

# Living with Wildlife – Beavers – Part II



submitted photo

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Beavers play a critical role in the ecosystem by creating and maintaining wetland habitat. They are considered a 'keystone' species because their activities create a healthy habitat for many other species.

In fact, beaver ponds are one of the best places to observe wildlife. Here, you are likely to see deer coming to drink, birds such as great blue herons and red-winged blackbirds feeding and nesting along with many different waterfowl and plant species. Wetlands created by beaver can also provide spawning, rearing and feeding for fish.

Beaver are of even greater direct benefit to us. Their ponds slow drainage run-off and mitigate erosion. The effects of their dams and ponds help to filter silt, agricultural chemicals and pollutants from streams. This helps to improve water quality for fish, wildlife, and people. Beaver ponds provide

quality habitat for non-rare and endangered species alike.

Conflicts can occur with beaver dams causing flooding of forests, agricultural crops and roads. Beaver can take down trees, including fruit trees and shrubs. However, there are effective ways to mitigate these problems without killing beavers. These include water level control devices and exclosures to protect valuable trees.

Recent research demonstrates that the benefit of beavers far outweigh the concerns. In an extensive study in western Canada, beavers were found to be the single most important factor in maintaining boreal wetlands during periods of drought, of particular significance given climate change. Some states in the U.S. have reintroduced beavers for this reason.

In this region people are increasingly seeing the value in living with beavers. Graham Creek residents in Ottawa's west end decided that the cycle of "lose trees, kill beavers, lose

more trees, kill more beavers" was not sustainable. Instead they wire-wrapped larger trees while planting, with the City of Ottawa's help, hundreds of fast-growing species to supply an alternate food source for beavers while helping to stabilize the steep banks of the creek.

Fletcher Wildlife Garden volunteers recognized that the arrival of a young beaver to their pond last fall was an opportunity to educate local residents. Some, who initially saw the beaver as a problem, after reading the informational signage and getting to observe the beaver, became admirers. Many had not actually seen a beaver before.

Recently, a rural resident called the Centre for advice about a flooding problem caused by beavers on their property. They reported a week later "the piping (beaver baffle) you recommended worked. A really good idea, thanks for the information".

For information on beavers and solutions to conflicts see [www.wildlifeinfo.ca](http://www.wildlifeinfo.ca).