



Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Saskatchewan

c/o 903 Temperance Street

Saskatoon, SK S7N 0N3

www.wrsos.org

WILDLIFE HOTLINE: (306) 242-7177

Beavers



Natural History: Beavers are the largest rodent native to North America and can be found throughout Saskatchewan. They can weigh as much as 60 lbs. and average 40-45 inches long to the tip of the tail. The tail itself is about 16 inches long and 4-4 1/2 inches wide. When disturbed, or frightened, they slap this broad tail in the water as an alarm to others. Beavers have webbed hind feet that make them excellent swimmers.

The tail is used as a rudder in swimming and an aid in diving or a prop while sitting up to gnaw on a tree. Because a beaver's incisor teeth grow continuously throughout their life, the beaver must wear them down through constant chewing resulting in much of the damage to trees that people complain about.

Beavers pair for life. They live in family groups with their "kits" who remain with the family until they are two years old, at which time they find a mate, move out and build their own dam. Beavers are slow on land, but quite agile and speedy swimmers. They store oxygen and can remain submerged for at least 15 minutes.

Beavers prefer a few specific types of trees, but will sample almost any. They eat aquatic plants, grasses, sedges, and rushes along with the bark of most deciduous trees and shrubs in the summer. In winter, they are restricted to mostly the bark of trees (aspen, cottonwood, and willows are preferred). which they keep fresh by cutting and hauling into the water before freeze-up. They may go up to 650 feet from shore to find trees. Their engineering abilities are legendary and deservedly so.

Resources

Wild Neighbors. Edited by John Hadidian, G. Hodge, and J. Grandy. 288pp. Available through the Humane Society of the U.S., 2100 L St. NW, Washington, DC 20037, USA

Living with Wildlife. by D. Landau and S. Stump. Sierra Club Books, 1994

The Fund for Animals, Inc.

P.O. Box 3665, Amity

Station

New Haven, CT 06525

-USA

(Videos

on how to control flooding)

A Beaver is eating all my trees!

A. The simplest solution is to wrap heavy gauge wire mesh (4 ft high with 2” x 4” mesh squares) around the tree. Secure the two ends with “form wire” to create a cylinder of mesh that is free-standing around each tree. The wire does not need to be staked in place as the beavers will not go under it as long as it is flush with the ground at the bottom.

Beavers have favorite trees. If possible, when planning to landscape in an area near a water body or where beavers are known to live, try planting those trees they are less fond of and avoid the aspen, cottonwood and willows.

A Beaver dam is causing flooding!

A. Beavers are natural engineers, creating wetlands out of streams, and providing vital habitat for a myriad of plants and animal species. If this is not conducive to your area, then there is the option of placing pipes through the dam to deceive the beavers.

The lodge, -that mound of sticks rising out of the water,- is quite dry inside and may house as many as ten beavers. They use this space for living and to protect them from predators as the only way in is from under the water. They also use this space for food storage. Their caches can be as large as 8 feet wide and 40 feet long and will sustain the family through the winter.

There are many sources of information available about how to install perforated PVC pipes through beaver dams to control water levels and solve the flooding problem. Since Beavers rebuild their dams in response to hearing running water, the system is designed to breach the dam in such a way that the beavers do not hear the water running through, and the water level can be managed.

Why Trapping will not work:

Where there is beaver habitat, there will be beavers. Migrating 2-year-olds in search of new territory often replace the trapped beaver, taking over vacant lodges and building new dams.

Destroying dams does not work either because beavers have an instinct to repair any holes or gaps in the dam. This is in response to the sound of running water. They will persist in rebuilding their dams until the humans are worn out. There are no long-lasting ways to discourage beavers from occupying suitable habitat. The only answer is to work WITH the beavers to control the flooding.

In addition, when beavers are trapped and removed from an area, all too often, they are not all successfully removed, leaving behind babies, or other young who may not be able to fend for themselves, resigning them to death by predators or by starvation. And, the problem has still not been solved.