

Animals pop up everywhere in the story of Canada. They're in the ocean and the wilderness, in farms, cities and even our living rooms. Indigenous peoples were the first to use animals to make food, clothing, homes, tools and more. Inuit, Métis and First Nations people all over the country still hunt and fish, as well as having pets and working animals. Europeans likely first came to what is now Canada looking for creatures of the sea and land.

# FUR, FEATHERS AND FINS

Illustrations by: Matt Kehler



they lowered a basket into the ocean it would fill up with cod. Before long, ships were sailing from France, Spain, Portugal and England to catch fish for Europe. Some companies took the cod ashore, split them and dried them on the stones or on wooden platforms in places such as Grande Grave in what is now Forillon National Park in Quebec. In some parts of Newfoundland, when people say “fish,” they mean cod — that’s how important it was to the island. So many ships from all over the world fished cod so heavily and for so long in the area that in 1992 the Canadian government banned all cod fishing except for people catching food for their families.

In 1497, Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot) and his crew were sailing near the island of Newfoundland and couldn’t believe their eyes. As someone said in a letter home to Italy, if



A young worker with drying cod, Esquimaux Point, Que., in the early 1900s

Library and Archives Canada



The best way to get rid of rats and mice that might chew through your ship's ropes and eat the food needed for a long sea voyage is to keep a cat on board. The *Empress of Ireland*, shown above, was about to sail out of Quebec City on May 28, 1914, when the ship's cat, Emmy, jumped off. The next day, the *Empress* crashed into a coal ship in the middle of the St. Lawrence River and sank. More than 1,000 people drowned.



Whalers from the Basque region, which lies partly in northern Spain and partly in southern France, sailed to the coast of Labrador to hunt bowhead, shown below, and right whales, shown above, from about 1530 to 1600. During that time they killed at least 20,000 whales. They wanted the baleen — the bony fringe the whales used to filter their food out of the water. The baleen was used to stiffen women's underclothes, like the corset at right, for knife handles and other products. Blubber (whale fat) was melted to make oil for lamps.







Fancy hats made from beaver pelts were so popular in Europe starting in the 1600s that their makers couldn't keep up. After they killed pretty much all the beavers at home, they turned to the vast wilderness of Canada. Voyageurs and traders travelled a huge territory from what is now Quebec to the Yukon and Northwest Territories to buy pelts from Indigenous people. Fashion almost destroyed Canada's beaver population, but thanks to the rise of silk hats in the mid-1800s, and the work of people to protect the busy creatures, they now thrive nearly everywhere except the Arctic islands.

In 1698, this is how one illustrator from France imagined beavers would look as they built a dam, including walking on two legs like people. Some in France were sure that these Canadian beavers had a king, while others said they held elections. Another insisted he had seen villages made up of beaver palaces in the wilderness.



Beaver pelts were so important to the Hudson's Bay Company that it put four of them on its coat of arms. Founded in 1670, HBC is the oldest company in North America.

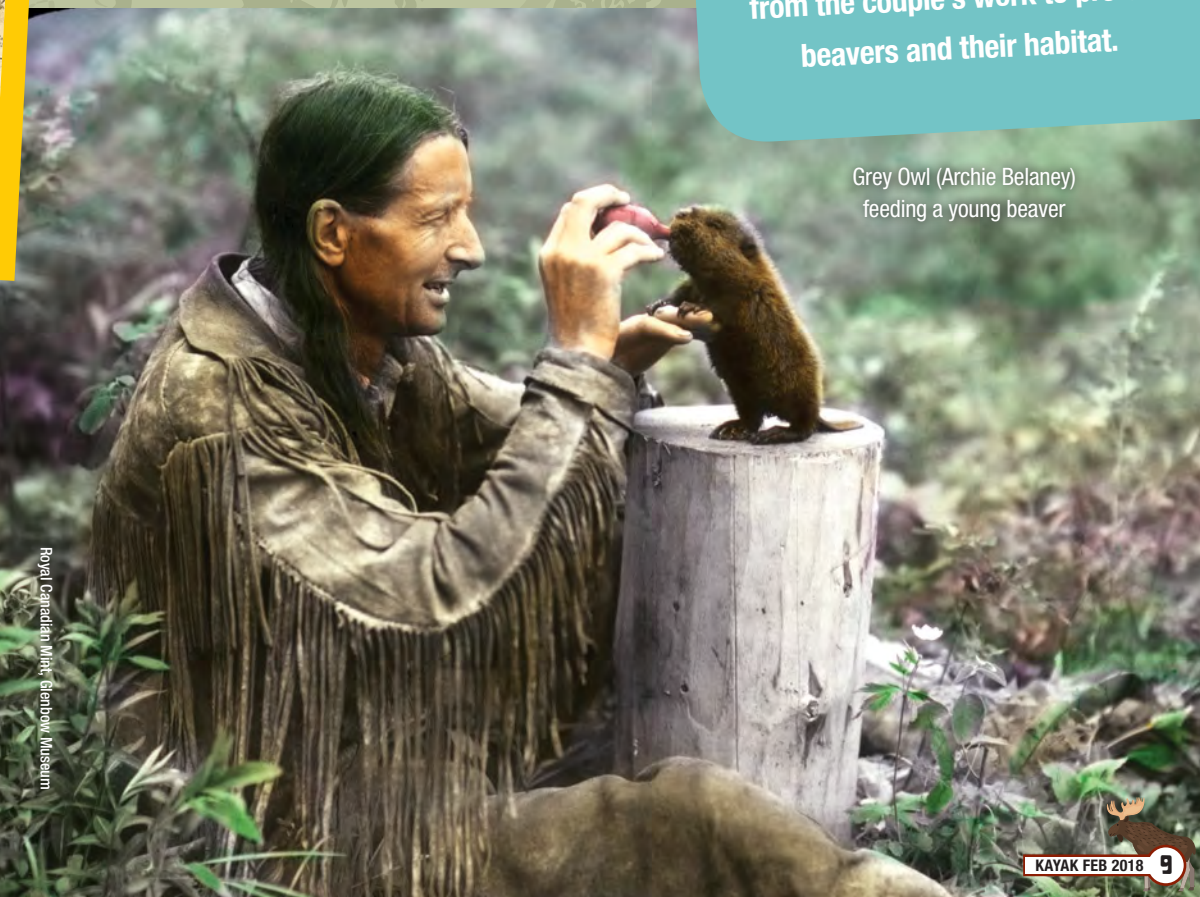


Canada's first stamp was the 1851 Three Penny Beaver.



**The beaver became an official national symbol of Canada on March 24, 1975.**

Canada's most famous beavers were likely Jelly Roll and Rawhide. They lived in a cabin with a man known as Grey Owl and his Mohawk wife Anahareo (Gertrude Bernard), first in Riding Mountain National Park in Manitoba and then in Saskatchewan's Prince Albert National Park. The four of them became famous in the 1930s through films and Grey Owl's books. Many people were shocked to learn he was actually an Englishman named Archie Belaney, but that didn't take away from the couple's work to protect beavers and their habitat.



Grey Owl (Archie Belaney) feeding a young beaver





Horses first came to eastern Canada in 1665, when King Louis XIV of France sent 21 mares (female horses) and two stallions (males). Horses were very important on farms, where they pulled ploughs and hauled out stumps. Settlers moving west took everything they owned in horse-drawn wagons. For centuries, horses also pulled carriages, fire wagons, sleighs, delivery carts and just about everything else, whether in small towns, cities or in the countryside. By 1921 there were 3.5 million horses in Canada, nearly all of them used for work. When cars and tractors came along, horses mainly became a kind of big pet, ridden for fun.

Taken around 1901, the photo at right shows an Indigenous woman from what is now Manitoba with a horse hitched to a Red River cart



Horses were helpful everywhere, but nowhere more than in the Red River region, the area around modern Winnipeg. The Métis were expert riders who used horses when they were hunting bison, and to pull Red River carts. These carts were perfect for the area — they could float, were easy to take apart, and had high wheels that could go through mud.

From the late 1800s well into the mid-1900s, in mines from Alberta to Cape Breton, small but strong pit ponies were used to haul loads of coal up to the surface.



The Canadian horse is a special breed that goes all the way back to those first horses in New France. In 2002, it was named Canada's national horse.

Sable Island is a big, long sand dune in the ocean about 300 kilometres east of Nova Scotia. The only land mammals on it are wild horses, shown above left, whose ancestors were brought to the island in the 1700s as part of a failed attempt at farming. The Sable Island horses are now protected by the Canadian government.

## War Horses

During the First World War, horses did a lot of hard work. They hauled heavy guns, pulled wagons and field kitchens, transported injured soldiers and more. One out of every 10 horses used in the war was from Canada — about 130,000 in total. Every year of the war at least one-quarter of them died in battle.



Bunny was the only one of 18 horses the Toronto police sent overseas to survive the war. He served in many dangerous battles, including Vimy Ridge. Morning Glory, shown above, left her home in Brome, Que., in 1915 along with her owner, Lieutenant-Colonel George Harold Baker, a Member of Parliament. Baker was killed in the trenches of Belgium, the only Canadian MP to die in the war. Morning Glory became the personal horse of a commanding officer, and made it home after the war without ever seeing battle.





Dogs have done lots of important work in our past. The Canadian Inuit dog or qimmiq, shown at left, is a special breed dating back thousands of years. Descended from wolves, these dogs can pull twice their own weight. In 1647, the French settlers of Ville Marie (now Montreal) feared an attack by the Iroquois, whose land they had taken for their settlement. A dog named **Pilote** used to patrol the village every day, her puppies trailing behind. One day some pups wandered into the surrounding forest, where Pilote sniffed out the Iroquois warriors hiding in the trees and barked to warn the villagers.



In the First World War, medical service dogs delivered first aid supplies on the battlefield. During the Second World War, when planes flying from the U.S. to Russia over northern Canada crashed, trained huskies carrying survival gear and medical supplies parachuted down to help the survivors.

There were once 30 million bison on the Canadian Prairies, enough to circle the earth one and one-third times. For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples had hunted the bison, typically using nearly every part of it for food, clothing, tipis, tools and more. But when Europeans moved west, huge numbers of bison were killed just for their hides, which were made into leather. The government of Sir John A. Macdonald looked the other way as the bison were slaughtered. If Indigenous people lost their main food source, they would have no choice but to move to reserves in exchange for food from the government. That meant the land would be available to settlers who wanted to start farms.



Paul Kane

Bison meat was extremely important in the fur trade. Dried and eaten as jerky or pounded into a powder and mixed with fat and berries to make pemmican, it fuelled many a long canoe journey.





Women at a Steveston, B.C.,  
salmon cannery, 1958

For many First Nations in British Columbia, salmon, like the sockeye shown above, is more than just an important food. The fish is part of their legends, culture and art, too. For as long as memory tells, Indigenous people caught salmon swimming from the ocean upstream into freshwater rivers. There were often strict rules about who could harvest salmon, what to do with the first salmon caught, and about how the remains of salmon should be disposed of.



Between 1880 and 1950, about 200 factories for canning salmon popped up along the west coast of B.C. The canneries were a bit unusual because they employed women as well as men, and many workers who were First Nations or from Chinese or Japanese backgrounds.

Starting in the late 1800s, coal miners took caged canaries underground with them to act as warning signals. If a canary breathed a poisonous gas, its reaction gave the miners time to get out or at least put on a mask. Pigeons, like the one shown at right, were important wartime messengers. Soldiers would write notes on tiny pieces of paper and attach them to the leg of a pigeon that would carry the notes where they needed to go. In 1942, **Beachcomber** the pigeon flew all the way from England to France with a message about the upcoming Dieppe Raid, earning the Dickin Medal, the highest honour for an animal.

