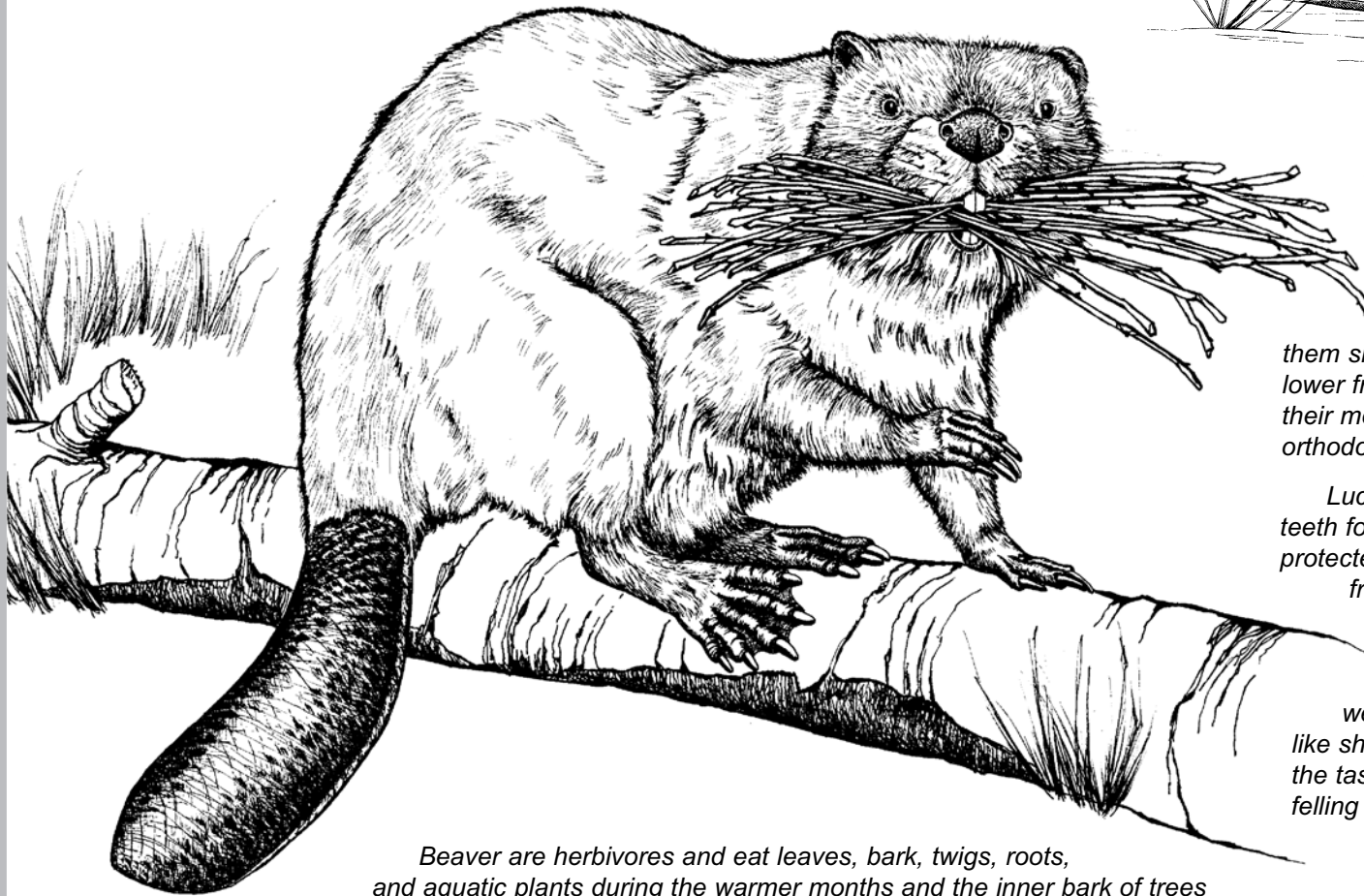


An Orthodontist's Nightmare



Beavers are the second largest rodents in the world. Like all rodents, beavers have front teeth—incisors—that never stop growing! Beavers must constantly gnaw, chew, and chop with their teeth to keep them short. If beavers stop chewing, their lower front teeth grow through the top of their mouth into their skull—truly an orthodontist's nightmare!

Luckily, beavers really rely on their teeth for eating and for constructing well-protected dams, dens, and lodges. The front surface of the incisors is made of very hard orange-colored enamel. The back side of the tooth is not as hard and it wears off first, resulting in a chisel-like shape. These teeth are perfect for the tasks of cutting through plants, and felling trees and stripping their bark.

Beaver are herbivores and eat leaves, bark, twigs, roots, and aquatic plants during the warmer months and the inner bark of trees during winter. They construct dams, dens, and lodges with gnawed branches leftover from their dinner. Beavers always cut down extra trees, especially as winter approaches. To make sure that they have food and materials to repair their homes when the water freezes over; they stockpile branches in an underwater food cache. Since their lips are actually behind their front teeth, beavers can cut and chew submerged wood without getting water in their mouths.

