



FAST FACTS

Name: Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)

Size: The largest rodent in North America - it can reach over one metre in length.

Weight: Can weigh up to 32 kilograms.

Icon: Canada's national symbol, representing our country for over 300 years.

PHYSIOLOGY

Beavers are known for their buck teeth and large, flat tail. These well-known features are what help the beaver live life from day to day.

This animal, from the rodent family, has a thick brown fur coat and a soft grey undercoat that protects it from all climates.

The beaver's tail is large and shaped like a paddle. It functions like a boat rudder, helping steer the beaver as it moves logs to its dam. The black scaly tail is also used for balance on land when carrying heavy tree branches.

Beavers are excellent swimmers and are built for underwater work. They have valves in their ears and nose that close when they swim underwater. They also have a clear layer that covers their eyes when swimming, in order to protect them from anything floating in the water.

Their front teeth stick out in front of their lips, so that they may cut and chew wood that is submerged underwater without getting water in their mouth. A beaver's teeth never stop growing and chewing on tree trunks and branches helps to keep the teeth from getting too long. They are strengthened with iron compounds.

HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

Beavers spend most of their time building dams and lodges - large cone-shaped pile of branches in the middle of a lake. They enter the lodge through an underwater entrance, which leads into a dry living area.

As the colder months approach, they spread a thick layer of mud on top of the lodge to keep out any predators, such as the lynx and wolf. If a beaver feels threatened, it will slap its tail on the surface of the water to warn other beavers in the area, then it will dive deep underwater to stay safe.

Beavers are vegetarians and feed on non-woody-type plants - such as cattail shoots - during the spring and summer and then switch to eating shrubs and trees in the autumn and winter. They build canals along the ground to float sticks and twigs to their lodges for winter storage. A common belief about beavers is that they eat wood, when in fact it's only the bark they eat.

RANGE

A large portion of the beaver population can be found in British Columbia and in lakes and streams all over the rest of Canada. It is quite hard to find beaver tracks, because their tail drags behind them on the ground and often covers the print. However, in muddy areas, the print is usually very clear.

In the past, beavers were over hunted for their fur and meat, threatening their population. However, their numbers have since risen due to wetland rehabilitation and strict conservation practices.