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see how we live

River Animals



 Orpheus

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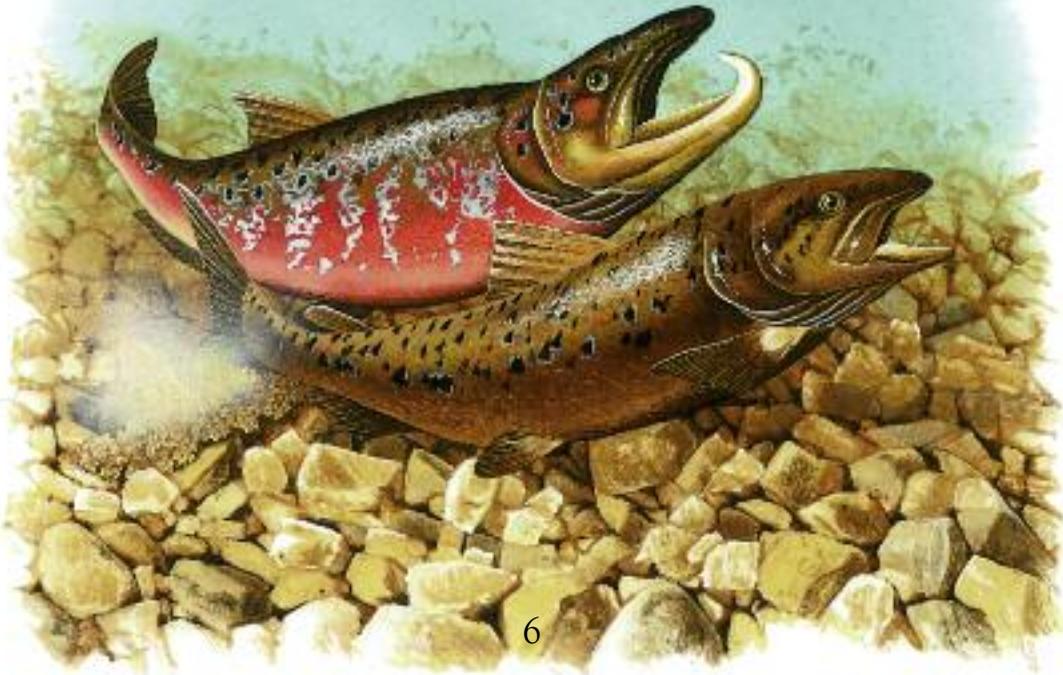


River animals

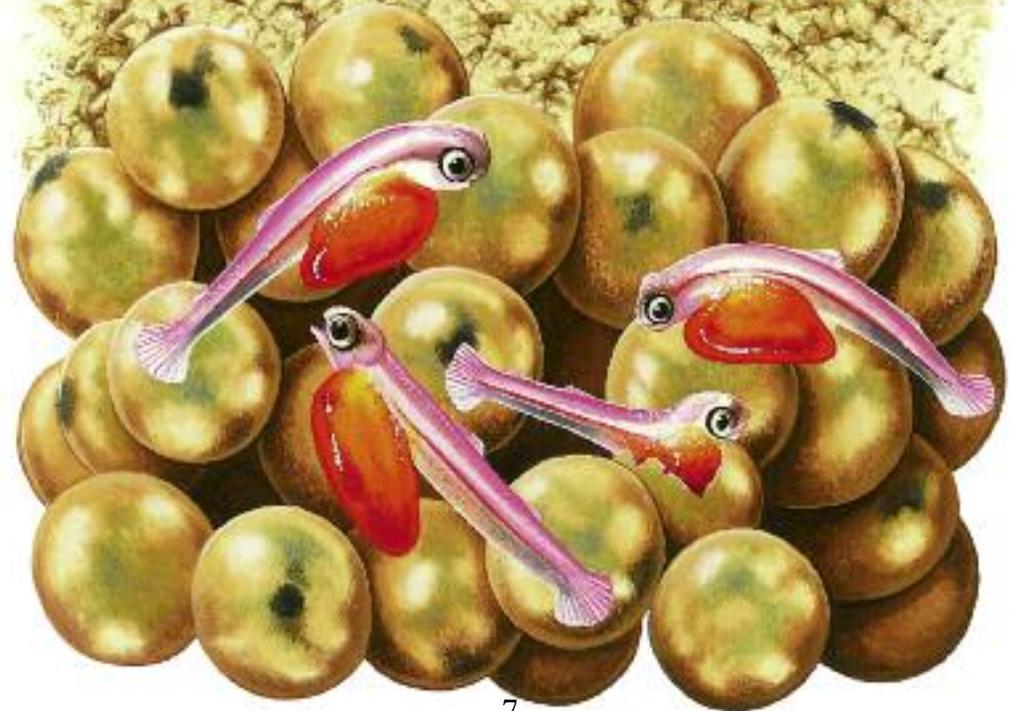
Rivers are a rich source of food for animals, so it's not surprising to find lots of us living in them. There are plenty of tasty plants and insects around, and of course some river creatures eat other ones. This book tells you about the lives of just a few of us: fish, birds, frogs, insects, mammals and reptiles.

Where do salmon lay their eggs?

My mother laid her eggs on a stream bed. She made a basin, called a redd, with her tail. After my father fertilized the eggs, she covered them over with gravel.



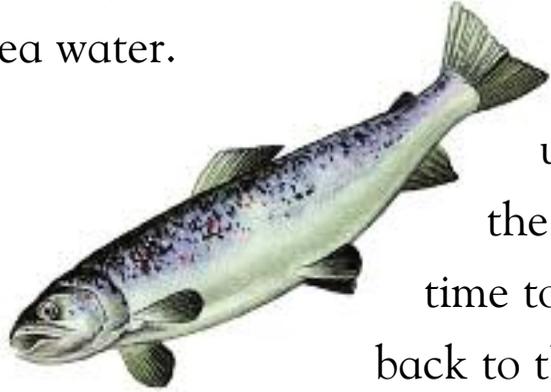
There are about 5000 pea-sized eggs. You can see our black eyes inside them. We hatch out a few months later. We are called alevins and still have our yolk sacs attached. This provides food for our first month.



Once I have grown large enough, I make my way downstream to the sea. My body slowly changes on the journey so I can live in sea water.



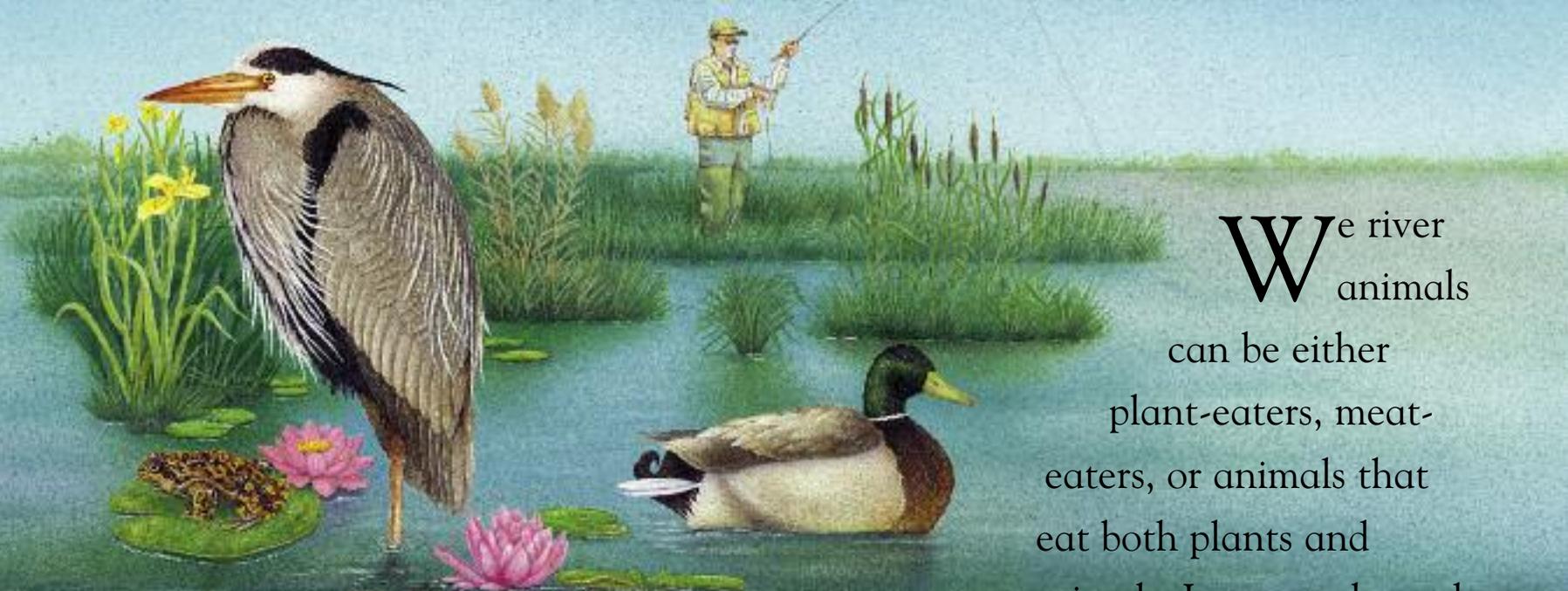
I might spend up to five years in the sea. When it is time to spawn, I swim back to the very same river where I was born.



I can recognize my home river using my sense of smell. Swimming upstream is difficult—we have to leap up waterfalls!



What do river animals feed on?



We river animals can be either plant-eaters, meat-eaters, or animals that eat both plants and animals. Insect grubs and worms feed on plants. Small meat-eaters like sticklebacks and diving beetles eat the grubs and worms. Larger meat-eaters hunt the small ones. Frogs eat plants, grubs and beetles, but are themselves prey for herons.





Why are flamingoes coloured pink?

I get my colour from the tiny pink shrimps that I eat. All I have to do is hold my beak upside down in the water. I use my tongue to pump water through a sieve inside my beak, leaving behind the shrimps I gobble up!

How does a tadpole become a frog?

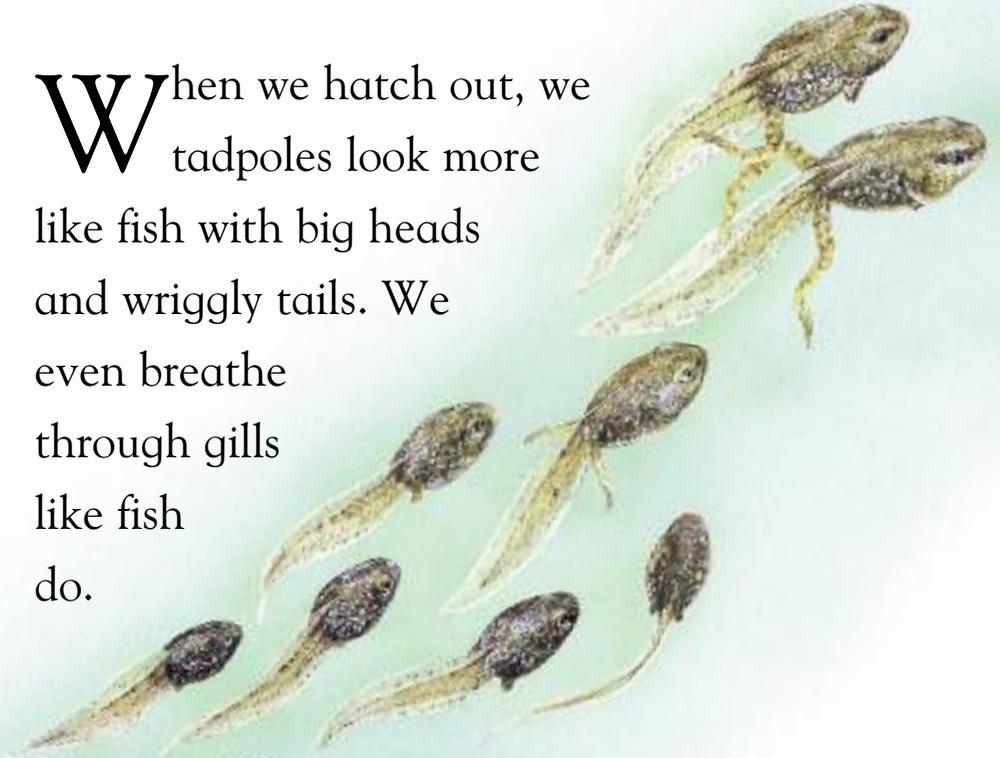


We always lay our eggs in water. Females lay thousands at a time. It is called frogspawn. Each egg is a little black dot surrounded by jelly.

We frogs are amphibians. This means we spend part of our time on land and part of it in water.



When we hatch out, we tadpoles look more like fish with big heads and wiggly tails. We even breathe through gills like fish do.



After about two months, our back legs start to grow. We also grow lungs and lose our gills. To breathe we have to come to the water's surface.

A month later
and my front
limbs start to grow.
My fishy tail starts
to shorten. I'm
definitely looking
more like a frog ...



Four months old,
and now I'm ready
for adult life on
land. Instead of
tiny plants, I feed
on water fleas and
other insects.



I'm four years old and a full-sized frog at
last. I catch insects, worms, slugs and even
small mammals. I still need to keep my skin
moist, so I never stray too far from the river.



How does a dragonfly capture its prey?

My mother laid her eggs in the water. When my brothers and sisters and I first hatch out, we are called nymphs. We live in the water for about two years. We prey on other insects, tadpoles and small fish.

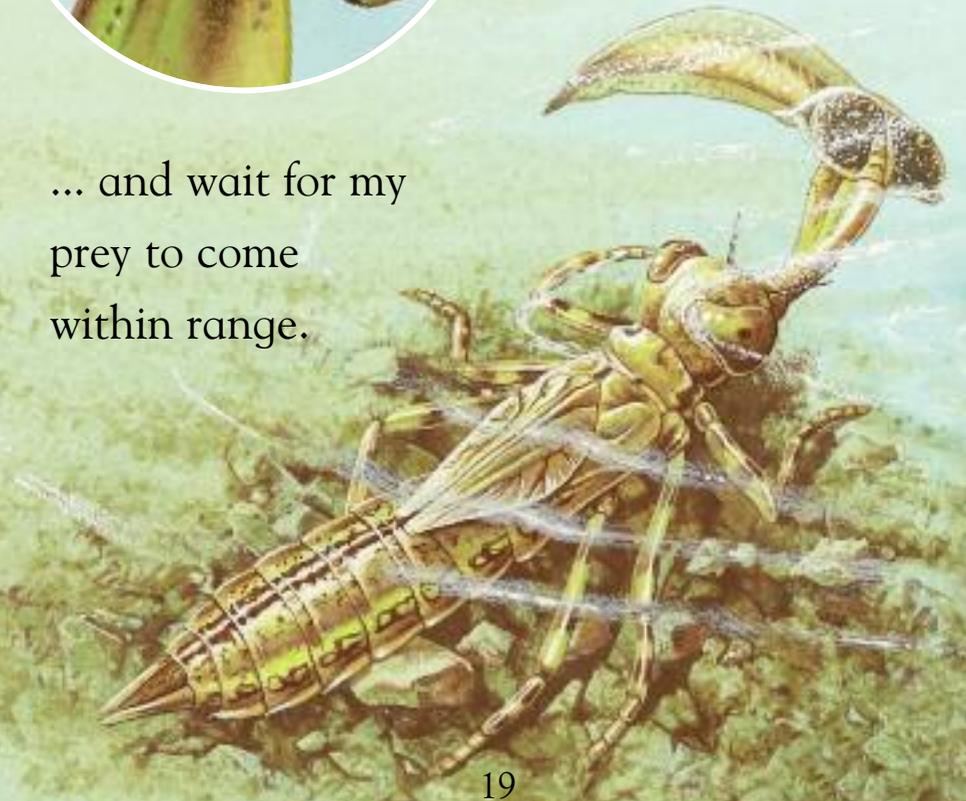


I cover my face with my clawed mask. When prey swims by, I grab it with my claws and pull it into my mouth.



All I have to do is sit still on the stream bed ...

... and wait for my prey to come within range.



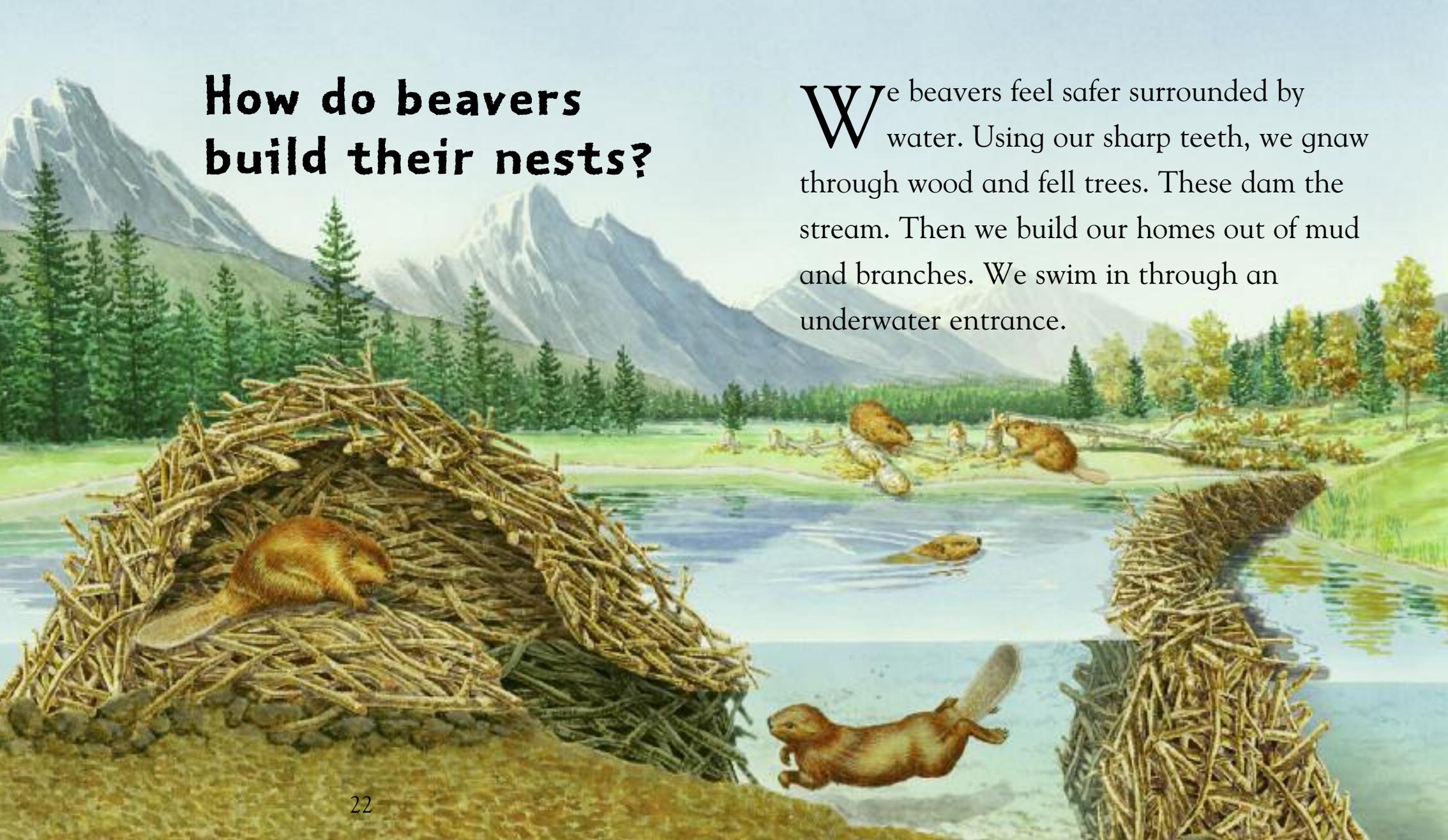
I am now ready to become an adult dragonfly. First I climb out of the water and fix myself to the stem of a plant. The skin along my back splits open and out I come. My new wings are still crumpled but they will flatten out soon enough. Then I fly away to eat before I return to the river to find a mate.

Now I'm grown up I don't need a clawed mask to catch prey. I simply grab flying insects with my legs.



How do beavers build their nests?

We beavers feel safer surrounded by water. Using our sharp teeth, we gnaw through wood and fell trees. These dam the stream. Then we build our homes out of mud and branches. We swim in through an underwater entrance.





Who lives in the rivers of the rainforest?

The Amazon rainforest has many streams and rivers. The warm waters are home to fish, guinea-pig-like capybaras, otters, turtles, crocodiles—even dolphins like me.

I'm a boto, a very strange-looking dolphin. My long, slender beak has about 100 pointed teeth. I can hardly see a thing, so I get about by making high-pitched squeaks and listening out for their echoes. Just as rare as me is the giant otter. It hunts larger fish than I do. Its webbed paws help it swim fast.



Amazon fish can be pretty big. The Apirarucu, for example, grows up to four metres long. It sometimes leaps right out of the water to grab an insect or even a bird.

Those silvery fish on the left are not to be messed with! Piranhas normally feed on small fish, but if a wild pig falls into the water, they will reduce it to a skeleton in minutes ...



You'll find frogs and toads,
lizards and snakes, and turtles and
crocs in a rainforest river. That's a Suriname
toad carrying its eggs on its back. Wallowing
on the bank is a huge anaconda snake. It coils
its nine-metre-long body around its victim.

Turtles and fish beware! Here is a hungry
caiman. It lurks in the shallows with just
its eyes and nostrils showing above water.

