

THE LORD OF WATER CASTLES

Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber*)

Left part:

The largest rodent in Europe, weighing up to 30 kilograms. It is perfectly adapted to life in water. Its body is covered with dark brown, glossy and water-resistant fur. It has webbed feet and a broad, flattened tail, which serves as a rudder as well as a signalling device. A loud slap of the tail on the water surface warns other members of the beaver family. It can stay underwater for up to twenty minutes.

Beavers live in families or colonies. Their mating season is in early spring, and in April or May, females give birth to fur-covered babies with their eyes open. A litter typically consists of two to five kits. Beaver pairs stay together for life.

Captions under photos and the beaver distribution map (left part):

- Most active at dusk
- Webbed feet
- A mother with her young
- Grooming after a bath
- Distribution of the Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber*) in Europe and Asia

Centre part:

Beavers can be found in natural habitats such as flowing and still waters in forested landscapes where they build lodges, also known as beaver castles, using branches, plants, soil, tree trunks, gravel and mud. In flowing waters, they construct dams. Females are the primary builders, while males gather and pass on the material. Beavers also dig burrows in riverbanks with underwater entrances. They mark their territory with a strong scent, i.e. an exudate from their castor sacks beneath the tail, known as castoreum. Beavers prefer riparian vegetation with willows, alders, birches and poplars. They inhabit waters deep enough to prevent freezing to the bottom in winter and drying up in summer.

Captions under photos and illustrations (centre part):

- When diving, it can close its nostrils and ear openings.
- It is active even during winter.
- Beaver lodge and dams (hrádza – dam, vchod – entrance, komora – chamber, hrad – lodge, vetracia šachta – ventilation shaft, obhryz – gnawed wood, zásoba potravy – food storage).

Centre right part:

The beaver feeds exclusively on plant material. It is known for gnawing trees completely around the base until they fall. It enjoys branches and bark which it stores underwater as winter food reserves. Its diet includes various tree species, however, some trees are used only for construction, while others are gnawed to remove shading. Occasionally, beavers consume herbs, graze on grass and even feed on agricultural crops near fields.

Bottom right part:

In recent years, beavers have been appearing more frequently not only in foothill areas but also at higher altitudes, even in some tarns in the Tatras. Although their presence is often associated with damage, their importance to nature is undeniable – they retain water in the landscape, creating suitable conditions for moisture-loving plants and animals such as newts, frogs, reptiles and waterfowl.

Captions under photos (right part):

- Beavers feed on various tree species.
- Beaver gnaw marks
- Occasionally they consume different plants.
- Beaver-made pathways
- Beaver biotope

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