

Beaver Finds a New Home

By Susan Fisher

A new litter of three kits had arrived in the beaver family. Now there were nine of them: mother and father, the three new ones, plus four kits from previous litters. As the new ones grew, there wouldn't be enough room in the lodge, and there wouldn't be enough food either. Young beaver was two years old. That made him nearly a grown-up. It was time for him to leave.



He set out at dawn one fine May morning and swam to the dam at the outlet of the pond. The creek that trickled out was shallow so he had to walk. He was a wonderful swimmer, fast and strong, but as a walker, he was much slower.

After he had waddled along for a few minutes, he met a shrew, digging in some leaves.

"Oh, hello," said the beaver. "What are you looking for down there?"

"What are *you* looking for?" retorted the shrew.

"Well, I'm looking for a pond of my own."

"Humph. You'll have a long way to go. There's another pond down there, but it's already got a beaver family."

"Really? Well, I'll just have to go farther."

"You should have stayed home. That's what we shrews do."

What a grumpy shrew. It was fine for him to stay home. He would live for only a year or two. But the beaver would live for another ten years. With a new litter in his family every year, he had no choice but to set out and find his own pond.

It was afternoon when he came to the next pond. The beaver swam across to the far end past a lodge where he heard some noises from another beaver family. He was a bit nervous that he might meet them, but they didn't appear. He clambered over their dam and carried on walking.



After a time, he began to feel tired and hungry. He broke off a small willow branch. Holding it in his forepaws, he gnawed the bark off and thought about his journey. How much farther would he have to go before he found a pond of his own?

As he sat at the creek edge, some cliff swallows swooped down and began gathering small balls of mud.

"Excuse me," said the beaver. "How far is it to the next pond?"



One of the swallows looked at the beaver, at his round body and short front paws. "Well, for me it's a three-minute flight, but for you it might take a while."

"Do any beavers already live there?"

"Beavers? Hmm.... There are some raccoons we have to keep an eye on, but I haven't seen any beaver this year. There is an old lodge, but I'm pretty sure it's empty."



"Oh, thank you, Swallow. That is very good news." Already the beaver felt stronger. He got up and started walking again.

In about half an hour he came to a pond. It wasn't big, but around its edges were willows and reeds. He slipped into the water and began swimming. There it was—an old beaver lodge, just on the western edge of the pond.

The branches on top were grey and leafless, and he saw the top of an entrance with a cobweb across it. The beaver lifted his head and listened. Hearing no squeaks or chewing sounds, he felt safe as he swam through the entrance. Inside, there were no signs of fresh leaves or branches, and it really was empty. Now it could be his.

The sun was going down. Soon he would find some willow leaves or maybe some aspen twigs for his dinner. Tomorrow he would have to start fixing his new home. He would repair the dam so the water in the pond would rise and completely hide the lodge entrance. Today, far from his family, he felt lonely. But he was sure that he would not be alone forever. Some day another beaver would come to his pond, and he could invite her to stay. Thinking happily about the future, the young beaver looked at the lodge and the clean, clear water of the pond and thought, Yes, I have found a home of my own.

