

SCOTTISH BEAVER TRIAL



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Scottish Beaver Trial: Project Update No. 12 1st April 2011

This is the 12th update on the Scottish Beaver Trial (SBT) and covers activity between 21st January and 1st April 2011.

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 European 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) coordinates 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?

I'm sure that like me all of you are relieved that the hard winter is now behind us and that the first signs of spring are finally here. The increasing day length and milder temperatures seem to make life easier for people and wildlife alike, particularly our hard working field staff and volunteers who are out and about, day and night in all weathers tracking the beavers and helping to monitor their effects on the Knapdale lochs and forests,

It is an important time of year for the beavers themselves for two main reasons. Firstly the end of the winter sees the main period of mating activity, where adult pairs hopefully manage to successfully mate and the females will start their 105 day pregnancy. It is vital that the females are in reasonable body condition during this time and therefore the arrival of fresh, green emerging vegetation at this time of year is vital to them, as they feed and begin to put on weight following the lean winter months. We will not know if any of the breeding age females in Knapdale have bred until mid – late summer this year when we will be carrying out weekly observations on the four lodges looking out for signs of any kits making their first hesitant journeys out from their home lodges.

The second important activity at this time in the beaver year is that early spring is often the time when juvenile beavers (around two years old) usually decide to disperse from their family territories and head off in search of their own mate and territory. Our two juvenile beavers; Mille from the Dubh Loch family and Biffa from the Loch Linne families are now closer to three years old, but as yet don't seem to have shown any marked dispersing behaviour, although they are spending less time in the company of their parents and younger siblings. We will be keeping a close eye on them however in the coming weeks to see if the urge to wander takes them. All of our 12 beavers have been seen by our Field Officers, Christian and Robert in the past few weeks and all seem to be doing fine.



Field Officers night tracking beavers in Knapdale (© Katrina Martin, SBT)



Dubh Loch beaver dam, March 2011 (©SBT)

Visiting Knapdale

Many people feel that spring is the best time of year to visit Knapdale, as flowers begin to emerge and frogs, toads, bats and migrant birds start appearing around the lochs and forests – although I'm in no hurry for the midges to return! With the new path open at the Dubh Loch we would really recommend a visit to the site, as the new route is a great improvement on the old path and takes people past many fascinating beaver signs, such as felled and regenerating trees, piles of sticks that make up feeding stations, beaver paths and canals and also the impressive beaver dam between the Dubh Loch and Loch Coille Bharr.

Later this year I hope to bring you exciting news of a beaver viewing facility in the the Dubh Loch area, so please keep reading SBT project updates for further developments.

Staff, volunteers & organisation

Roisin Campbell Palmer, our Field Operations Manager has been busy recruiting a series of volunteer and students to join the field team over the spring and summer months. People from a variety of backgrounds and places have already worked on the project, assisting with field surveys and helping out at public events and the help of these volunteers is vital, not only to ensure that all the fieldwork gets done, but also as an interactive and educational process for all concerned.

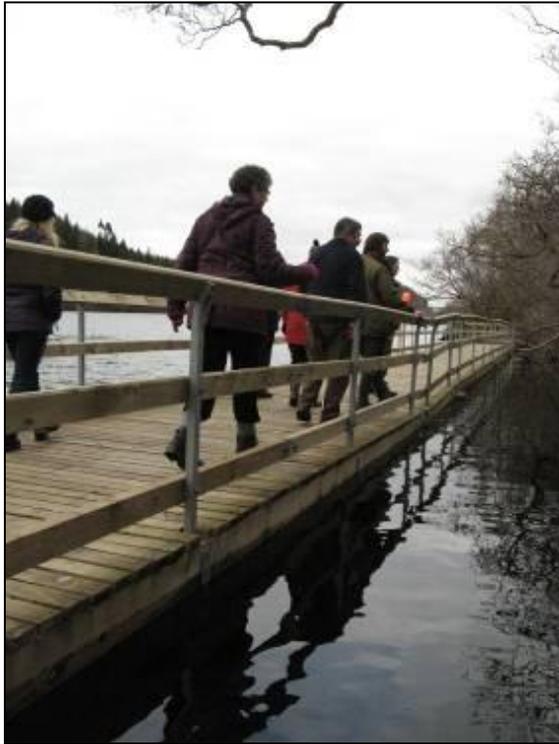


SBT Field Officers Christian Robstad and Robert Needham with beaver 'carvings', Knapdale (©SBT)

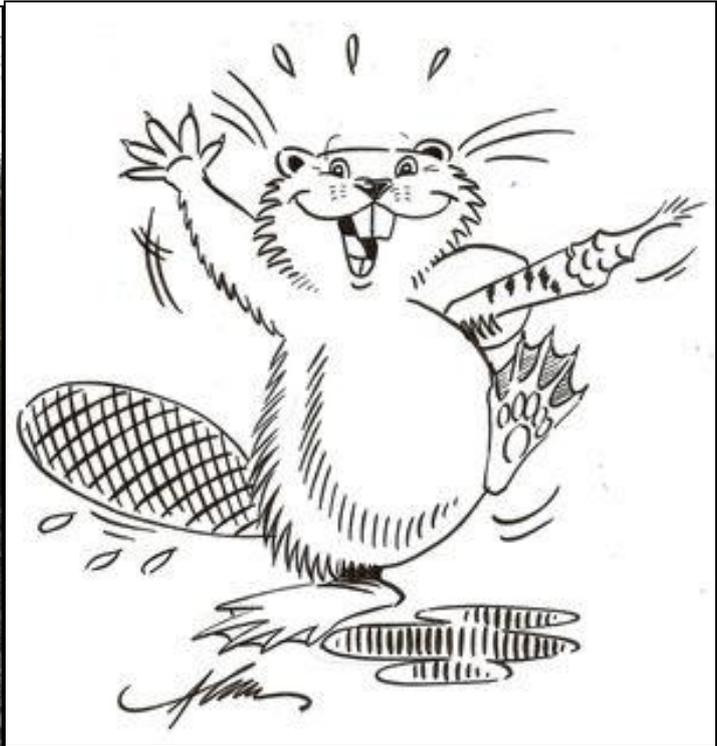
Interpretation & Education

Since my last update 445 people have attended talks, guided walks and events focused on the Scottish Beaver Trial. Groups and societies from Ardrishaig, Lanark, Comrie and Glasgow have received illustrated talks on the Trial.

On the 19th and 20th March SBT staff and volunteers participated in the European wide '**Beaver Spring**' event ("Printemps des Castors") in which beaver celebration activities take place across France, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and Scotland. At Knapdale the weekend saw a beaver training event for local volunteers held by Polly Phillpot and Amy Cox, our RZSS Education Officers, and this was followed later that night and the following morning by three guided walks from the Barnluasgan Information Centre down to the Dubh Loch site. The same weekend saw fun beaver activities at the Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow, with over 300 museum visitors taking part in our beaver quiz trail around the impressive halls of this very busy attraction.



Beaver Spring walk, Knapdale 19/3/11 (©SBT)



Beaver Spring logo – Printemps des Castors (©PDC)

NEWS; Watch this space for breaking news on the soon to be available '**Scottish Beaver Trial Education Pack**'

NEWS: The SBT Team will be running weekly guided walks to the Dubh Loch site from Barnluasgan Information Centre every Tuesday night (6 – 7pm) between June and September 2011.



Bruce the Beaver meeting visitors at Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow 19/3/11 (©SBT)



Liaison & communication

Media interest in the project continues to be constant and along with the steady requests for articles and stories on the beavers from far and wide we were delighted to welcome the BBC children's **'Newsround'** programme to the trial site on the 21st March and this feature, along with the forthcoming new Chris Packham BBC series **'Animals Guide to Britain'** (which features the Knapdale beavers and our Field Officers) will be shown on TV later this month.

Prior to his successful appearance in Glasgow, our mascot beaver, Bruce joined Dr. Mike Cantlay, Chair of VisitScotland in launching the **'Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance'** in Lochgilphead on the 11th March. The SBT Partners are delighted to support this new and dynamic marketing initiative for the Mid Argyll area, which aims to make this very special part of Scotland a 'must visit' region on local, national and international tourist itineraries. To find out more about HoATA please visit their new website at www.heartofargyll.com



Dr. Mike Cantlay and Bruce toasting the launch of HoATA (©HoATA)

Website & Blog

Up-to-date information on the Trial can as always 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

If you have any questions about the Scottish Beaver Trial then please visit our website www.scottishbeavers.org.uk 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
www.scottishbeavers.org.uk
