



Lesson 3: Wetland Wildlife - Beavers

Theme

Wetlands provide habitat for many species of wildlife in Rhode Island.

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, students will learn how animals have adapted to live in wetlands in Rhode Island and the definition of a keystone species. Students will gain an understanding of the relationship between different species of wetland animals and how the habitat supports them.

Corresponding Activities for this Lesson

- Build Your Own Beaver Dam
- Beaver Puppet Craft -- Learn how to create this craft while learning about beavers with our [“Creature Crafts” video](#) on our YouTube channel (RI Department of Environmental Management > Playlists > Home Sweet Habitat: Freshwater Wetlands)

Materials

- Wetland Wildlife PowerPoint
- Beaver skull replica and pelt
- Paint trays
- Sticks and leaves
- Soil, Play-Doh, or clay

Lesson

- 1. Explain to students that today we will be learning about the animals that use freshwater wetlands in Rhode Island and how biologists at the RIDEM Division of Fish and Wildlife are helping them.**
- 2. Ask students if there are any activities that people might like to do in wetlands? Collect answers from students to get them thinking about their personal connection.**
 - Examples might include swimming, kayaking, fishing, boating, catching frogs etc
- 3. Ask students what humans need water for.**
 - Examples might include drinking, bathing, washing, watering crops, brushing teeth etc.

4. Ask students which animals use wetlands. Why would animals use wetland habitat?

- Many animals use water as a home (fish and frogs), as a resource for drinking (deer, bobcats), or as a place to find food (otter and mink). Raccoons even use water to wash their hands! Water is one of the four resources that all living things need to survive, so it is very important for us to protect it however we can!

5. Review history of overharvest of beavers in the U.S.

- Beavers were harvested heavily for their fur and nearly disappeared. Let students gently touch the fur to see how soft and warm it is. When used sustainably, beavers provide a great resource to keep us warm!

6. Ask students what adaptations beavers have that help them to survive.

- Physical (fur, webbing) vs. behavioral adaptations (building dams etc)
- Show everyone the beaver skull and ask students to make some observations out loud.

7. Discuss benefits/conflicts with beavers.

- Explain that the RIDEM Division of Fish and Wildlife manages the beaver population to prevent conflicts and allow collection of natural resources in a sustainable way.

8. Beavers are a keystone species. The habitat that they create also supports many other animals.

- A keystone is the piece that holds everything together, and if removed, could make everything fall apart.
- Many other animals, including wood ducks, depend on the wetlands that beavers create, and if they were to go extinct, many other animals would be affected by the loss.
- Beavers are the only animal, aside from humans, that change their habitat to fit their needs. They are important to have in the ecosystem, but it is also important to keep their populations in check in order to maintain balance.

9. Follow up with the Build a Beaver Dam activity. Afterwards, watch the “Creature Crafts” video and create your own beaver puppets with paper bags!