



## Beavers

American beavers (*Castor canadensis*) have long been revered as a natural resource for their precious fur, but their value as a keystone species is what truly sets them apart. As ecosystem engineers, beavers create and maintain wetland habitats that many other species rely on. Their near extinction in the late 1800s, resulting from habitat loss and unregulated harvest, greatly impacted much of the wildlife that depended on their services. Reintroduction efforts in surrounding states, along with new regulations and protections for wildlife, led to the re-establishment of beavers in Rhode Island. The first colony in the state after their disappearance was observed in 1976. Today, beaver populations have grown, and they continue to provide habitat for wildlife in Rhode Island. Since they have few natural predators, their populations must be kept balanced through careful management practices led by research.

### LIFE HISTORY

**Range and Habitat:** American beavers can be found across North America, except for most of Mexico, the Southwest desert, and the northernmost parts of Alaska and Canada. Beavers can be found in ponds, rivers, streams, and lakes.

**Behavior:** Beavers are crepuscular and nocturnal, spending most days within the lodge. Beavers typically live in colonies consisting of adults and two years' young. Most known for their dams, beavers are efficient and impressive builders, reconstructing habitats to their liking by blocking flowing water with mud, sticks, logs and vegetation. Beavers are territorial and mark their boundaries using castor mounds, on which they rub scent produced from their castor glands. If threatened, beavers will slap their tails on the water to scare off predators.

**Reproduction:** Beavers pair for life and mating occurs each year between January and March. On average, females give birth to 4 young, called kits, after a gestation period of around 100 days. Kits nurse for about a month and will remain with the family unit until they are able to reproduce during their second winter, at which time they disperse to establish their own territories.

**Food Habits:** Beavers are herbivores and consume the outer, live layer of bark, tubers and other aquatic vegetation. Before the winter, beavers create a food "cache" in the water outside of their lodge, which appears as a pile of semi-submerged branches. This cache gives them access, via their underwater lodge entrance, to food even if the top surface of the water freezes. As rodents, beavers' front incisors grow constantly, so they must continuously gnaw to keep them from becoming too long.

### IDENTIFICATION

- Stout, round body covered with dark brown fur with flat, paddle like tail
- Square snout and rounded ears
- Length: 36-48 in
- Weight: 40-60 lbs
- Lifespan: 10 years

### DID YOU KNOW...

- Beavers are the largest rodents in North America.
- Beavers' teeth are orange because they are reinforced with iron from their diets.

## REGULATORY STATUS

Beavers are classified under general law (*RIGL 20-16-1*) as a protected furbearer in Rhode Island. Harvest is strictly regulated by the DEM's Division of Fish and Wildlife to ensure the long-term viability of beaver populations in the state. Carcass collection from trappers and roadkills provides valuable biological information, such as population age structure, dietary habits and reproductive potential. The taking of road-killed furbearers, including beavers, is prohibited without special authorization from the Division of Fish and Wildlife. The law also does not allow for the random taking of wildlife, for the taking of furbearers for their pelts outside the open season, or for killing of animals outside the boundaries of the property of the person with the problem. It does not allow for unlawful methods of take such as poisons, snares, foothold traps, or discharge of firearms in violation of state or local ordinances. The law states that animals taken must be reported to the DEM within 24 hours. The DEM does not recommend that property owners attempt to live trap nuisance furbearers unless they are prepared and willing to euthanize the offending animal. State regulations prohibit the live capture and translocation of furbearers. Captured furbearers can only legally be released on the property on which they were captured.

[Click here](#) to find a Licensed Nuisance Wildlife Control Specialist near you.

For additional resources visit:  
[www.wildlifehelp.org](http://www.wildlifehelp.org)

