



Scottish Beaver Trial: Project Update No. 3 28th August 2009

This is the third update on activity associated with the Scottish Beaver Trial and covers the period between 22nd July and 28th August 2009. A more detailed report on the first stages of the Scottish Beaver Trial will be available later this year.

Background

The Scottish Beaver Trial is a partnership project between the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS), the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) and host Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) to undertake a time-limited, five year long trial reintroduction of the European beavers (*Castor fiber*) to Knapdale, Mid-Argyll.

The licence for the trial was granted by the Scottish Government in May 2008. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) coordinates the independent scientific monitoring of the trial, reporting to the Scottish Government on whether the conditions of the licence are being fully addressed on the ground.

How are the beavers doing?

The Loch Coille Bharr beaver family are continuing to entertain visitors on an evening as they emerge from their burrows and make their way off to their nearby feeding areas. Most of the family have been busy building the first actual beaver dam within the trial area, which was discovered on a drainage ditch between the main loch and the smaller neighbouring Dubh Loch on the 27th July. The animals are favouring the rich feeding that exists in the Dubh Loch and therefore had built a small dam to impound water and allow them to swim between the two sites. Local SNH staff requested that the dam be altered to prevent the raised water levels having a potentially negative impact upon the Dubh Loch aquatic vegetation, which is a feature of the Special Area of Conservation. A 'beaver deceiver' pipe was therefore installed at the base of the dam to allow water to pass through it whilst hopefully retaining the dam as a feature that the trial can monitor longer term. The situation is currently being closely monitored by the Field Officer, Jenny Holden and local SNH and FCS staff. One of the juvenile females from this group who separated from the rest of the family soon after release was reported to have been seen in a nearby sea loch in early August and staff and volunteers continue to track her whereabouts.

The family of three in Loch Linne/Fidhle continue to exhibit normal beaver behaviour, and along with feeding and burrow construction they appear to have been starting some small scale damming activity near the outflow to the main loch, which is being monitored by Jenny and local SNH staff.

Following the sudden dispersal of the Creag Mhor Loch family of beavers soon after release, a great deal of effort has been put into relocating the adult pair and young female kit. Whilst the search for the two females continues, the adult male was located inland of a fish farm in Loch Craignish, approximately 10 km north of the trial area. On the 12th August a team of field staff successfully recaptured the animal and returned him to the original release loch, where to date he appears to have stayed and has been very busy felling and feeding on small broadleaved trees along the loch's edge.

For more information on what the beavers have been up to please see the Field Officer's weekly blog at <http://blog.scottishbeavers.org.uk/>

Research & Monitoring & Tracking

- The post release monitoring of the project, led by SNH continues on track, with the publication of the first baseline survey reports expected in the next few months. See www.snh.org.uk/scottishbeavertrial for further details. Further information on this matter will follow in time.
- Research proposals associated with the trial continue to be refined by the partners and will be discussed by the SNH led Research & Monitoring Coordination Group in the coming months. Further information on this matter will follow in time.
- The coming autumn and winter months will see the start of the first catch up of the released beavers. As part of the scientific monitoring process the animals will be individually caught once a year and their physical condition and health checked. Any missing radio transmitters will be replaced as required and some key animals (notably juveniles approaching dispersal age) will have satellite transmitters attached to the fur on their backs to allow us to remotely track their movements.

Staff & Volunteers

- Following the success of the first three Beaver Training Days held back in May 2009, Jenny will be organising further training days over the coming year. Please see the SBT website for further details.

Liaison & Communication

- The third local Stakeholder Forum meeting took place on 21st August 2009 at Achnamara Village Hall. Chaired by local councillor Donnie MacMillan, the forum meetings allow the opportunity for local residents, landowners and stakeholding organisations to learn about progress with the trial from the trial partners, and also to raise and discuss any issues or concerns they may have with the trial partners and government agencies involved. There was much discussion at this meeting about missing beavers and the source pool of beavers used in the trial. The minutes of the meetings will shortly appear on the SBT website and we plan to place further, relevant information concerning the trial on the website to ensure there is a constantly accessible and updated supply of public information.
- The trial continues to generate media interest and proposals are currently being considered for the BBC's 'Autumn Watch' and 'One Show' programmes to film at the trial site in the near future.
- SBT staff also have a busy 'walks and talks' events schedule, not least giving presentations at next months' 5th International Beaver Symposium at Vilnius University, Lithuania.

Potential future release proposal

- The Scottish Government licence permits the trial partners to release up to four families of European beavers into Knapdale as part of the trial reintroduction. In order to establish a small, but viable population of animals within the trial area and therefore fulfil the objectives of the trial and licence, the SBT partners have proposed that a fourth pair of Norwegian beavers be released into a new release site within the trial area in spring 2010. Should agreement come from the Scottish Government on this matter then discussions will shortly begin with the relevant local agencies.

Interpretation & Education

- The Education and Interpretation Working Group of the trial met at Edinburgh Zoo on the 19th August and along with further developing the Education Plan for the Scottish Beaver Trial they have begun organising educational outreach events focusing around the trial. These include a potential visit by RZSS's 'Wildbus' to local schools in the Mid Argyll area and the invitation of local high schools pupils to a 'Global Classroom' event at Edinburgh Zoo in November. Additionally links are being formed with schools from the Telemark area of Norway, close to the donor sites where our beavers were captured.

If you have any questions about the Scottish Beaver Trial then please contact:

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