

Beaver

(Castor canadensis)



ID YOU KNOW:

The Beaver is the largest rodent in North America and can grow to a length of four and a half feet. The eyes of a beaver are protected by a special covering, called a nictitating membrane, that allows the beaver to see extremely well in the water (like a built-in scuba mask). Beavers can also close their noses and ears when they are busy working underwater.

EATING HABITS:

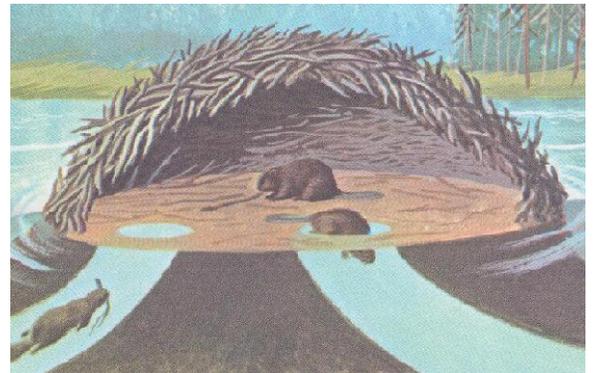
Beaver food is mainly bark and cambium (the soft growing tissue under the bark of plants); they prefer willow shoots, but they enjoy maple, aspen, poplar, beech and alder. They also munch on water plants, buds and roots.

THE YOUNG:

Beaver moms have litters of 3 to 4 young in April, May or June. At birth, baby beavers are covered with fur, their eyes are open and their teeth are visible. They can already swim at this time but will not leave the safety of the den for a month. Beaver parents care for and protect their young for about two years and then the young adult beavers leave on their own to start their own families.

HABITAT (HOME):

Beavers build elaborate homes called lodges that look like islands in the middle of a body of water. It's made of sticks, grass and moss. The beavers constantly repair the dome, adding material and plastering the whole lodge with mud. Entrances are underwater; the beaver has to dive under water to get into his house.



DEFENSIVE HABITS:

When alarmed a beaver will give a loud slap repeatedly on the water with its broad tail. If cornered a beaver may use its enormous incisors to deliver a powerful bite but its first instinct is to escape from any threat by a water route.

UNUSUAL FACTS:

- A beaver has furry lips that close **BEHIND** the large incisor teeth; this is a special adaptation for eating underwater!
- Beavers have webbed feet to help them swim better. Their tails act as rudders.
- The largest beaver ever found in Missouri weighed 115 lbs.
- Beavers build dams to make sure that the water around their houses is deep enough. The dams help to maintain wetlands, prevent erosion and stop the flow of floodwaters. As beaver ponds get bigger, pond weeds and water lilies start to grow. When beavers leave their homes, the dams decay and the ponds turn into meadows.