

SCOTTISH BEAVER TRIAL



BRINGING BACK BEAVERS TO SCOTLAND

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Scottish Beaver Trial: Project Update No. 20 1st August 2013

This is the 20th update on the Scottish Beaver Trial (SBT) and covers activity between 14th May and 1st August 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?

The summer holiday season is now in full flow and with children off school and tourists venturing into the wild west coast with their heavily laden roof boxes and campervans, the Heart of Argyll area sees its busiest time of year. Much of July saw the UK running for sunscreen, shade and ice cream as we had weeks of hot, dry weather followed by oppressive humidity which was finally shattered by widespread thunderstorms at the end of the month. Waking up to day after day of glorious sunshine is not a common occurrence in this part of the world and I'm sure I even saw someone watering their garden with a hosepipe a couple of weeks back – a first for me on the west coast of Scotland! Midsummer is, as always, wonderful in the forests and lochs of Knapdale with the woodlands overflowing with insects, young birds and carpets of ferns while the lochs are jumping with trout and floating rafts of white water lilies.



Loch Linne water lilies, Knapdale Forest © Scottish Beaver Trial

As well as being attractive to us, water lilies are a fond favourite of the Knapdale beavers as well but for a different reason. Leaving the flowers they eat the biggest leaves, snipping them off the stalk, rolling them between their front paws and feeding them into their mouths through shredding machine-like incisor teeth. One aspect of the independent scientific monitoring programme of the Scottish Beaver Trial has been the study of the effect of the beavers on the water plants of the freshwater lochs. Researchers from the University of Stirling have found how the beavers target different plant species at different times, how this affects the abundance of the plants and how the debris of discarded plant stems forms large floating detritus rafts at some sites. You can read this report and all the other reports published to date on the SNH Scottish Beaver Trial web pages www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/safeguarding-biodiversity/reintroducing-native-species/scottish-beaver-trial/the-monitoring-programme.

BREAKING NEWS:

For most beaver pairs this time of year is dominated by the raising of new kits and we are delighted to announce that once again Knapdale has welcomed the splash of tiny tails as so far five new kits have been spotted by our eagle-eyed field team. Two kits appear to have been born to each of the Dubh Loch and Lochan Buic pairs, while the Loch Linne pair has produced a single kit, although previous experience has shown us that new kits can avoid detection as late as September, so it will be another few weeks before we can confirm final numbers. This good news has been particularly welcomed as it follows soon after confirmation that Elaine, the adult female from the pair on Lochan Beag (the 'wee loch') appears to have died or dispersed from the trial area as there have been no confirmed sightings of her in or around the site since late winter. Her mate Christian is still living at Lochan Beag and appears to be in good condition but the field team will keep a close eye on him over the coming months should he begin to show signs of looking like he may leave his territory to search for a new mate.



New beaver kit, Knapdale 2013 © Rob Needham, Scottish Beaver Trial



Beaver rear footprint, Knapdale © Scottish Beaver Trial

Interpretation & Educational Activities

Late spring and summer is the busiest time for our educational work, with many schools organising field trips and fun lessons before the end of term and hundreds of visitors to the Heart of Argyll booking onto our guided beaver walks. As well as running lessons for 17 schools since mid May our education team including SBT Education Ranger Oly Hemmings have attended 23 events engaging a whopping 8,500+ people at events such as the Glasgow and Inverness Science Festivals, Edinburgh Zoo's 'Conservation in Action' weekend and locally the Clipperton Project and Water Festivals which took place on and around the Crinan Canal.

Along with the new beaver kits, we have a new addition to the SBT team in the form of Bruce the Beaver MkII. Proving to be very popular with children (less so with dogs), Bruce will be a regular sighting at beaver related events across Scotland in the coming months. I would like to express our thanks to the Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance for their support in purchasing this new mascot.



Bruce the Beaver MkII © Gill Dowse, Scottish Beaver Trial

An exciting development for visitors to the trial site has been the construction of a viewing platform on the edge of the Dubh Loch beaver pond. The timber platform constructed from Scottish softwood will give excellent views across the beaver created flooded forest and bench seats along the back of the structure give you the chance to stop and rest and enjoy the abundant wildlife and landscape of 'beaver country'. The finishing touches are currently being made to the structure but landowners and SBT host partners Forestry Commission Scotland hope that it will be open to the public in the very near future.



Dubh Loch beaver pond viewing platform under construction in Knapdale © SBT

Liaison Work

An important element of the Trial is to give those with a specific interest in beaver and species reintroductions the opportunity to see firsthand the effects that the beavers are having and how the project has been designed and implemented. With this in mind the SBT team welcome many guests and special interest groups to the site and occasionally travel further afield to provide talks and presentations on this ground-breaking project. In June a visit from members of the People's Trust from Endangered Species was held on site and later that month Roisin Campbell Palmer (SBT Field Operations Manager) gave a presentation to the national 'Natives, Aliens and Reintroductions' conference held in Glasgow.

In July the SBT Partnership submitted a joint response to a recent consultation by the Scottish Government on reservoirs which posed questions as to the need to potentially include beaver dams in this legislation. You can see the consultation at www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/04/5330 and our response which can be found under the Beaver Facts>Publications drop down menu on our website at

http://www.scottishbeavers.org.uk/docs/003_143_responsetoconsultationonreservoirsactcommencementandregulations_july2013_1375284464.pdf

Media Activity

Since my last update the Trial has been mentioned in two national and 14 regional news articles, including an opinion piece for New Scientist on-line in May ("Beavers are born to bite wood, not people"). Most of the coverage however focused on the announcement that the SBT has been shortlisted for the Nature of Scotland Awards 2013. These awards which are only in their second year are designed to recognise and celebrate excellence, innovation and outstanding achievement in Scottish nature conservation. We are grateful and pleased to have been nominated in the Innovation Category and will find out at the final awards ceremony in October whether or not we have won this particular category. Wish us luck!



www.rspb.org.uk/thingstodo/natureofscotland/shortlist

Remember that up-to-date information on the Trial can be found at the **SBT website** www.scottishbeavers.org.uk and for regular news from the Field Team make sure you look 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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