

SCOTTISH BEAVER TRIAL



BRINGING BACK BEAVERS TO SCOTLAND
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Scottish Beaver Trial: Project Update No. 14 24th October 2011

This is the 14th update on the Scottish Beaver Trial (SBT) and covers activity between 18th July and 23rd October 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 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) 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?

Since my last update in July it has been a very eventful few months in Knapdale, as we have welcomed new baby beavers, hundreds of members of the public and visiting Scottish Government Ministers.

Luckily we managed to avoid the sweltering temperatures that the rest of the UK had to suffer in the late summer and our field staff and volunteers were safe from sun burn under their fleeces and waterproof jackets! At least the rain keeps the midges at bay and this is why the beautiful native woodlands of the West coast are aptly named our 'Atlantic Rainforests'.

During July, August and September each year of the Trial, the SBT Field Team spend around four nights every week at each of the four beaver lochs in Knapdale, patiently recording the comings and goings of the resident beaver families in the hope that one night they will be rewarded by the first appearance of the small, fuzzy shapes of beavers kits excitedly playing near their home lodges. Last year two of our four families bred and had young and this year we saw the same families, (on the Dubh Loch and Loch Linne) again produce another kit each, who interestingly seemed to appear later this year than in 2010. The joy of seeing two new kits was however tinged by sadness as the Dubh Loch kit was found dead soon afterwards by Rob Needham our Field Officer whilst he was surveying in the area. Any recovered beaver bodies from the trial are sent for independent post mortem and the results for this young beaver suggested it had been killed by a sizable, predatory animal, possibly a dog. Whilst this is a real loss to our small beaver population, it is part and parcel of a trial reintroduction of wild animals, as is the range of other natural beaver behaviours we have seen in the first two years of the Trial, namely births, deaths, pairings, dispersal, damming and lodge building. It is important to remember that it is the study and analysis of these very behaviours by SBT staff, SNH and the independent monitoring partners that are providing valuable experience and scientific data of what it means to live with a beaver population again in this part of Scotland.

In my last report I told you about Biffa, our juvenile male beaver who left home in the late spring and is thought to have dispersed outwith the trial area in search of a mate. Although the Field Team have spent many days searching water bodies in and around the trial area there is to date no sign of him, so I would

ask local people and regular visitors to the area to please be watchful of any potential beaver sightings or field signs outwith the Trial area and if you do find something then please let myself or the Field Team (01546 603346) know as soon as possible. Should he set up home outwith the Trial area then we will quickly attempt to capture and return him back to the site.

One beaver family that have captured the public's imagination are the young adult pair of Trude and Christian who live in Loch Buic in the southern part of the Trial area. These stars of Springwatch have provided yet more interesting video footage, as remote infra red cameras placed near their lodges showed them busily engaged in lodge maintenance by dragging large branches onto their roof and waddling into view with armfuls of mud as they plaster the top surface of the lodge, readying it for the harsh winter weather to come. You can see this fascinating footage yourself by visiting the official Scottish Beaver Trial blog at <http://blog.scottishbeavers.org.uk>

Another natural beaver behaviour is damming. This behaviour is not carried out by all beaver families, but only where there is a need to or benefit in raising water levels in order to access good feeding areas or to protect a lodge entrance. Until recently two of our families had built or attempted to build dams, the most notable being the impressive dam at the Dubh Loch site, but Roisin Campbell Palmer our Field Operations Manager informed me recently that the young adult pair, Elaine and Eoghann from the Creag Mhor Loch area have started building a dam on a narrow outflow of the small loch which they have recently moved to and is possibly as a result of the new lodge that they have recently built at this site.

Independent Monitoring Programme

Scottish Natural Heritage have now released nine commissioned reports covering the interim findings to date of the various independent monitoring partners involved in the monitoring of the beavers and their effects. These reports cover woodland, fish and aquatic macrophyte (water plant) communities, along with river habitats and beaver/otter ecology findings. More reports are due to follow in time, although the findings of the studies into hydrology, Odonata (dragonflies and damselflies), beaver health, public health, water chemistry, and scheduled historic monuments will not be published until the end of the trial in 2014.

All of these reports can be viewed online or downloaded from the SNH website at www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/safeguarding-biodiversity/reintroducing-native-species/scottish-beaver-trial/the-monitoring-programme

Interpretation & Education Activities

Since my last update there have been 27 SBT related talks, guided walks and events to a total audience of 1160 people over the summer and early autumn period. Highlights have included the Crinan Canal Water Festival where 'Team Beaver' were narrowly pipped to fourth place in a very competitive Dragon boat racing event on the canal. As well as appearances at the Mid Argyll Show and Kilmartin Gala Day in August, the SBT team combined with local Forestry Commission Scotland staff to run free, weekly guided walks to the Dubh Loch site from June until September and this proved hugely popular with a total of 596 people attending the 18 guided walks. Rest assured that with this level of interest we will be running further public guided walks again next year as well as other family-orientated beaver activity days.

The main educational event over the past few months was the successful launch of the long awaited **Scottish Beaver Trial Education Pack**. Mike Russell, Minister for Education launched the pack at Lochgilphead Joint Campus on the 21st of September and it was fantastic to see how the large number of schoolchildren present got stuck into activities such as the beaver feely items and artificial lodge building.

Liaison & Communication Activities

The media highlight of the late summer was the announcement that the Scottish Beaver Trial had won the **Lonely Planet Award for 'Wildlife Comeback' in 2011**. This story combined with the Ministerial visits which occurred in August and September was covered by local and national newspapers.



On the 30th August the Trial also received a visit from Stewart Stevenson, MSP, Minister for Environment and Climate Change who toured two of the beaver release lochs and discussed in detail the progress of the Trial to date.



Stewart Stephenson MSP, with Allan Bantick (SWT, left) and Simon Jones (SBT, middle) at the Dubh Loch beaver dam
30/8/11 ©SBT

The Trial also featured on the popular CBBC TV programme **Live 'n' Deadly**, which was broadcast earlier this month.



Live 'n' Deadly filming at Loch Linne, July 2011 ©SBT

Website & Blog

All 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 up to the **Official SBT blog** <http://blog.scottishbeavers.org.uk>

Recent reports and updates can be viewed on the SBT websites in Beaver Facts > Publications and News > Project Updates.

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

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