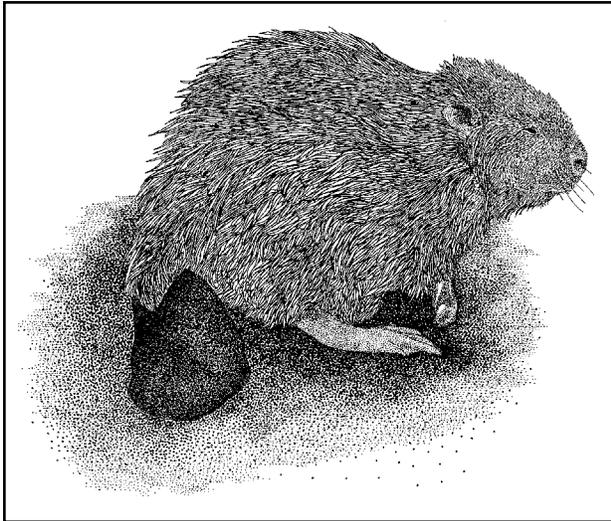
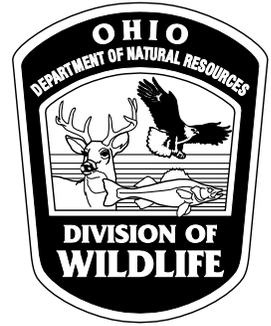


Ohio Division of Wildlife  
Life History Notes  
**Beaver**

Scientific Name: *Castor canadensis*



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## Introduction

The beaver is North America's largest rodent. It is often cited as one of the prime forces motivating exploration and European settlement of the United States and Canada. Beaver pelts commanded high prices abroad. However, this unregulated commerce resulted in a drastic drop in beaver numbers; by 1830, there were no beavers in Ohio. Wildlife management practices were instrumental and effective in allowing the beaver to return to Ohio and establish a thriving population today.

The beaver is found throughout the continental United States and Canada except in extreme northwest Alaska, portions of California and Nevada, the Northwest Territories, and far north Quebec, Canada. In Ohio beaver are found in more than 1/2 the counties; the eastern half of the state and the southwest counties are the most populated.

## Description

The beaver is a large mammal with beautiful, dark chestnut brown fur. This coat is slightly lighter on the animal's head and belly. It has a large, flat scaled tail and webbed hind feet. Its large front teeth (incisors) are one of its distinguishing characteristics.

The beaver has several special adaptations that are not visible. It has valves in its nose and ears that close when it goes underwater. It also has oversized lungs that allow it to retain enough oxygen to stay under water for 10 to 15 minutes. Its eyes are also relatively small and capable of staying open while the animal is under water.

## Habitat and Habits

The beaver's behavior is among the most unique and interesting in the animal world. Beavers alter the existing habitat to suit their needs. A pond, lake, or slow moving river or stream bordered by stands of small trees, preferably aspen, poplar, birch, maple, cottonwood, willow, or alder is ideal beaver habitat. Once a beaver has located such an area it proceeds to construct elaborate and effective dams. These structures are primarily made with small sticks and mud. An average beaver dam is three to four feet tall and 50 to 200 feet long. One of the largest dams known of in Ohio was in Columbiana County and measured 1,200 feet long.

Behind the dam, the beavers will construct an intricate domed lodge made of twigs, logs, and mud, that will have at least two underwater entrances. Although most winters in Ohio are not severe enough for waterways to ice over for an extensive period of time, beavers prepare anyway. Large piles of branches are stored on the bottom of the pond near the lodge as a food reserve for the winter.

Beavers live in extended family colonies. This grouping is usually made up of the adult male and female beavers and four or five, respectively, of their one- and two-year old offspring.

The broad, flat tail is used by the beaver to navigate through and under the water. It is also used as a warning device to other beaver. The loud slap of the tail on the water's surface is



an alarm, telling of some type of disturbance or danger in the immediate area. The slap of the tail is the sound most associated with the beaver.

The beavers' dam work doesn't just benefit their own; many other species of wetland wildlife also take advantage of their efforts. Ducks, songbirds, and fishes all use the habitat resulting from beavers' dams.

## Reproduction and Care of the Young

Beavers are monogamous meaning that the male mates with only one female. Further, in the case of the beaver the bond appears to be for a lifetime. Beavers begin mating relatively late in life compared to many other species of wildlife that are reproducing within the first year of their birth; most beavers are two and one-half to three years old before they mate. Breeding generally occurs in January and February, with young born a little (128 days) over four months later. On average, four kits are born in the litter. When born, the kits have a full coat of fur and their eyes are open. The young kits can also swim shortly after they are born and soon are eating tender bark. During the first month of their life, the adult male beaver will live outside the lodge away from his mate and offspring; at the end of this period he will then start to take an active role in rearing the young.

Young beavers stay in the family group approximately two years and usually leave, voluntarily or involuntarily, at about the time the next litter is due to arrive. They will then go out to establish their own colonies, dams, and lodges.

## Management Plans

The Ohio Division of Wildlife doesn't manage specifically for the beaver. With the presence and maintenance of sound watersheds and waterways around the state, the beaver can virtually manage for itself. The beaver is found on many of our state wildlife areas where suitable habitat exists. The habitat management activities that occur on these areas and elsewhere around the state are designed to benefit the beaver and a host of other wildlife species. Each year wildlife biologists evaluate data and establish trapping season dates and bag limits for beaver harvest.

## Viewing Opportunities

Beaver can be found throughout the state in most every suitable watershed. The best chances of seeing them are just before dark in the area of an active colony or dam site. Fourteen of Ohio's officially designated "Watchable Wildlife" areas are good places to see beaver. They are: North Chagrin Reservation, Grand River Wildlife Area, Tinkers Creek State Nature Preserve, Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area, Killbuck Marsh Wildlife Area, Cooper Hol-

low Wildlife Area, Crooked Run Nature Preserve, Beaver Creek Wildlife Area, Hueston Woods State Park, and Mosquito Creek, Woodbury, Salt Fork, Deer Creek, and Spring Valley wildlife areas. In addition, several more of our state wildlife areas are home to significant beaver populations. They are: Tycoon Lake, Highlandtown, Berlin Lake, Fallsville, and Monroe Lake.

## Do Something Wild!

The Ohio Division of Wildlife manages for wildlife diversity in the state. We attempt to create and/or conserve the habitat that will support as wide a diversity of wildlife as possible. Many species like the beaver are trapped in the state, but many more are not. The Division has a special program to manage and research non-game species that is supported by the generous citizens of the state of Ohio. With money either donated through the state income tax checkoff, by the purchase of wildlife license plates, or direct contributions to the Endangered Species Special Account, the Division is able to purchase critical habitat that is essential to sustaining many species of wildlife and to implement special efforts like the reintroduction of the osprey and the trumpeter swan to the state.

Contributions to our Wildlife Diversity Program are accepted throughout the year. To make a donation, please send a check to: Endangered Species Special Account, Ohio Division of Wildlife, 2045 Morse Road, Bldg. G, Columbus, Ohio 43229-6693. All contributions, whether made on your income tax return or directly, are tax deductible.

## At a Glance

Mating: Monogamous

Peak Breeding Activity: February-March

Gestation: 128 days

Young are Born: May-July

Litter Size: 2-8 kits, 4 is average

Young Leave Parents: Two years after birth

Number of Litters per Year: 1

Adult Weight: 30-70 pounds, 40 pounds average

Adult Length: 25-30 inches

Life Expectancy: 9-11 years, some live to be 20+

Migration Pattern: Year-round resident

Typical Foods: Bark and twigs of softwood trees including: aspen, poplar, birch, willow, maple, cottonwood, and alder; aquatic and marsh plants such as duckweed, arrowhead, cattail, sedge, bulrush, water lily, waterweed, and goldenrod

Native to Ohio: Yes

