



Scottish Beaver Trial: Project Update No. 4 5 October 2009

This is the fourth update on the Scottish Beaver Trial (SBT) and covers activity between 28 August and 5 October 2009. A more detailed report on the first stages of the SBT will be available later this year.

Background

SBT 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 trial reintroduction of 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 past few weeks have seen a noticeable increase in beaver activity as the animals busy themselves in preparation for the coming winter months. Both the Loch Coille Bharr and Loch Linne families have been dam building and at all three release sites there has been a noticeable increase in tree "harvesting" by the animals in certain areas close to the water's edge. Regardless of how cold the Argyll winter turns out to be, it will be much milder than the winters that these animals are used to back home in Telemark, Norway, where winter produces many months of "ice over". Time will tell as to how our beavers will adapt to the less severe winters on the west coast of Scotland.
- The Loch Coille Bharr beaver family appear to have moved from the main loch to the smaller neighbouring Dubh Loch and the monthly night tracking will hopefully give us a clearer picture of their activities in this area. The beavers are continuing to extend a small dam on a drainage ditch between the main loch and the Dubh Loch in late July. The dam has impounded a sizable area of water which effectively extends the Dubh Loch right to the edge of Loch Coille Bharr. This has meant that the path in this area is now flooded and impassable on foot. The trial partners are working with the landowners FCS and SNH to try and find a way to reopen the path, whilst retaining the dam and the wildlife-rich beaver pond it has produced. This will allow us to assess the longer term effects of beaver dams in the area.
- The family of three in Loch Linne/Fidhle have been very busy harvesting small to medium-sized broadleaved trees along sections of the loch edges and have produced some very clear foraging trails. Many of the trees felled earlier in the summer are showing signs of coppiced regrowth. These beavers have also built two smaller dams on the outflow from the main loch in order to access a rich area of feeding. The lower dam which was located near a road culvert was removed by SBT field staff to prevent any build up of debris affecting the operation of this culvert.
- The adult male beaver from the family released at Creag Mhor Loch has remained since his dispersal and subsequent recapture in August. Like the other animals he has been busy foraging and will hopefully be accumulating fat reserves to see him through the winter. Approximately three weeks ago reports reached us from the local farming community of suspected beaver activity on the River Add, north of the trial area. A subsequent site visit by Jenny Holden, the SBT Field Officer confirmed that there was very recent

beaver feeding activity and this appears to be the result of one or both of the missing adult female and female kit from the Creag Mhor family. The site is currently under observation by field staff and volunteers and efforts will begin soon to trap and relocate this animal(s) back to the original release loch.

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

Research & Monitoring & Tracking

- For further information on the monitoring of the SBT please see SNH's website www.snh.org.uk/scottishbeavertrial.
- November will see the start of the first catch 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

- A couple of days ago Jenny badly injured her ankle whilst carrying out survey work near Loch Linne. She is now in plaster and will be out of action for at least three to four weeks and we wish her a speedy recovery.
- Cover in Jenny's absence will be carried out by myself and Roisin Campbell Palmer (RZSS Beaver Team Project Leader), with the assistance of local volunteers. Our contact details are as follows:
Simon Jones (Scottish Beaver Trial Project Manager, 07920 468556, sjones@swt.org.uk)
Roisin Campbell Palmer (07775 621347, rcampbellpalmer@rzss.org.uk)

Liaison & Communication

- Up-to-date information on the trial can be found at the SBT website and Jenny's blog. Recent reports and updates can be viewed in Beaver Facts > Publications and News > Project Updates on our website www.scottishbeavers.org.uk
- The beaver trial appeared on the BBC's Autumnwatch show last week (Friday 2 October).
- Representatives from SBT, FCS and SNH attended the recent *5th International Beaver Symposium* held at Vilnius University, Lithuania. These symposia take place every three years and bring together beaver experts and management practitioners from all over the world in order to discuss and debate recent beaver research, management and reintroduction projects. There were two presentations given to the 100+ strong audience by SNH and SBT staff on the Scottish trial and experience.

Future release proposal

- Plans continue for the release of a fourth pair of beavers to a new location within the Knapdale trial area next spring. 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 and further details of this planned release will be made available in the coming months.

Interpretation & Education

- Today the RZSS Wildbus (picture attached) has been at Lochgilphead High School delivering an outreach learning programme to pupils from the local area, including topics associated with the beaver trial. Other education initiatives are currently being developed at a local, national and international level associated with the trial and more details of these will emerge in time.

If you have any questions about the Scottish Beaver Trial then please contact
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ROYAL ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF SCOTLAND 'WILDBUS'

