



BRINGING BACK BEAVERS TO SCOTLAND

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**Scottish Beaver Trial: Project Update No. 19  
13th May 2013**

This is the 19<sup>th</sup> update on the Scottish Beaver Trial (SBT) and covers activity between 2<sup>nd</sup> February and 13th May 2013.

**Project Background**

The 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 Eurasian beavers (*Castor fiber*) to Knapdale, Mid-Argyll.

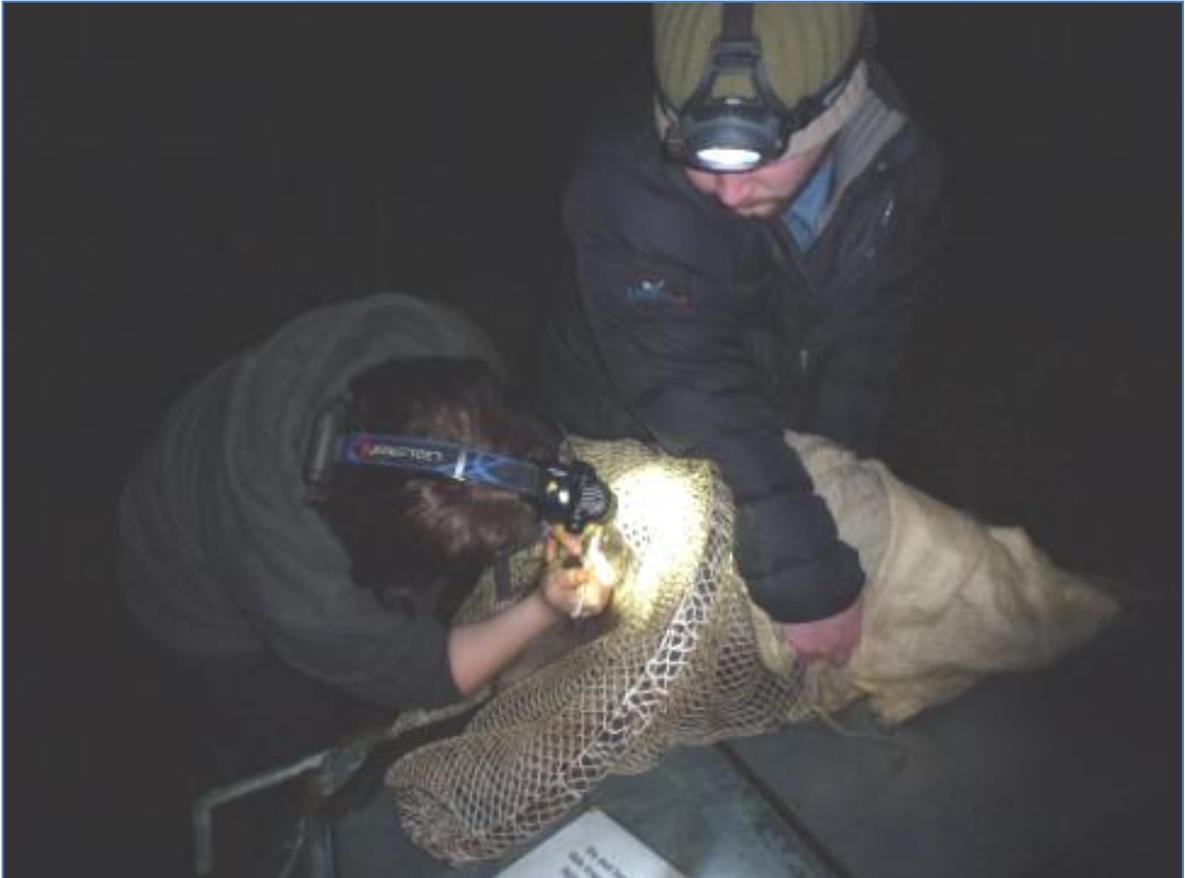
The licence for the Trial was granted by the Scottish Government in May 2008, with the first beavers being released in May 2009. The Trial will run until 2014. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) co-ordinates the independent scientific monitoring of the trial, reporting progress to the Scottish Government and monitoring how the conditions of the licence are being addressed on the ground.

**What's been happening in Knapdale?**

In accordance with our main national obsession, I will as always start this report with my quarterly weather report. You may recall that in the last project update I explained how the late autumn and winter period had been dominated by milder, wetter conditions through on Argyll's west coast. How we longed for the spring to arrive, and how long it seemed to take to finally begin. The mild, damp weather of late winter turned into cold, windy and dry weather during the early spring, so dry, in fact, that the local newspaper in Lochgilphead ran the headline: 'Argyll Farmers pray for rain', which is a phrase that I have never heard after working in Argyll for 12 years. Many of these farmers have been forced to lamb large parts of their sheep flocks inside sheds and the delayed appearance of spring grass has meant that livestock along with wild grazing animals, most notably deer, are in poorer condition than usual for this time of year.

The Knapdale beavers are perhaps better equipped than some other herbivores to deal with prolonged winter conditions, as they specialise on feeding on large volumes of tree and shrub bark, while other species, such as deer, turn only to this food source as a last resort. However, their autumn food caches are running low and body fat reserves will be dwindling. It is during this time of year that the SBT Field Team have noticed since the trial began an unusual phenomenon, when the beavers take very small amounts of coniferous tree species, notably Sitka spruce, which is a very common and widespread plantation tree in Knapdale. The occasional spruce branch will be found at a waterside feeding station, alongside piles of willow, rowan and birch branches stripped of their bark by the impressively dextrous beavers. We have pondered whether this behaviour is a result of the need for some fresher, green vegetation at the end of a long winter or whether there is a plant compound in the spruce that some or all of the beavers seek out at this time of year? There is a research opportunity in that question we are sure.

The continuation of live trapping monitoring work by our Field Officer, Rob Needham and Field Operations Manager, Roisin Campbell Palmer, in the last few months has shown that despite the expected drop in weight towards the end of the winter, the Knapdale beavers are still in good health for this time of year. As spring finally arrives, the adult females in particular need to feed well ahead of hopefully giving birth towards the end of May and start of June. As always we will be closely monitoring each of the four beaver pairs in Knapdale in the coming weeks to assess whether the females are pregnant and whether they may have given birth this year. Now that we are entering our fourth breeding season in the Trial, it will be fascinating to see whether some of the ageing females are still able to breed and produce litters and also whether the younger adult females have yet reached their peak reproductive years.



**SBT Field Team removing tracking loggers from trapped beaver, Dec 2012 © Scottish Beaver Trial**

Spring has finally arrived and the following pictures show some of the amphibian wildlife found using the Dubh Loch beaver pond.



Toads in the Dubh Loch, April 2013, © Charlotte Wagner



Fresh frogspawn amongst the peeled sticks of a beaver feeding station in Knapdale, April 2013,



Three-spined stickleback shoaling by the Dubh Loch beaver dam. © Rob Needham



A spring day in Knapdale © SBT

## Monitoring the beavers and their effects

A new report covering the woodland monitoring aspect of the Trial has now been published. It and all other reports published by SNH as part of the wider independent monitoring programme associated with the Trial can be seen at:

[www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/safeguarding-biodiversity/reintroducing-native-species/scottish-beaver-trial/the-monitoring-programme](http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/safeguarding-biodiversity/reintroducing-native-species/scottish-beaver-trial/the-monitoring-programme)

## Interpretation & Educational Activities

Between February and April there were 29 talks, guided walks and events to a combined audience of over 750 people across Scotland. Highlights have included the launch of the new 'Beavers at Home' lesson for primary school age children, which aims to show how beavers affect the areas in which they live and what impact they have on other wildlife. We also ran our successful Easter holiday guided walk programme for the second year running and we were pleased that 99 people came along to enjoy one of the five walks over the spring holiday period.



**'Beavers at Home' lesson at Glassary Primary School © SBT**

One local school pupil turned out to be a winner when she was picked as the top spot in our 'Name the Beaver' competition back in March.



Hannah Simpson and her teacher Maxine Rowe being award cuddly beaver toy and SBT Adoption Certificate by Oly Hemmings, SBT Education Ranger, March 2013 © SBT

## Liaison Work

Along with our ongoing educational programme, it has been a busy few months for beaver related meetings, events and site visits to the Knapdale trial area. On 28<sup>th</sup> February the SBT Partners joined forces with the Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance to run the **'Beaver Tourism Experience'** at the Cairnbaan Hotel near Knapdale. The event aimed to give those working in the accommodation, retail and activity sectors a better understanding of what the Trial is about, what beavers do and what information is available to pass onto their guests and customers who may wish to visit the Trial site in Knapdale.

The event attracted over 40 delegates who had travelled not only from the local area but as far afield as north-east Scotland and Wales. The audience were shown live online, the newly developed beaver **'Tourism Toolkit'** which can be found on the Trial website at [www.scottishbeavers.org.uk](http://www.scottishbeavers.org.uk) and which contains downloadable fact sheets, images, video clips, and posters that can be easily accessed for use by businesses and visitors. Next, the delegates heard from three local business people whose trade has been affected by the presence of the beavers and the visitors who come to try and see them. Darren Dobson, owner of the Cairnbaan Hotel, explained that the beavers had brought in an estimated 100 extra bed-nights and over £20,000 in extra turnover from 'beaver tourists' staying and dining at the hotel. After a networking lunch, the delegates then all headed out to the nearby Barnlusagan Information Centre where they experienced first-hand a Beaver guided walk, led by Scottish Beaver Trial staff.



**Darren Dobson, owner of Cairnbaan Hotel talking to 'Beaver Tourism Experience' delegates, February 2013 © Scottish Beaver Trial**

The latest meeting of the Local Stakeholder Forum took place on the 28<sup>th</sup> March at the head offices of Argyll and Bute Council. As well hearing about the latest news on the Trial, these meetings are an opportunity for local people to quiz staff from RZSS, SWT, FCS and SNH about all aspects concerning the project. As we enter the final year of the Trial, many discussions are focusing on what will happen to the Knapdale beavers after May 2014 and also the progress of the work looking at the larger, unlicensed population of beavers over in Tayside. Regarding the former question, the SBT Partners are planning for a 'holding phase' in the second half of 2014 and 2015, when the beavers will likely remain on site with a reduced monitoring programme being carried out until the Scottish Government makes a decision on the wider reintroduction of beavers at some point in 2015. Educational work carried out by Oly Hemmings, including the highly popular guided walks programme will continue until August 2014, after which time educational work associated with the Knapdale beavers will be reviewed. Minutes from all Local Stakeholder Forum meetings can be found at the SBT website under the 'About the Trial' drop-down-menu.

In early April, we also welcomed two MSPs to the Trial site on separate visits, as David Stewart MSP and Paul Wheelhouse, Minister for Environment and Climate Change travelled to Argyll to get a first-hand look at the work of the beavers and the project. After an extensive tour through some of Scotland's top wildlife destinations, Paul Wheelhouse rounded the day off by successfully spotting one of the beavers at the Lochan Buic release site in Knapdale.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> April, we were invited to help represent Argyll and The Isles at the Scottish Travel Trade Fair at the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre in Glasgow. Oly Hemmings, our Education Ranger and Bruce the Beaver highlighted Knapdale and the beautiful Heart of Argyll to over 1000 professional tourist trade providers.



**Bruce the Beaver celebrates 'winning' The Ryder Cup at The Scottish Trade and Travel Fair, April 2013 © Heart of Argyll**

### **Television and Media Activities**

Since my last update the SBT has appeared on BBC's 'The One Show' on the 14<sup>th</sup> December 2012, where they focused on Olympic gold medal winning canoeist, Tim Baillie's visit to Knapdale. The ITV 'Wild Britain' series presented by Ray Mears will also feature the Argyll forests and Knapdale beavers and this programme is set to air on ITV south of the border on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> February and we hope it will be aired on STV soon afterwards. Last week we welcomed another film crew, this time from the BBC 'Winter Up-Close' series. Despite the very wet and windy weather, they managed to get some great footage, so make sure you keep an eye out for this series which is due out in the near future.

All up-to-date information on the Trial can be found at the **SBT website** [www.scottishbeavers.org.uk](http://www.scottishbeavers.org.uk) and for regular news from the Field Team make sure you look up to the **Official SBT blog** <http://blog.scottishbeavers.org.uk> Remember that you can also now follow us on Facebook and Twitter. Recent reports and updates can be viewed on the SBT website in Beaver Facts > Publications and News > Project Updates.

If you have any questions about the Scottish Beaver Trial then please visit our website or contact me at:

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