



BRINGING BACK BEAVERS TO SCOTLAND

WWW.SCOTTISHBEAVERS.ORG.UK

Scottish Beaver Trial: Project Update No. 16
1st May 2012

This is the 16th update on the Scottish Beaver Trial (SBT) and covers activity between 30th January and 30th April 2012.

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?

As you read this the forests, lochs, burns and bogs of Knapdale are erupting with new life as spring takes hold on the west coast. The bluebells and wood anemones are carpeting the forest floor, willow warblers sing from dawn until dusk, newly arrived ospreys are quartering their fishing grounds and sleepy adders are emerging from hibernation into daylight which is now already stretching to 16 hours long. For our beavers we are moving into a time of plenty as the new plant growth in and around their lochs blooms. Water lilies, rushes, willowherbs and grasses amongst many other species form a large part of their spring and summer diet and the beavers, like other herbivores gorge themselves to build back up body condition after the lean winter months when they relied on their fat reserves and food stores. It is also this time of year when kits are born, spending their first few weeks inside the dark, protective chambers of their home lodge. I hope that like us you will have your fingers crossed for the arrival of more baby beavers in Knapdale this year, although we will have to wait until later in the summer to find out for sure.

As always our four families of beavers were busy building, digging, collecting and foraging over the late winter to early spring period. The SBT field team have recorded significant amounts of lodge building and tree felling activity at all four loch sites, with the Dubh Loch family having now increased the original water body size five-fold, as a result of their dam and canal building work. Many people are unaware that as well as creating ponds beavers often dig canals from the pond into surrounding areas to allow them to reach new feeding sites. These canals can be extensive and form networks of linear waterways which can reach up to 100 metres out from the main pond. In Knapdale we have seen how these canals are rapidly colonised by aquatic plants and invertebrates and they are wonderful illustrations of why the term 'ecosystem engineer' is so appropriate for the beaver.

Following the successes the field team have had using remote camera traps to accurately record beaver behaviour, locations and body condition we have, thanks to our host partner Forestry Commission Scotland, been loaned more camera traps and it is now possible to simultaneously place cameras at each of the beaver loch sites. You can see some of the fascinating footage that these cameras have captured by going to our website www.scottishbeavers.org.uk and blog <http://blog.scottishbeavers.org.uk/>



Beaver canals, Knapdale (©SBT)

The Tale of Trude

You may remember in my last update I told you about the intriguing story of the neighbouring beaver pairs at Loch Buic and Creag Mhor Loch. In the autumn of 2011 our field staff discovered that the males from these pairs had swapped places with one another. Although somewhat unexpected this behaviour was welcomed by us as it demonstrates mate selection which is a natural behaviour that may lead to more settled and perhaps more productive beaver families. However that was not the end of the story as it was confirmed in early February that Eoghann, the newly arrived male at Loch Buic, had not been recorded for over a month and despite radio tracking sweeps to locate his radio tag, a constant effort camera trap near the lodge and visual searches of nearby burns and lochs he seemed to have disappeared. The only beaver remaining at the loch was the lone female Trude, who had already endured the death of her first mate Tallak shortly after his release, the dispersal of her second mate Christian, and now the disappearance of her third mate Eoghann. Our concern was that Eoghann had dispersed out of the trial area away from Trude and their territory or worse that he may have died over the late winter. It was a pleasant surprise therefore to receive an email from a neighbour and local accommodation provider who informed us that two of her guests had seen and photographed two beavers together at Loch Buic. After further camera trapping and night watches by the field team it was confirmed that there were indeed two beavers back on the loch and although we are currently presuming the male to be Eoghann we will only be able to verify this when our annual live trapping programme begins in the summer and we catch and scan this male beaver to confirm his identity.



Grey heron caught on camera trap, Knapdale (©SBT)

Monitoring the beavers and their effects

Along with the natural heritage monitoring projects carried on the effects of the beavers in Knapdale, there are also other independent monitoring projects taking place which look at the potential impacts on public health, scheduled ancient monuments and socio-economics. The latter project which aims to capture the social and economic effects of the Knapdale beavers has just published its first report;

[Moran, D. & Hanley-Nickolls, R. \(2012\). The Scottish Beaver Trial: Socio-economic monitoring - First report 2011.](#) Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No.482.

If you run a local business in the Mid Argyll area then please contribute to the socio-economic monitoring of beaver impacts by filling out the short, confidential survey (see link below). It is part of the official Independent Monitoring Programme and will go directly to Professor Dominic Moran of the Scottish Agricultural College.

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YPHZRRW>

All reports published to date can be viewed online or downloaded from the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/safeguarding-biodiversity/reintroducing-native-species/scottish-beaver-trial/the-monitoring-programme

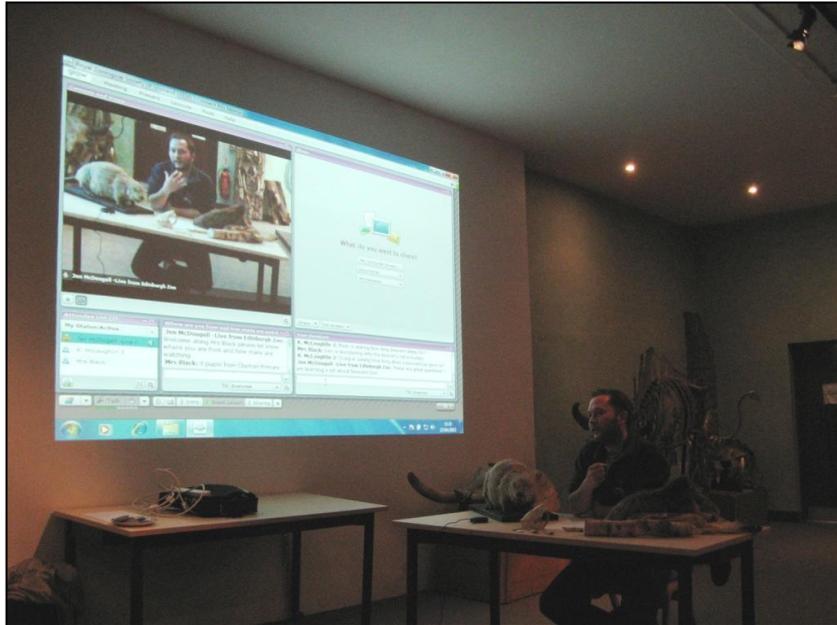
Research

SBT and RZSS staff have also been involved with furthering our understanding of this fascinating species through research work out with the trial project. Roisin Campbell Palmer, our Field Operations Manager is leading on the production and publication of animal husbandry guidelines for captive beavers and working with vets from Edinburgh Zoo, she is also contributing to research papers developing other veterinary procedures and protocols for wild beavers.

Interpretation & Education Activities

Since my last update there have been 22 SBT related talks, guided walks and events to a total audience of 722 people over the late winter and early spring period. As well as talks to 13 special interest groups both in Argyll and further afield, we led activities for 9 children's groups. A notable event was hosted in late April at

Edinburgh Zoo where several schools remotely accessed the web-based GLOW system in order to discuss aspects of beaver ecology and fieldwork with our Field Officer, Rob Needham.



Rob Needham being remotely interviewed by school children using GLOW network 27/4/12 (©RZSS)

New Scottish Beaver Trial Education Ranger

We were also delighted to welcome a new member to our staff in mid April. Olwen Hemmings has joined us as the Scottish Beaver Trial Education Ranger and will be leading on our educational activities and public events starting this spring. Oly (as she likes to be called) has lived in the Mid Argyll area for several years and has a background in outdoor education, but is well known locally for her time spent at the Forestry Commission and The Dalriada Project. You may bump into Oly if you visit the Trial area and she will no doubt want to have a chat with you about your views and experiences of the site.

She is also looking for volunteers to assist with all of the forthcoming spring and summer events taking place in Knapdale (see below), so please email her on ohemmings@swt.org.uk or call 07920 468564 if you feel you can help.



Oly Hemmings, SBT Education Ranger

Spring-Summer Guided Walks are here!

We are just about to start our programme of guided walks for the coming season. Guided walks led by Trial staff will happen every Tuesday night (6pm start at Barnluasgan car park) from 15th May until 28th August. Additionally this year we will also be providing Sunday guided walks from 17th June until 26th August (6pm at Barnluasgan). Booking is essential so please ring the Trial Office on 01546 603346 if you want to join us. See our website <http://www.scottishbeavers.org.uk/news/events/> for further details on events.

On the 15th and 16th May we have two very special events taking place in partnership with Kilmartin House Museum:

Prof. Bryony Coles Archaeologist Presents:

Tues 15th May 6pm Barnluasgan

Guided Tour of Dubh Loch

Call (01546) 603 346 to book

Wed 16th May 7pm Kilmartin House Museum

Talk and presentation on 'Beavers Past and Present'

Call (01546) 510 278 to book. www.kilmartin.org



Liaison & Communication Activities

Since my last update the Scottish Beaver Trial has featured on the BBC Radio 4 Today programme, the Welsh language TV series 'Antur y Gorllewin' and in both national and local press. On the 16th March the SBT Local Stakeholder Forum met at the Cairnbaan Hotel in Argyll. These meetings which are chaired independently by a local councillor are an opportunity for any local people or organisations to hear about progress with the Trial and discuss any issues, concerns or suggestions they might have with the project partners, SNH and other stakeholders. You can read the minutes of this meeting and all other previous meetings by going to the relevant page on our website <http://www.scottishbeavers.org.uk/who-is-involved/stakeholder-group-news/>

Scottish Beaver Trial merchandise

You can now buy your very own SBT mug, notebook, pencil or key ring! The products have been developed as gifts for those wishing to both take away a memento of the Knapdale beavers and support the project at the same time. You can buy all of these items at any SBT event this summer or at The Square Peg, Lochgilphead, The Cairnbaan Hotel, Edinburgh Zoo, Highland Wildlife Park or at any Scottish Wildlife Trust Visitor Centre. We hope that they will also soon be available on-line through the SBT website.



Official Scottish Beaver Trial mugs

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 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:

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