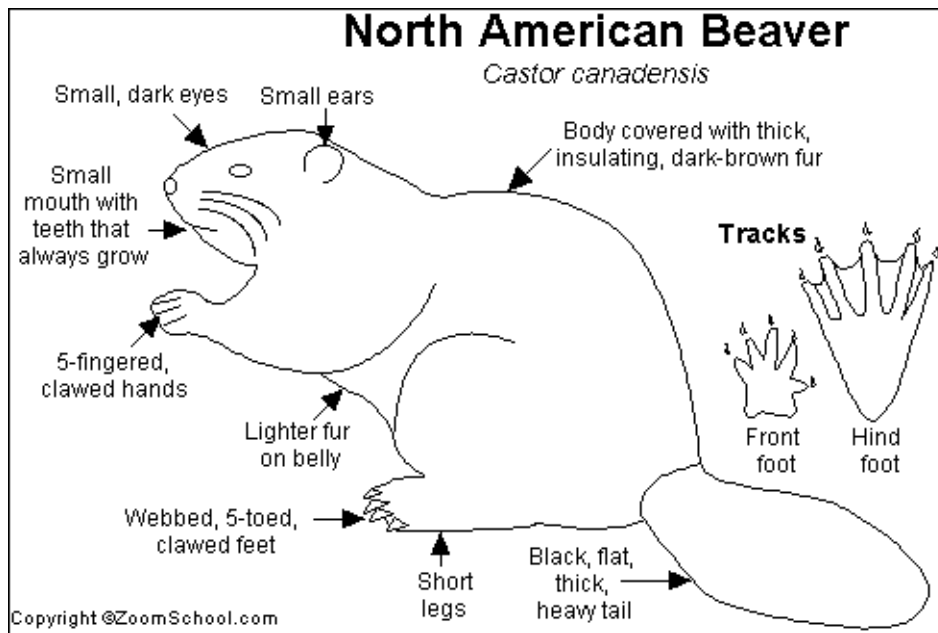




## Pine Park Beavers



Beavers are large, semi-aquatic rodents. Beavers often alter the landscape with their construction of dams, canals and lodges. They are territorial and will remain in the same location as long as the habitat will allow. Beaver families live together in groups called colonies. Beavers are powerful animals on land, but feel safest in the water out of reach of predators.



### Appearance and Adaptations (fur, tail, teeth, valves, webbed feet)

Both male and female beavers have glands, called castors, which produce oil. Beavers comb the oil into their fur to waterproof it. This oil is also deposited by the beaver at selected locations as territorial markers or mating attractants in the spring.

Beavers have a long, flat, thick tail. The tail acts a rudder while swimming, as a prop for standing upright on land, and as a noise maker for producing a warning signal when it is slapped on the water.

Amazingly, beavers can hold their breath and remain underwater for up to 20 minutes. Beavers can also haul food or construction materials while swimming. They can close their mouths by closing a flap located behind their teeth, allowing them to clamp onto logs or chew while holding their breath. Like all rodents, their teeth continue to grow their entire lives.

When beavers go below the surface, they close their ears and nostrils with flaps of skin that act as valves. Beavers also have a special transparent eyelid over each of their eyes which protect their eyes from debris while swimming underwater.

The hind feet of beavers are fully webbed, and large. Beavers normally swim with their front feet held against their chest, and their large webbed hind feet propel them in the water with the tail acting as a rudder.

## *Diet*

Beavers are herbivores. They eat mainly aquatic plants (including cattails) and the new wood and bark of birch, aspen, willow, alder and cottonwood trees.



## *Predators*

The beaver is hunted by many animals including coyotes, wolves, and bears. Hawks, eagles, and owls prey upon young beavers.

## *Reproduction*

Beaver usually live in family units consisting of the older mated pairs. New born beavers are called kits. Breeding season takes place in January or February. The gestation period of beaver is 107 days and the adult male usually takes up temporary residence in a bank den while the new litter is being born between April and June. Three to five kits are a typical litter size. Kits can swim, but it may take them a month or more to figure out how to hold their breath and swim underwater. When they get tired, they catch a ride on their mother's back. A beaver in the wild is considered to be old at 15 years of age.

## *Habitat (dams and lodges)*

Beavers live by rivers, streams, ponds, and lakes. They are one of the few animals that alter their environment in a large-scale way in order to provide themselves living space and protection. To create a habitat, beavers build a dam in order to flood an area up stream. This flooding creates a pond in which the beaver can then build a lodge. Some beavers live by rivers and do not need to build dams. Instead, they live in burrows that they build within the river bank. Beavers build dams and lodges using sticks, bark (from deciduous trees), mud, and logs (that they fell themselves). An adult beaver can fell a tree, 25.4 cm or 10 inches in diameter, in about six minutes. Beavers maintain their dams so that the pond water level stays up. If a dam breaks, the beavers will frantically rush to repair it before all the water rushes away.

Lodges are dome-shaped and usually built in deep water. Beaver lodges are located a short distance from shore and have an underwater entrance. Beavers dive under the water to enter the den. The location of the lodge and this underwater entry makes it difficult for most predators to enter the lodge.

In the winter, the water around the lodge usually freezes, protecting the beaver almost completely. Beavers stash trees underwater for use during the winter. They will drag a limb down and plant the heavy end in the

mud at the bottom of the pond. When the pond is frozen over and it is hard to find food, the beaver can take advantage of this stash. Beavers do not hibernate over winter, but they will stay in their lodge, where they have stored enough food to last until spring.

