

# NATURE NOTES

## The Beaver

*Castor canadensis*

The scientific name of this large rodent links it closely to our natural heritage. Though it holds a lofty place as a Canadian symbol, the beaver is often cursed by people who see destructive, rather than constructive, effects of its activity. It is all a matter of perspective.

These workaholics are constantly fixing, dredging, cutting and hauling. Before freeze-up, they winterize their homes with extra mud and store food for the long, cold season. Large piles of freshly cut branches are located close to the lodge. This ensures a constant supply of food near their underwater entrances. Beavers consume the bark and buds, then often chip the remainder of the branch to create a cozy floor cover for their living quarters. An air vent allows for a constant supply of fresh air. When the water freezes over, these industrious animals can make it through the winter without serious risk of predation, starvation, exposure or suffocation. A typical lodge at this time of year houses two adults, two or more yearlings and this year's litter.

Like people, beavers are able to shape landscapes. Unlike people, beavers don't attempt to push out other species that take advantage of their work. They are therefore instrumental in creating habitat for many increasingly rare plants and animals that have developed a dependence on their activity.

In recognition of the important role beavers play in providing habitat, we might want to consider moving over just a bit to allow these phenomenal creatures to do their work. Taking the role of fascinated observer rather than fierce defender of "our" property will get us so much further in understanding where we really fit into the natural order.

by Bea Heissler

Illustration: Aileen Merriam

