

CATTAILS

Beavers

Spring 2009

One of the coolest water animals is the beaver. Beavers are MAMMALS. Their body covering is fur. They actually have two layers of fur, an outer guard hair layer which has long, coarse hair and lets the water roll off easily. The under layer of fur is short and fuzzy and helps keep the beaver warm in winter when he swims under the ice in cold water.

Beavers are RODENTS, like mice and squirrels. They are the largest rodent in North America, weighing 60 to 70 pounds. Like all rodents, their long, sharp front teeth continually grow. Beavers constantly chew things like trees. The teeth are orange which is the color of the protective enamel coating.

The beaver's wide, flat tail is not covered with fur, but with leathery scales. The tail can be used like a rudder in a boat, to help steer and turn direction. It often works like a kick stand, propping the beaver up as he chews down a tree. The tail is also used as a warning signal. Slap! The beaver slaps the tail on the water, communicating to other beavers in the area that there is danger. The beaver does NOT slap mud with his tail, but rather uses his front feet to pack mud on his lodge or dam.

At the base of the tail is a gland that makes an oil that the beaver combs through its fur for waterproofing.

The back feet of a beaver are large and webbed like a duck. This helps them paddle in the water. The beaver's front feet are small with long claws that are used to carry sticks and stones to build dams.

Beavers are excellent swimmers and can stay under water a long time, holding their breath up to 20 minutes. How long can you hold your breath? While the beaver is under water, special valves or skin flaps close off the nose, ears and throat to prevent water from coming in. The beaver also has a second set of eyelids that are see-through that protect the eyes when swimming under water. They work just like your swimming goggles!

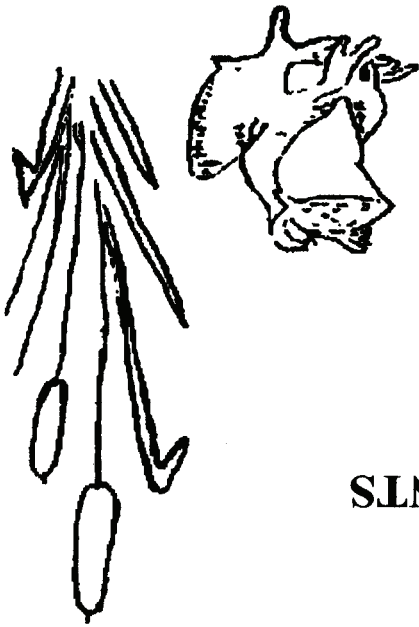
A beaver eats leaves, twigs and bark of most trees and shrubs growing near water. They also like sedges, water lilies, and even mushrooms. Small sticks are stored under their home (LODGE) so they have food all winter long, even after the pond has frozen over.

Beavers mate for life, and give birth to 4 babies each year. A baby beaver is called a KIT. These young beavers stay with their parents two years, so there may be up to 8 young plus the parents inside the lodge which is about 5 feet high and 15 feet wide.



***Come learn more about Beavers at the Wings & Wetlands Youth Program May 9!!**

CATTAILS



TO PALO ALTO COUNTY STUDENTS

From Miriam Patton
Palo Alto County Naturalist

Spring-Summer Programs

May

9 & 10

Wings & Wetlands Festival. Join us for a swan release, canoeing, "Remarkable Reptiles", Greenwings, & Ringnecks Youth Program, and Watchable Wildlife Tour. See insert for complete details.

June

27-28

Bioblitz
24 hour snapshot inventory of all species found at Dewey's Pasture. Join scientists as they survey marsh, lakes, prairie and timber on this 7,000 acre complex. Watch for details.

July

11

Prairie Scavenger Hunt. 10 am. Meet at the Nature Center. Join us for some fun at Huston Prairie. Appropriate for all ages.

24-26

Palo Alto County Fair. Visit the County Conservation and Soil & Water Conservation District booths. Enter your nature photos in our contest and win a prize!

