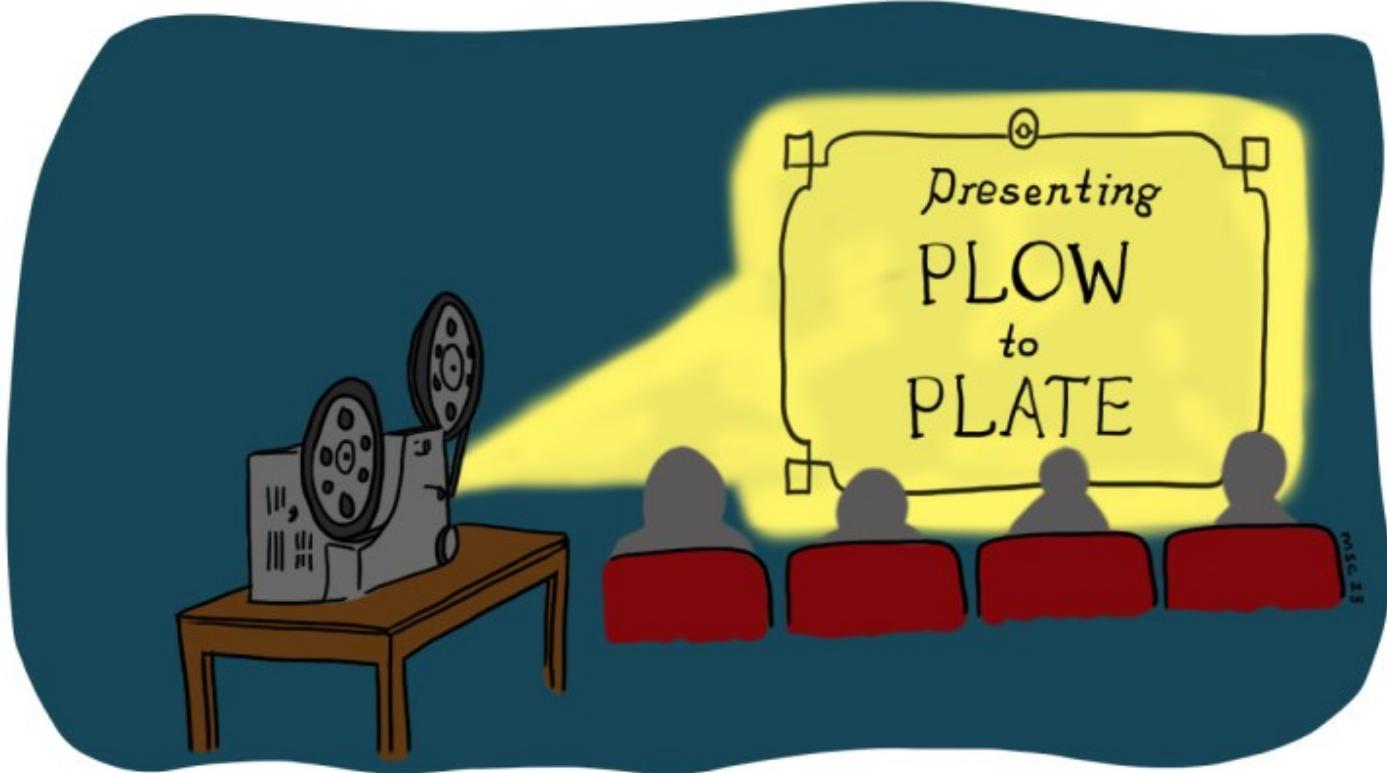


Illustration by Maggie Carson

January 20, 2026

By Adam Rabiner

*Rodents of Unusual Size* begins on Delacroix Island, Louisiana. A street sign on the left prominently announces: “Dead End.” Another, on the right: “End of the World.” But despite the area’s isolation and hardship, many die-hard Cajuns like fisherman Thomas Gonzalez refuse to leave this marshy swampland south of New Orleans. There is even an invasive species of giant rodent, originally from South America, known as the nutria, which positively adores the place. The film is the story of humans and nutria living together in an uneasy peace and equilibrium that constantly threatens to tip one way or another.

The nutria, a giant rat with two yellow buckteeth and webbed feet weighing up to 20 pounds, first came to Louisiana in the 1930s, when furriers transported them from Ar-

gentina, to breed with muskrats for their fur. This enterprise was initially lucrative. Fatefully, though, the nutria is thought to have escaped from their cages during a storm. They adapted well to the bayou, and hunters and trappers kept the population in relative balance. However, in the 1980s, the animal-rights movement against fur caused the bottom to fall out of the market, and pelts lost their value. With no one hunting the nutria any longer, zero predators except alligators, and the ability to create a new litter every three months, the nutria population exploded from five to 20 million. In short order, they began eating up the swamps and causing massive harm to the delicate ecosystems, which went from verdant green vegetation to brown mud flats.

Louisiana created the Nutria Control Program, which offered a five-dollar bounty for each nutria tail turned in, with no limits. This program provided a lifeline to many local fishermen and fisherwomen. While most nutria hunters have no problem with exchanging tails for pelts, Bimbo Phillips, a native American from the Atakapa-Ishak tribe, continues the tradition of using the pelts for coats as his ancestors did.

One of the essential questions posed by *Rodents of Unusual Size* is what economic value, if any, can we extract from the nutria today? Phillips may be on to something. *Righteous Fur* is a company whose mission is to bring designer nutria fur clothing to the contemporary fashion market. Their goal is to raise public awareness about coastal restoration while providing an eco-friendly alternative to traditional fur.

Louisiana has also promoted cooking and eating nutria. The government commissioned a study and has hired local and celebratory chefs to make nutria sausages, Slim Jims, hot tamales, gumbo and other locally popular dishes. The nutria has a lot going for it. The animal is a vegetarian that only eats roots; has a clean, grass-fed diet; is lean and is reputedly tasty. One chef said it is an excellent alternative to chicken breast and described eating it “like tasting Louisiana.” That is quite an endorsement. However, the animal’s aesthetics are a significant strike against it, hurting its promotion. After all, it looks like a giant rat. The nutria, in this respect, faces some of the same challenges that edible insects do in terms of mainstream acceptance

among your average American consumer.

Another question raised by the film is how we should view this invader on our shores. It is indisputably destructive to the environment. Though cute, especially when they are babies, nutria's aggressive nature toward everyone but their owners and high maintenance requirements make them poor pets. Yet they have been Louisianans' neighbors for about 100 years, and people there have become fond of them. They were the mascot for the New Orleans Zephyrs, a now-defunct minor league baseball team. The Louisiana Fur and Wildlife Festival features a nutria-skinning competition and a Fur Queen Beauty Contest. Some wealthy homeowners of a local golf community routinely steal and tamper with the traps set by the pest control specialist. They believe that showing kindness is a good example for children. Love them or leave them, the nutria is here to stay.

***Rodents of Unusual Size* Tuesday, February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2026 @ 7:00 p.m.**

Screening link: Visit our Upcoming Events page

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to [plowtoplate@gmail.com](mailto:plowtoplate@gmail.com).

Note: From October 2025 through March 2026, Plow to Plate is exclusively featuring Grasshopper Film documentaries. *Rodents of Unusual Size* is a Tilapia Film distributed by Grasshopper Film.

*Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina.*