American Beaver

Scientific Name: Castor canadensis
Class: Mammalia
Order: Rodentia
Family: Castoridae

Males and females are similar. There is very dense under fur overlaid with coarse guard hairs of black, brown, yellow or reddish brown. Tail is paddle shaped, flat and covered with shiny black horny scales. It functions as a rudder and to tamp mud into place. The tail is 9" x 4", total average length 4'6"; shoulder height is 12 to 23"; their weight is between 32 to 66 pounds. Newborns weigh about 1 pound. The torpedo shaped body has short legs with black feet with 5 claws. Claws on first 2 toes split to aid grooming. Claws are 1" long for digging. Hind feet are webbed. Forepaws are designed to allow dexterity in manipulating sticks etc. Body can sit erect, freeing paws for architectural work. Rather awkward on land but a good swimmer. Acute hearing and smell but short-range vision.

Range
Continental United States, Canada and extreme northern Mexico.

Habitat
Tree lined banks of ponds, lakes and streams.

Gestation
100 – 110 days.

Litter
2 to 4

Behavior
They are most active on summer nights, tending to sleep long hours away in winter, waking only to feed on their cache of branches fastened under water in the mud just outside their lodge. Nutrients in branches are preserved by the near freezing water. Their dams of mud, sticks, branches and stones are built across small streams at high water times forming ponds. They construct canals between ponds by loosening mud from a marshy side and pushing it aside. Behind the dam the lodge is built of mud and branches with the main room above the water level.

Reproduction
Apparently monogamous pairs mate in January and February with birth coming between April and June. Sexual maturity comes between 1.5 - 2 years at which time they are forced from the colony.

Wild Diet
Bark, leaves, twigs and roots of Willow, Aspen, Poplar trees and aquatic plants, especially water lily shoots. In spring they concentrate on non woody items and algae, woody items in fall.