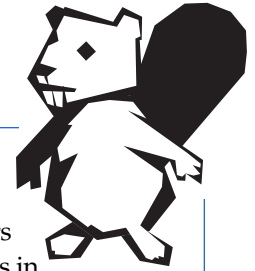


LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

Humane, Effective Solutions to Human-Wildlife Conflicts

A Program of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals



The Beaver: Wetlands Engineer

In cities, suburbs, and small towns across Massachusetts, people are noticing a change in their neighborhoods. Some think it's good. Some think it's bad. But everybody seems to be talking about it: more wild animals are making their homes in and around people's yards and houses, in parks and playgrounds, in business developments, even right on Main Street.

In this edition of Issues & Answers, we will take a look at the beaver and its importance as a vital member of the Massachusetts ecosystem.

General Information

The beaver (*Castor canadensis*), a keystone species in our environment, is the largest rodent found in North America. An individual can weigh up to 60 pounds, but the average adult generally weighs between 35 and 40 pounds.

Trapped to near extinction for its dense waterproof fur soon after the European settlement of North America, the beaver is making a comeback. Its recovery is a godsend for the environment.

Beavers are the world's greatest builders of small, rich wetlands. The habitats they fashion support a myriad of species, including other mammals, wading birds, waterfowl, fish, turtles, mussels, deer, bears, and moose. Beaver habitat also houses sensitive plant species, improves water quality by acting as a settling basin, and controls flooding by slowing water movement.

Beavers live in and around water and constantly modify streams by build-

ing dams and impounding flows to create ponds. They are herbivores, feeding on the inner bark layer of woody plants and on leaves, shoots, and aquatic herbs such as duckweed, water lilies, and pondweed. A

remember that beavers do not create problems in natural or wilderness areas. The two most common human-beaver conflicts are flooding, resulting from dam building, and damage to trees that are used for food or building materials.

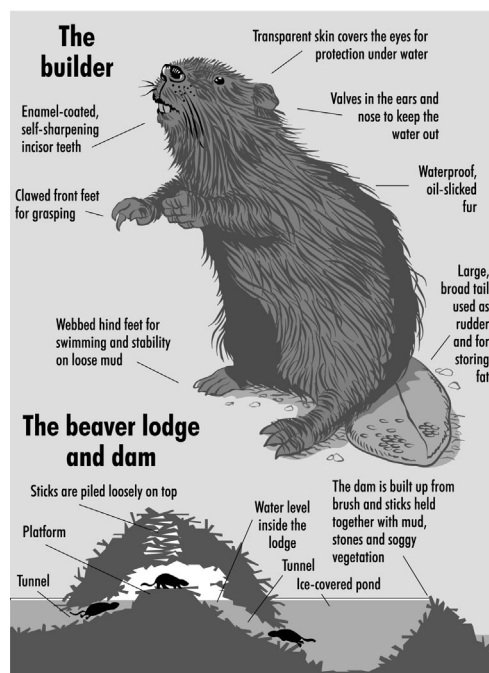
Contrary to popular belief, trapping is not an effective means of controlling beaver populations or of solving conflicts. In fact, unless it's extensive and heavy, trapping has been shown to stimulate the production of more young than if the animals are not trapped.

Fortunately, there are effective solutions to dealing with human-beaver conflicts. Where potential flooding is an issue, there are devices—called bafflers, deceivers, levelers, or other terms—designed to control water levels without removing or destroying the beavers. Tree protection, fencing, and repellents are also possible solutions.

The key to living with beavers is tolerating them and realizing that they play an important role in establishing and maintaining wetlands.

Public-Health Concerns

While beavers have been implicated in the spread of *Giardia*, to date there is no documentation of a human contracting *Giardia* from a beaver. A variety of other animals, including humans, shed *Giardia* in their feces, and the presence of *Giardia* in a wetland or watershed may be due to the presence of many different environmental factors.



beaver's preferred food trees include aspen, birch, willow, cottonwood, poplar, maple, apple, and even oak.

Beavers are monogamous and produce one litter a year, usually between March and June. Because they are territorial and tolerate only the presence of family members under the age of two, families typically disperse, usually traveling less than six miles in search of homes.

Possible Conflicts and Solutions

While problems sometimes arise when beavers come into contact with humans or human property,