



## Scottish Beaver Trial: Project Update No. 8 11 June 2010

This is the 8th update on the Scottish Beaver Trial (SBT) and covers activity between 7 March and 11 June 2010. It has been quite a few weeks since my last update to you all, as I have been away from the office a great deal, assisting with vital monitoring field work over the spring months.

### 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.

### What's been happening in Knapdale?

- After a long hard winter it was a relief for spring to arrive at last, and the forests and lochs have been alive to the sights and sounds of singing birds, croaking frogs and the noisy buzz of insects – even though the midges are already back with a vengeance! The Dubh loch site, home to a family of three beavers (and as a result of their industrious dam building activity now 1.5 times its former size), has been a real demonstration of the effect that beavers can have on the landscape. Although already a rich site for biodiversity, the increase in aquatic habitat here has resulted in an explosion of natural life, which has been stunning to observe.
- The beavers have been making the most of the new spring growth and as expected, are now foraging on more green aquatic vegetation after their winter diet of tree bark. Rowan, willow and to a lesser extent birch appear to be their favoured tree species and their coppicing effects are very noticeable around the water's edge on Loch Linne and the Dubh Loch. Many tree stumps that were felled last year and over the winter, have begun sprouting new shoots from their bases. It will be fascinating to see how this regeneration develops and how the local wildlife (particularly the deer population) might react to this.
- Some lucky visitors to Loch Linne several weeks ago, were rewarded with the sight of watching the first observed beaver-otter meeting in the wild. A pair of otters, oblivious to the presence of the onlookers swam rings round a purposeful lone beaver as it tried in vain to catch up with them! Just last week a colleague and I were lucky enough to watch an otter fishing in a pool created by a small beaver dam near to this site.
- On the early evening of 4 May, we successfully released the fourth pair of beavers into the Trial site, at a small loch known locally as the Lily Loch. The adult male, Tallak, and younger female, Trude, quickly settled into one of the artificial lodges we had prepared for them and were regularly recorded exploring their new home. Following any beaver release our field staff and local volunteers check the release site and surrounds daily to attempt to see the animals, assess their condition and verify their location with radio tracking. This programme lasts for about 10 days before monitoring visits are steadily reduced to every other day, every third day and eventually to the normal frequency of all Trial animals once a month. After a couple of weeks, this post release monitoring showed that Tallak had not been seen for several days, although his radio tag signal was still very strong. On 27 May we were very saddened and

disappointed to discover that Tallak had died and his body was found in one of the artificial lodges. This was a real blow to all the staff and volunteers involved in the project and we expect the full results from his post mortem in the next couple of days. Early indications from the vets however suggest that he lost body condition rapidly after release.

- In the same week, we lost one of our original beavers, Andreas Bjorn, who had been recaptured and returned to captivity at Edinburgh Zoo for welfare reasons, had also died of natural causes.
- These sad losses highlight the fact that animal mortality is an inevitable part of the Scottish Beaver Trial, and although expected, the loss of any Trial beaver is difficult, particularly in this early phase when we still have such a small, wild population. This was the reason why, several months ago SWT and RZSS wrote to the Scottish Government with a proposal (mentioned in my last update) to request permission to release if necessary, replacement beavers for the purposes of maintaining the small beaver population in the first two years of the Scottish Beaver Trial. Just today we have learnt from the Scottish Government that they have granted us permission to replace if necessary dead or dispersed adult beavers for the period leading up to May 2011. This good news will allow us to hopefully establish a minimum of four breeding pairs of beavers over the coming months which we believe would be a suitable core population for the purposes of this Trial.
- Search efforts continue uninterrupted for the three Trial beavers unaccounted for. To date staff and volunteers have walked 234 kilometres, covering 817 hectares and amassed 301 hours searching for these animals. Particularly thanks should go to local volunteer, Jim Malcolm of Kilmartin, who must have searched nearly every ditch within a 5km of the area! It is of course possible that some or all of these missing animals may by now be dead, but a recent sighting of a beaver in the Crinan Canal suggests that at least one animal is moving around the local area. If located, we would aim to trap any beaver as quickly as possible, attach new radio transmitters and return them to the Trial area to re-join the Trial population.

### **Staff & volunteers**

- We were very pleased to welcome a new member of staff to the Trial team in April. Christian Andre Robstad, has joined us from Norway as a part-time Field Officer. He brings some excellent skills to the project, having spent much of the past two years monitoring and trapping beavers whilst working on his MSc at Telemark University College. Christian has got stuck into the job straight away and is always happy to chat to locals and visitors alike when out in the field in Knapdale.
- We will shortly be recruiting an additional Field Assistant employed on a six-month contract to help with our monitoring and tracking work. I would hope a suitable candidate would be able to start in July or August and I will let you know further progress in my next update.

### **Liaison & communication**

- Up-to-date information on the Trial can be found at the SBT website and the official blog. Recent reports and updates can be viewed in Beaver Facts > Publications and News > Project Updates on our website [www.scottishbeavers.org.uk](http://www.scottishbeavers.org.uk)
- Media interest in the Scottish Beaver Trial continues and the project is a regular feature on Scottish news programmes and broadsheet newspapers. Since January, £190,000 worth of print coverage has reached 11,494,501 and 10.19 minutes of broadcast coverage has been aired.

### **Interpretation & education**

- Since my last update RZSS and SWT staff have carried out 25 talks, walks and events for over 900 children and adults in relation to the Scottish Beaver Trial. Activities have included lessons for primary and high school pupils, radio tracking workshops and guided walks to the Knapdale site.

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

Simon Jones  
**Scottish Beaver Trial Project Manager**

Scottish Wildlife Trust  
Units 5 - 7 Napier way  
Cumbernauld  
G68 0EH  
Tel: 01236 617113  
Fax: 01236 617111  
Mobile: 07920 468556  
Email: [sjones@swt.org.uk](mailto:sjones@swt.org.uk)  
[www.scottishbeavers.org.uk](http://www.scottishbeavers.org.uk)

**Trude emerging from release crate at Lily Loch on 4 May 2010**



Recent re-growth on beaver-felled Rowan tree



**New part-time Field Officer – Christian Andre Robstad**

