

## FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

### American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)

ORDER: Rodentia  
FAMILY: Castoridae

The largest North American rodent and the only one with a broad, flat, scaly tail, the Beaver is now common and widespread, even in areas it did not inhabit during pre-colonial times. The modifications it makes to the environment by felling trees and building dams result in changes to plant, animal, and microbial communities that are sometimes desirable and sometimes not. The Beaver itself is not easily seen, being nocturnal and secretive, but it can be spotted in ponds, lakes, or large streams at twilight by a quiet observer. Its pelage is brown, with gray underfur, and is prized by trappers. The webbing on its hind feet help it to swim; claws on the digits of its forefeet give it dexterity in handling food; comblike claws on its hind feet help it in careful grooming; and it can close its mouth behind its front teeth, so that it can carry woody material without taking in water. Beavers cache and consume the inner bark of both deciduous and evergreen shrubs and trees, as well as terrestrial and aquatic plants. Their young, called kits, leave the colony at the age of six months.

**Also known as:**  
Canadian Beaver, North American Beaver

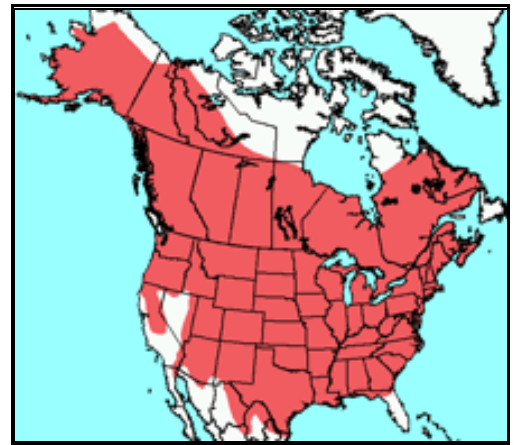
**Sexual Dimorphism:**  
None

**Length:**  
Range: 1,000–1,200 mm

**Weight:**  
Range: 16–30 kg



*Credit: painting by Todd Zalewski from Kays and Wilson's Mammals of North America, © Princeton University Press (2002)*



### FIELD NOTES

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ LOCATION: \_\_\_\_\_  
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