

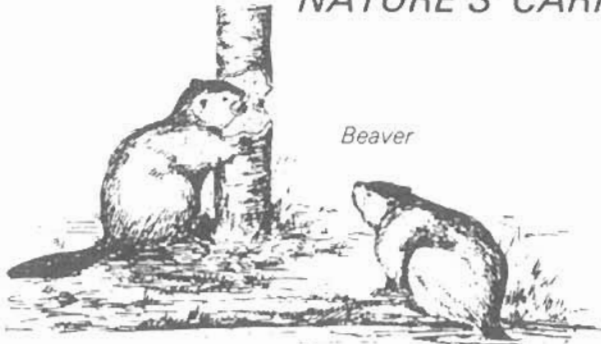
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Natural History Notes



MIKE DOMBECK grew up in the Moose Lake area and graduated from Hayward High School and the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. He has a B.S. degree in Biology and an M.S. degree in Aquatic Biology. He has taught Zoology at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and is presently a staff member of the University of Minnesota's Bell Museum of Natural History. Mike has also been an area fishing guide since his high school days.

NATURE'S CARPENTER



Only two species of animals build dams: man and the beaver. Beavers are the more experienced since they have, without a doubt, built many more dams than man ever will. Just as we have our roads and highways for travel, the beaver has its rivers, streams, and ponds.

Colonies of two to eight beaver will settle on a meticulously selected area of a stream or pond where they begin to work at once. Dams are constructed on small streams to raise the water level. Canals are then dug to serve as water highways to transport food and building materials. Burrows are dug and lodges built to provide protection from predators and the weather.

Some remarkable features enable the beaver to thrive in the water as well as on land. Well-oiled heavy outer fur waterproofs him while a thick layer of fat insulates the beaver from icy cold water. Large hind feet with webbed toes are used as paddles. The two inside toes have split claws which the beaver uses to clean its fur and spread waterproofing oils. When the beaver dives, ear and nose valves close to keep water out while he remains under the water for as long as 15 minutes. The

beaver's large yellow front teeth grow continuously throughout its life and he must wear them down to maintain a constant length. The upper incisors hold the wood, while the lower pair do the cutting. Lips behind the teeth close and permit underwater cutting. The beaver's "trade-mark" is his flat broad tail, used as a rudder in the water and a prop on land. When danger is near he slaps his tail against the water's surface with a loud crack, warning others of the danger.

Beaver cut trees up to 18 inches in diameter. The bark is then peeled for food and the wood is used in the construction of dams and lodges. In winter the tree tops are stored under the ice for food. The dams may hold back more than six feet of water, flooding lowlands and providing a rich aquatic habitat for fish, ducks, mink, and other aquatic animals. Beaver lodges may be up to 30 ft. across at the base and taper toward the top. The lodges have two or more underwater entrances and as much as 25 square feet of living space. Here the beaver spends most of the winter and bears and raises its young in a close-knit family group.

Beaver colonies are common here in Northern Wisconsin. When you see a beaver colony, tip your hat to nature's carpenter, who doesn't even need a saw or hammer.



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