

Beaver Fact Sheet

HISTORY

Beavers (*Castor canadensis*) were almost eliminated from Georgia because of unregulated trapping and habitat loss. Wildlife professionals of the 1940's conducted restoration efforts that were quickly successful. As the beaver population expanded, management regulations were adjusted to permit a legal harvest. Today, beavers are thriving statewide, harvest demands are low, and there is no closed season on taking beavers in Georgia.

HABITAT AND RANGE

Beavers are found throughout North America and statewide in Georgia wherever suitable habitat exists. Present in most areas with a year-round water flow, beavers are found in streams, lakes, ponds, wetlands, and low lying land or swamps along flood-prone creek and river bottoms. Beavers occasionally are found in roadside ditches, drainage ditches, and sewage ponds and are becoming more common in urban areas.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Members of the Order Rodentia (rodents) and Family Castoridae, beavers are North America's largest rodents. Considered semi-aquatic animals, beavers live on both land and in water. Their broad flat tails are used for stability while sitting, feeding or chewing trees. In water, the tail serves as a warning device when slapped on the water and as a rudder for swimming. Sexes appear indistinguishable from visual observation.

DIET

The herbivorous diet of beavers varies seasonally. During the winter months, preferred woody vegetation includes sweet gum, ash, willows, poplar, cottonwoods, pines and fruit trees; however beavers will chew most trees. During the spring and summer, beavers relish aquatic plants and lush tender green shoots or plants.

REPRODUCTION AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Beavers are social animals and usually live in family units called colonies. A single colony may contain a breeding adult pair and both yearling and juvenile offspring. Breeding in Georgia typically occurs in October through March. Offspring are born 105-107 days following breeding. Beavers become sexually mature at two years of age and will then produce one to four kits (young) annually.

LODGES, DENS AND DAMS

Beavers create their own shelter in the form of either bank dens or lodges. Dens are created by digging a series of holes in the banks of lakes, ponds, rivers, creeks or streams. If banks are not suitable for digging, beavers will opt to pile up sticks and form a lodge. Entrances to the lodge or den are submerged while the denning area is 1-2 feet above the water level. The beaver's most famous signature is the dam. Beaver dams serve to stabilize water levels yielding protection to both beavers and their homes as well as facilitating access to food.

ECOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE

From an ecological standpoint, beavers are one of the most important animals in Georgia. Ponds or wetlands created by beavers provide excellent habitat for numerous plants and animals, as well as provide critical nesting or foraging areas for numerous species of waterfowl and other migratory birds. Beaver created wetlands also serve as a filtration system trapping sediments and improving water quality. Landowners may benefit from having beaver ponds on their property through improved hunting, fishing and bird watching opportunities.

NUISANCE

Beavers sometimes create impressive wetlands that conflict with people's use of the land. Frequently beavers impound streams creating flooded bottomlands, pastures or crops. Numerous trees are chewed in areas of beaver activity resulting in damaged or dead trees. Beavers chew on almost any tree or plant, including desirable timber, planted crops, or valuable landscaping. The most effective way to control beaver damage is through shooting or trapping. However, other actions such as fencing and drainage devices can work in certain situations.

FURBEARER VALUE

During the 1700's and 1800's beaver fur was one of the most widely and intensively sought natural resource in North America. Their fur was used for clothing, especially hats. The oil from beaver castor glands was an essential component of many high quality perfumes. Today, beavers are a valued fur resource worldwide. However, in comparison to northern furs the Georgia beaver is less desirable resulting in lower pelt prices.

ADDITIONAL WRD PUBLICATIONS

Beaver Management and Control In Georgia, 2002