

Smart Stuff

with Twig Walkingstick

Q. Dear Twig: Do the trees beavers cut down ever fall on and squish the beavers?

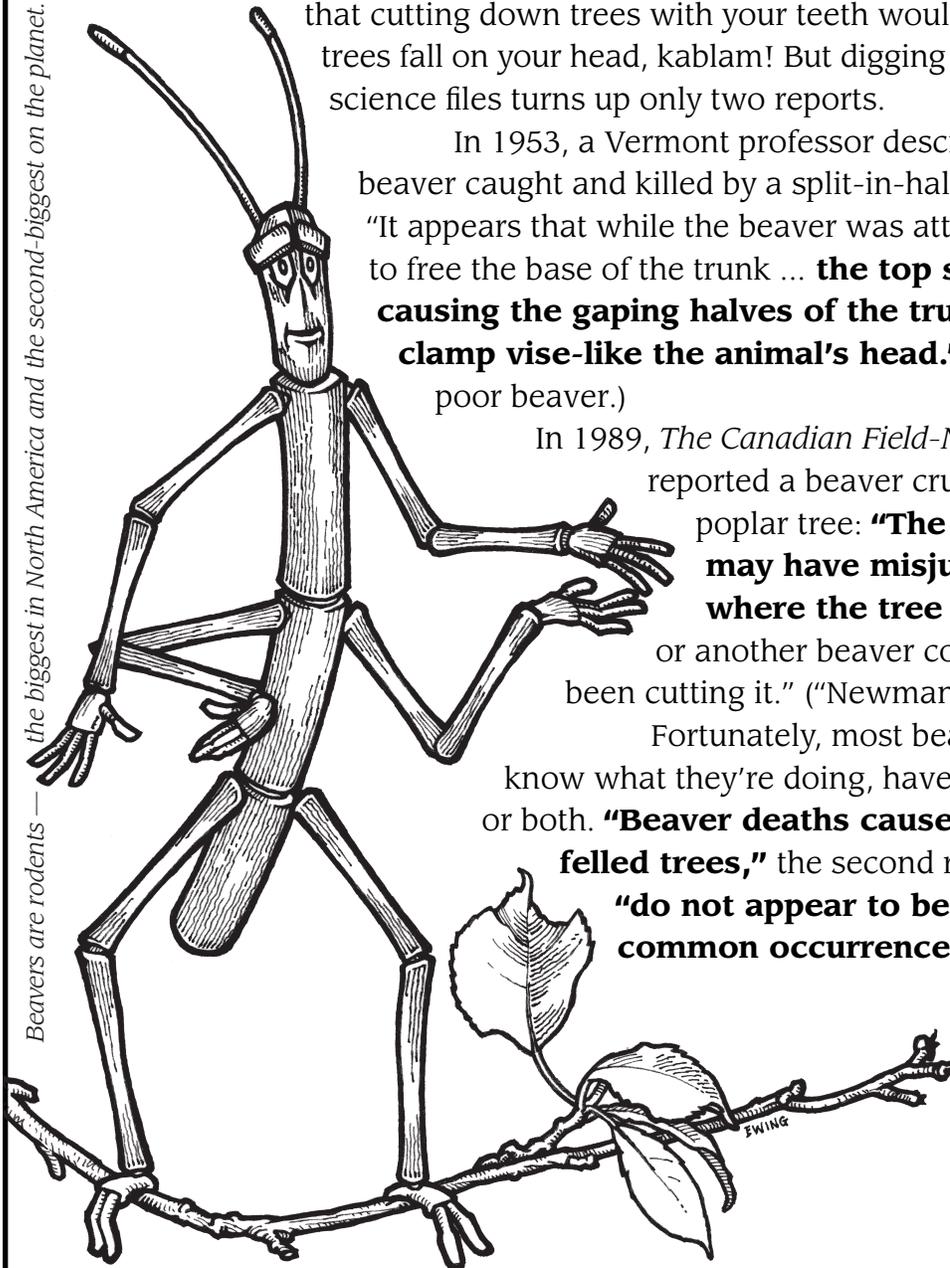
A. Hardly ever, though you'd think it would happen a lot. You'd think that cutting down trees with your teeth would make the trees fall on your head, kablam! But digging through the science files turns up only two reports.

In 1953, a Vermont professor described a beaver caught and killed by a split-in-half tree trunk: "It appears that while the beaver was attempting to free the base of the trunk ... **the top shifted, causing the gaping halves of the trunk to clamp vise-like the animal's head.**" (Ach, the poor beaver.)

In 1989, *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* reported a beaver crushed by a poplar tree: "**The beaver may have misjudged where the tree would fall,** or another beaver could have been cutting it." ("Newman!")

Fortunately, most beavers know what they're doing, have better luck or both. "**Beaver deaths caused by felled trees,**" the second report says, "**do not appear to be a common occurrence.**"

Beavers are rodents — the biggest in North America and the second-biggest on the planet.



Twig

From your scientific friends at The Ohio State University — specifically, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (www.oardc.ohio-state.edu) and OSU Extension (extension.osu.edu).



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Notes: Sources included "Felled Tree Kills Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)" by Harold B. Hitchcock, Middlebury College, Vermont, in *Journal of Mammalogy*, 1953; and "Beaver, *Castor canadensis*, Mortality Caused by Felled Trees in Alberta" by George W. Scotter and Etta Scotter, Edmonton, Alberta, *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, 1989. Twig has been vacationing in a place where beavers live and cut down trees but hasn't seen any beavers nor been clonked by any of their trees. This column first ran Jan. 22, 2006.

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