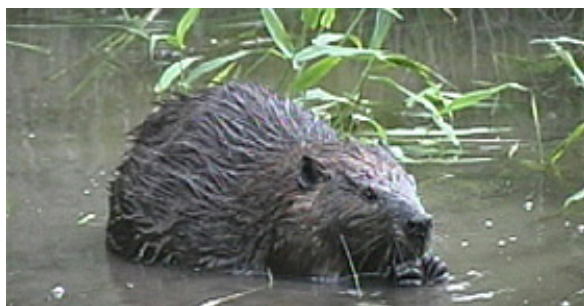

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Solving Problems with Beavers



The two most common conflicts between humans and beavers are the flooding that results from dam building and the damage or destruction of trees.

Flooding can become a crisis if beaver dams are not monitored, and the area is inundated by unusually heavy rains. Trees cut by beavers may strike utility lines, or the trees themselves may be prized specimens—as happened in 1999, when beavers felled some of Washington, D.C.'s beloved cherry trees.

Most of the trees used by beavers are felled within 100 feet of a body of water; the trees are usually two to six inches in diameter, but can reach 24 inches. Often, beavers partially or completely "girdle" trees, removing the bark but leaving the trees standing.

The key to living with beavers is appreciating the important role they play in establishing and maintaining wetlands, which in turn provide critical environmental functions. The beaver's handiwork can have far-reaching positive effects. Beaver impoundments provide rich habitat for a great variety of species, including plants, waterfowl, songbirds, amphibians, fish, insects, and mammals. Dams may also improve water quality by acting as a settling basin, and provide excellent flood control by slowing water movement.

Tree Protection

If your wooded property is adjacent to an area populated by beavers or located near water, your aquatic neighbors will likely pay a visit in the autumn and early spring. This may not be a problem for many people. But if you have small ornamental or valuable specimen trees that need protection from beavers, tree guards are an effective solution.

You can wrap small trees with simple cylinders of galvanized, welded wire, placed 6–12 inches out from the trunk and standing about three feet high. Chicken wire or hardware cloth (1/4- to 1/2-inch mesh) will also work, but the heavier galvanized wire will hold up better. Cylinders on larger trees may require staking, and mulching within the cylinders will prevent weed growth. For seedling trees, corrugated plastic drainpipes provide low-cost, easy-to-

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install protection. Just slit the pipes to allow room for growth, then place them around the trees.

Since beavers are not good climbers, a three- to four-foot fence can also be a permanent deterrent. This may be the best option when trees that need protection are grouped together. Try fencing off just the water side first, and then extend the fence if the beavers start to find their way around it.

Baffling a Beaver

While beavers are superb engineers, they're no match for humans. Where flooding is an issue, you can install "bafflers" or "levelers" that control the water level without disturbing the beavers.

Beavers are thought to be stimulated to repair breaches in their dams by the sound, feel, and sight of running water—a logical response as a draining pond can quickly leave them exposed to predators. Beaver "bafflers" work by dispersing the flow in such a way that the beavers are not stirred to plug them up. Bafflers have many different designs, and can be constructed of plastic or metal pipe, wooden troughs, or metal mesh fencing formed into culverts.

The Beaver Deceiver™ is another effective device. Deceivers are trapezoid-shaped fences built around points of vulnerability like easily plugged culvert openings. These fences extend outward to create an area large enough to discourage damming and to keep beavers away from the moving water that triggers dam building. The design and installation of beaver bafflers and deceivers are sufficiently complex that technical experience from professionals is recommended. It's also important to be aware of local, state, and federal regulations when planning to install these devices.

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Beavers: Nature's Engineers



The beaver, the industrious aquatic mammal known for altering his landscape much like a human, has performed one of North America's most remarkable ecological

feats: recovery from near extinction.

Beavers numbered anywhere from 60–400 million prior to European colonization, but colonists in eastern North America so coveted the animal's thick, waterproof fur that the beaver was nearly trapped right out of existence. In fact, beaver pelts were so valuable that, for a time, they were even used as standard currency. By the early 1900s, the beaver population had dropped to as few as 100,000 due to overtrapping and land clearing, which largely destroyed their wetlands habitat.

Today, with their population rebounding, beavers are now recognized as a "keystone" species—one that fundamentally supports an ecosystem. However, as beavers return to long-abandoned watersheds, conflicts with humans increase, even though these aquatic animals have more in common with us than we might want to admit. We both substantially alter the environment for our own benefit. Though our dramatic alterations to the landscape ensure that the beaver population will never return to what it once was, these determined animals are reclaiming parts of their former range and are now more common in urban and suburban wetlands.

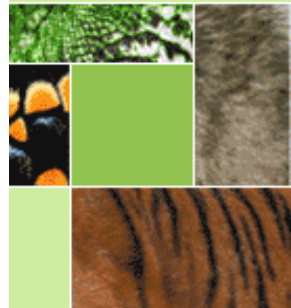
Beaver Basics

The largest rodent in North America, the beaver (*Castor canadensis*) can tip the scales at more than 60 pounds, although an average adult weighs 35–40 pounds. An adult beaver can be nearly three-feet tall when standing on his hind legs.

Found in wetlands throughout most of the United States and Canada, beavers are well adapted to an aquatic habitat. They're excellent swimmers, able to hold their breath for as long as 15 minutes. Beavers also have large, webbed hind feet; valves in their ears and nostrils that form a watertight seal; and dense, waterproof fur. A flap of skin behind their front teeth even prevents

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them from swallowing liquid when carrying wood underwater.

Beavers are also known for their large front teeth, whose exterior surface is covered in bright orange enamel. Although their long incisors may look menacing, beavers are completely herbivorous mammals, and generally peaceful creatures. Their ever-growing front teeth are worn down to a chisel-like edge by regular gnawing on trees, a plant that provides both food and shelter. Beavers feed primarily on the inner bark of woody plants, but also eat leaves, shoots, duckweed, water lilies, and pondweed. Of course, beavers are also famous for their unique, flat tails, which they use as balancing tools and communication devices—slapped on the water surface, the tails effectively signal danger.

Beavers typically live in lodges constructed from branches, mud, and other debris, or in dens dug into the banks of streams or lakes. Lodges may be created along the edges of canals or ponds, or formed as mounded islands of interwoven branches that stand further out in deeper water. The structures are packed solid with mud to make them weatherproof—except for the peak, which is left open for ventilation—and have at least two or more water-accessible openings.

In the fall, beavers stockpile winter food supplies by sinking large amounts of branches into the mud close by their lodges or dens. With a sizable underwater cache, beavers can remain comfortably well-fed even during the harshest winter freeze. They simply swim beneath the water's icy surface to retrieve choice branches, then devour them inside the lodge.

For beavers, dam-building is an instinctive survival skill. The main purpose is to surround themselves with a stable body of water—understandably important to animals who are far more adept in water than on land. The resulting pond provides beavers with a safe refuge from predators; flooding an even larger area also ensures watery access to prime food sources in the vicinity.

Beavers produce one litter per year, usually between March and June. A typical litter contains three or four kits. After kits are weaned, parents and older offspring who remain with the family share parental duties. A beaver colony usually has six to eight animals: an adult pair and the kits from the previous two litters. Older kits usually leave the colony by their second birthdays. Most generally travel less than six miles to find new homes, but some beavers have been documented to have traveled as far as 150 miles.

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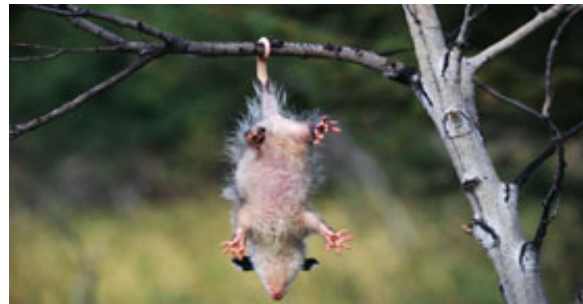
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Urban Wildlife Sanctuary Program



The HSUS's Urban Wildlife Sanctuary Program (UWSP) provides individuals and communities the opportunity to assess and improve their property's usefulness

as a wildlife habitat. UWSP members receive a variety of educational materials on habitat creation and restoration, as well as tips for enhancing wildlife-watching experiences.

You don't have to have acres of land to provide sanctuary. The UWSP is open to anyone with an interest in making our urban areas more hospitable to wildlife. Even a city apartment balcony can hold a birdfeeder or butterfly garden. If you have a sincere desire to help wild animals by enhancing habitat on your property and committing to humane approaches for resolving conflicts with wildlife, your property could become an official HSUS Urban Wildlife Sanctuary.

Stay informed about issues affecting animals.

Enter your email address and sign up for our Humane Living e-newsletter.

Benefits of UWSP certification:

- A free copy of *Wild Neighbors: The Humane Approach to Living with Wildlife*, our 253-page book offering practical advice for the humane, effective resolution of conflicts with more than 30 species of animals commonly found around homes and buildings. An \$18 value!
- A complimentary one-year subscription to *Wild Neighbors News*, our award-winning, quarterly newsletter offering seasonal suggestions for helping wildlife, ideas for enhancing habitat, and feature articles on urban wildlife species.
- A full-color certificate dedicating your property as an Urban Wildlife Sanctuary.
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property an "Official Urban Wildlife Sanctuary."

- An Urban Wildlife Sanctuary decal to display in your home window.
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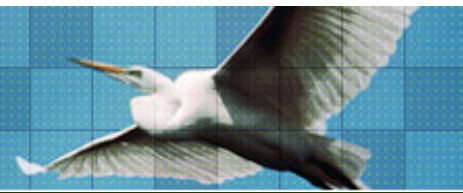
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Fur and Trapping



Using animals for fashion cheapens life—including our own. Synthetic fabrics, both warmer and lighter than fur, have eliminated the need to kill animals for their fur. Yet each year more than 40 million animals are killed for their fur: minks, foxes, bobcats, beavers, raccoons, sables, lynx, chinchillas—the list goes on and on. Each piece of fur trim represents an animal who suffered and died; a full coat represents many animals. There is no reason to kill animals for fashion, and many reasons not to.



Supporters portray fur "farms" or "ranches" as humane environments, but in fact, these facilities are little more than a series of small wire cages in an open shed. Animals suffer extreme confinement and poor housing conditions. Many of them exhibit behavioral disorders such as constant pacing, self-mutilation, and infanticide. Many suffer physical abnormalities as a result of inbreeding. They suffer as they die, too: neck breaking, gassing, and anal electrocution are the most common methods of killing animals raised for fur.

Trapping is well known for the suffering it causes—torn flesh and tendons, broken bones, dislocated joints, crushed pelvises, swelling, and blood loss. Traps and snares, especially the archaic steel-jaw leghold trap, have been so maligned in the United States that many believe they have been banned. While both the number of active trappers and the number of animals who fall victim to these inhumane devices have declined, the leghold trap remains the most commonly used trap in the United States, despite a reported 74% of Americans who want the trap banned (Caravan Opinion Research Corporation, October 1996).

Strides have been made to eliminate the use of cruel and indiscriminate traps in the United States, with eight states (Washington, California, Massachusetts, Colorado, Arizona, New Jersey, Florida, and Rhode Island) now banning their use. And the notion of trapping as an essential wildlife management tool is being dismissed with the success of these bans. The public has accepted trapping as an anachronism that should be relegated to the history books.

Using animals for fashion cheapens life—including our own. Synthetic fabrics, both warmer and lighter than fur, have eliminated the need to kill animals for their fur. Yet each year more than 40 million animals are killed for their fur: minks, foxes, bobcats, beavers, raccoons, sables, lynx, chinchillas—the list goes on and on. Each piece of fur trim represents an animal who suffered and died; a full coat represents many animals. There is no reason to kill animals for fashion, and many reasons not to.

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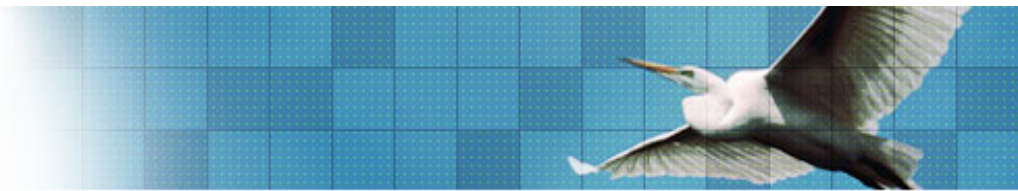
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Caged Fur: The Inside Story



More than 30 million animals worldwide are raised in cages and killed each year for their fur. Not only are cage-raised animals killed inhumanely, but they suffer from

numerous physical and behavioral abnormalities induced by the stress of caging conditions. The Humane Society of the United States is strongly opposed to raising animals in cages and killing them for fur apparel and accessories. Synthetic fabrics that are warmer and lighter than fur have eliminated the need for fur apparel.

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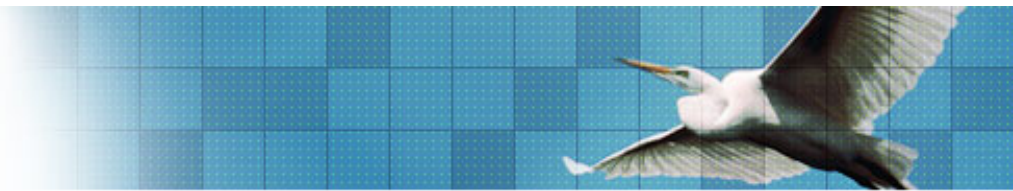
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U.S. Beaver Management Tool Crosses the Pond



John Hadidian

By John Hadidian

History of a sort was made in October when "beaver deceivers" were installed on European soil—or rather, in water—for the first

time.

Pioneered and developed by wildlife biologist and HSUS consultant Skip Lisle, beaver deceivers are economical and long-lasting devices that prevent the planet's second-best engineers from blocking streams and culverts and thereby creating those mini-ponds that can provide refuge and sustenance for beavers—and headaches for humans.

What wildlife managers might call "beaver devices" have been around for perhaps 40 years. In the public's mind, these devices are mostly associated with the Clemson Beaver Pond Leveler, which consists of a pipe, encased in a wire grid, that is used to level out a beaver-made pond by draining water to the other side of the animals' dam.

But in the early 1990s, Lisle, then a biologist working for the Penobscot Indian Nation in Maine, began to work with different design concepts that have come to be called "beaver deceivers" and "levelers." His work has raised the design principles, not to mention the aesthetics, behind beaver devices to new heights, and his devices have proven quite successful when installed at trouble spots throughout the United States.

So when Poland came calling about beaver deceivers, it only made sense that Lisle answered it. Lisle, The HSUS, and Dr. Andrzej Czech, an ecologist and founder of the Polish consulting firm Natural Systems, joined forces to provide the first field demonstrations of this simple but effective technology at two sites near the town of Suprasl in northeastern Poland.

Not long after we helped install Lisle's two different beaver deceivers, the round-fence-and-pipe system and the trapezoidal fence system, the Poles soon learned the great benefits—and the unforeseen complications—of these

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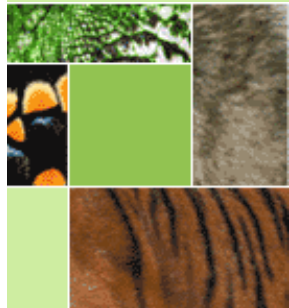
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innovative devices. But more on that later.

Beaver History 101

Before humans almost completely wiped out Europe's indigenous beaver populations for the fur trade, there were dams along virtually every stream in what is now modern Europe. (Incidentally, the European beaver, *Castor fiber*, is both similar and different from the North American species, *Castor canadensis*. The two species look alike, but they do not interbreed, and the European beaver has eight more chromosomes in its genetic makeup than its New World counterpart). But that was hundreds of years ago, before the drive to trap beavers for their fur was exported to our continent, with similarly disastrous results.

Today, in both Europe and North America, beavers are making a comeback. Often their return is aided directly by humans translocating the animals, the result of resource managers and ecological planners who have gained an ever-greater understanding and appreciation for the environmental services these animals provide.

Beaver activities create and sustain wetlands; allow sediments and toxic materials to filter out of watersheds before they can harm aquatic ecosystems; and create biodiversity and provide habitat for both plants and animals, some of whom may be threatened or endangered. And that's just a partial list.

Clearly, it is in our interest to have beavers present on the landscape wherever they do not directly affect resources that people need to protect. In fact, some biologists have argued that beaver dams spread throughout a major drainage area—even ones as large as the Mississippi and Missouri basins—will prevent catastrophic floods, since each dam will contribute its small part to stopping, slowing, and impeding the mad rush of water that moves through the channels we have encased in concrete armor.

Even beyond the arguments for humane treatment, the logic for living compatibly with beavers is overwhelming. The trick is to prevent beavers from doing any harm, and for that we can only note that as superb as beavers are as engineers, they are only second-best to humans.

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