

Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter

Ben Goldfarb

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Environmental journalist Ben Goldfarb's lively and educational *Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter* shows why beavers should be respected as "ecosystem engineers."

Goldfarb is a fan of beavers, but he admits that they are not loved by all. To some, he writes, "beavers still appear more menacing than munificent." This book is an excellent antidote to that attitude. It traces the history of beavers, tying their evolution to the colonization of North America, and shows their positive impact on the natural environment. Goldfarb also uncovers how humans who recognize beavers' importance help by relocating them to areas where they can do the most good.

In addition to being enlightening, *Eager* is filled with unusual beaver-related stories. One can learn about "the world's largest collection of beaver-themed" items (it's located in Martinez, California), and "one of the largest beaver relocations ever undertaken" (it took place from 1986 to 1999 to the north of Yellowstone National Park).

Perhaps most interestingly, *Eager* addresses both the positives and negatives of the beaver-human-ecology relationship in a thought-provoking way. Goldfarb ponders important issues, suggesting, for example, "whether it's appropriate to build artificial beaver dams in national parks is an ethical question as much as a scientific one." He also discusses the possible downside of beaver-based restoration: "The landscapes where beavers can do the most good aren't always ready for them."

The author perceptively and eloquently concludes that, while beavers were almost obliterated in the early twentieth century and were saved by humans, now "it's we who need *their* help—to store and clean water, to rebuild flood defenses, to repair degraded rivers, to revive biodiversity."

Eager offers rare insight into the history of beavers and their behavior, qualities, and characteristics. Even more importantly, *Eager* explores the animals' complex relationship with humans, and the essential role they play in developing ponds and streams that support wildlife.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (July/August 2018)

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