



## Scottish Beaver Trial

### Local Stakeholders Forum Meeting

**Cairnbaan Hotel Friday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2012, 10:00 – 12:30**

**Present & Apologies:** See end.

**Abbreviations:**

- ABC** – Argyll & Bute Council
- FCS** – Forestry Commission Scotland
- RZSS** – Royal Zoological Society of Scotland
- SBT** – Scottish Beaver Trial
- SG** – Scottish Government
- SNH** – Scottish Natural Heritage

#### **1. Welcome and Introductions.**

Councillor Donald Macmillan of ABC as Chair welcomed the participants to the Forum, who then introduced themselves.

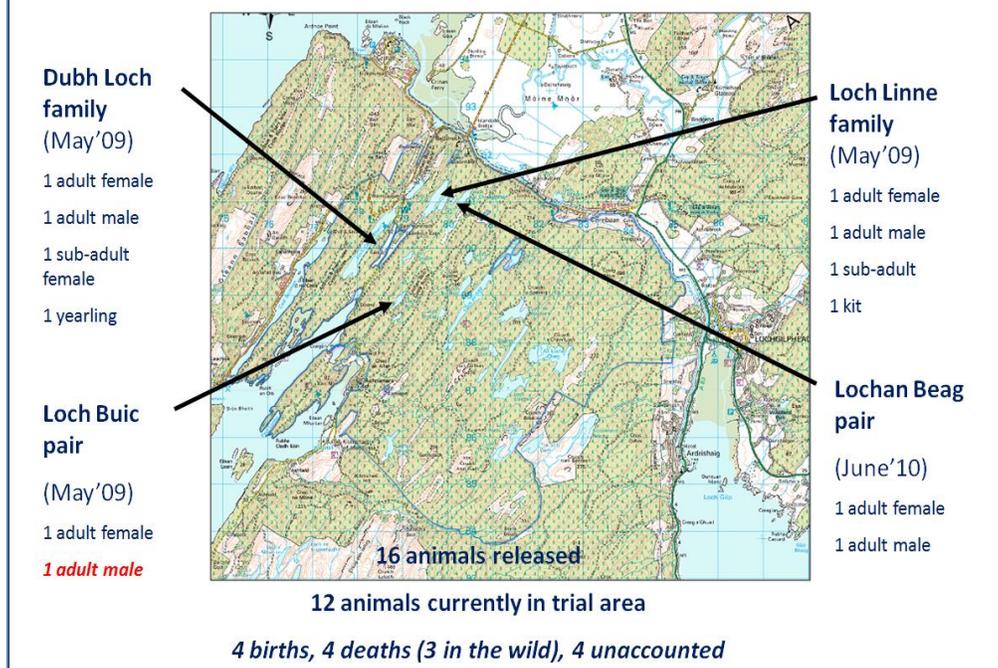
#### **2. Minutes and Action Points from Meeting of 21<sup>st</sup> September 2011.**

The Minutes were approved. There were no outstanding action points.

#### **3. Overview of Beaver Trial Actions and Progress to Date.**

- Rob Needham (SBT Field Officer) gave a presentation on current beaver distribution and activity since the last meeting.

## Jan 2012 beaver distribution



- A draft 'family tree' of the various beaver families was shown.
- **ACTION POINT 1:** SBT to circulate finalised SBT family tree to stakeholders.
- At the Dubh Loch site there had been a growth in the size of both the lodge and the dam, with an increase in the extent of the flooded area and beaver-dug canal system.
- At Loch Linne the lodge had also increased in size, but there was no damming behaviour at present. The beaver family here had felled new areas of trees, creating sizable glades close to the loch edges. More adult/kit interactions had been recorded by field staff over the past months.
- In the Creag Mhor area the beaver pair here had recently moved to the neighbouring Lochan Beag and built two new lodges and a small dam on the outflow. This had created new canals and wetted areas.
- At Loch Buic the beaver pair had been actively building their lodge and creating a large food cache for the winter months. Both animals had been trapped by the field staff and had full health checks and GPS/Radio tags attached.
- It was noted that the male from Loch Buic had not been observed since December 2011 (although his radio tag was still tracked in February 2012) and therefore a search effort was currently underway.
- *Postscript 26/4/12 – this beaver now appears to have returned to Loch Buic*
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- Using infra-red camera traps, observations had shown that all beavers were in good body condition.

- Following agreement with SNH and the relevant Independent Monitoring Partner, monthly night tracking has now been replaced by visual observations and the use of remote camera traps. Field sign surveys were now carried out four times a year.
- There had been no other effects on other land uses (forestry, farming, fishing, recreation) recorded since the last meeting.
- Some mink tracks had been detected using floating rafts recorded but no animals had been trapped.
- Water testing was as normal, with no notable findings.
- Trapping – 9/12 animals had been trapped by field staff, all health checks normal. Positive weight and body condition gains
- Small depth-temperature loggers are to be fitted onto some of beavers which will be trapped in the summer months.
- Observation sessions for new kits will start in July and extend into September.
- RZSS and associated partners had recently concluded research on Captive Management Guidelines for Beavers, a blood parasite study in wild Norwegian beavers (none were found), beaver Post Mortem protocols and a trial sterilisation study on a captive beaver population.

#### Questions Arising - responses:

- Jane Allan: Why were previous beaver dams on the Loch Linne outflow removed?  
Karen Taylor – this was because the Scottish Government licence contained a condition which meant that the Special Area of Conservation status of the loch required any dams that may have changed water levels in the loch to be removed. However this condition has now been reviewed and it is no longer always necessary to remove all beaver dams.

Robert Needham: After the removal of two beaver dams on the Loch Linne outflow the beavers have not attempted to re-build them to date.

- Mike Macintyre: Have the beavers which have moved done so of their own accord?  
RN: Yes, this was natural behaviour.

- Peter Slann: What year does the beaver family tree shown start?  
RN: In 2009 at the first releases.

There followed some discussion about how to make the family tree clearer.

- Marina Curran-Coulthart: How many beavers could Knapdale support?

Simon Jones – It has been estimated by experts from Norway that the trial site has sufficient habitat for approximately 25 territories/families.

- MCC: Have the beavers increased biodiversity so far?

KT: Too early to say at this stage, but the Independent Monitoring Programme is identifying that some changes in wildlife communities are taking place.

- Jamie Mellor: How large are the new felling areas at Loch Linne?

RN: some approximately 0.25 hectares in size.

- JM: How long will felled trees take to regenerate?

KT: James Hutton Institute is the Independent Monitoring Partner monitoring the beaver effects on the woodland and results to date show that regeneration has been reasonably rapid in approximately half of the trees within the study plots that have beaver affects.

There has been little evidence of the beavers effecting the tree regeneration so far. There followed a discussion concerning the potential estimation of total tree felling around the lochs and how this would change if there were more beavers in Knapdale.

- Charlie Self: Are aerial photographs being used to monitor changes in woodland cover?
- KT – Yes, both by SNH and FCS.

SJ then recapped the overview of the aims of the trial as outlined in the licence application to the Scottish Government.

SBT Education and Interpretation update:

- SBT Education Pack available on line + Gaelic version planned
- 2011: 97 educational events, 3824 people
- Summer guided walk programme will continue again in 2012
- SBT Education Ranger post starting Spring'12
- Student/work placements & volunteers involved in fieldwork and events
- Development of downloadable self guided tours/worksheets
- Development of fieldwork day for local upper secondary students

Media & PR review for 2011:

- 6 TV programmes featured SBT
- Print coverage – focused on kits, competitions and Tay beavers
- Radio coverage – focused on competitions and visitors
- Lonely Planet 'Wildlife Comeback Award 2011'
- Regular SBT website and Blog updates

Marketing update:

- 20,000 SBT leaflets reprinted and will be circulated via distribution contractor and Heart of Argyll Tourism Association (HoATA) network
- 2011 SBT competitions ran on 'Name the Beaver' kit and Spring watch-related.
- SBT trialling merchandise (e.g. branded mugs, notebooks, key rings)
- SBT membership in and support of HoATA
- Reviews of trips to Knapdale and SBT found on Trip Advisor website

SJ reviewed general performance of the SBT to date, as we are now halfway through the five year trial

SBT Achievements to date:

- Fieldwork & Research – developed and implemented well
- Meeting all SG licence conditions
- Education & Visitors – able to provide many opportunities for people to engage and learn about beavers and Knapdale, both locally and further afield
- Media interest

Lessons learned to date & remaining challenges:

- Dispersing beavers – loss of beavers from trial area and constraints of telemetry
- Population vulnerability due to small size
- Ongoing fundraising efforts

### Questions Arising - responses:

- Mike Macintyre: Could SBT set up as an attraction on Trip Advisor website?  
SJ – Probably yes, but the SBT partners feel that it is more appropriate for local businesses, people and visitors to promote the area and the project. More independent and perhaps results in greater funds into the local economy.
- Jane Allen: My own holiday cottages have not seen a visitor boom so far as result of the beavers. Should SBT place visitor numbers on their website?

SJ – Socio-economic impacts of the SBT (including visitor numbers) are being monitored by Independent Monitoring Partner (Scottish Agricultural College). Visitor numbers in SBT area being monitored using people counters. Anecdotal evidence of beaver visitor numbers from HoATA members.

**POST SCRIPT** – SNH have now published the first report on social economics – available from the SNH Scottish Beaver Trial webpages – see link below

- Fiona Campbell Byatt: Some local accommodation providers are not members of HoATA. Can the SBT website include links to others?

SJ: Happy to consider this proposal.

**ACTION POINT 2:** SJ to investigate inclusion of other accommodation agency websites onto SBT website.

**POST SCRIPT** – Links to several other accommodation agency websites have now been placed on the SBT website.

- Ian McKee: Would it be possible for accommodation providers to ask guests about their interest in the SBT at time of booking?

**ACTION POINT 3:** SJ to liaise with local accommodation providers regarding the potential collection of SBT visitor data from guests.

### 4 Update on Access and Recreation within Trial Area – Ian McKee, Forestry Commission

- Further upgrades to the Loch Coille Bharr path. Now much more robust.
- Need to make improvements to wet path sections through Barnluasgan field opposite the Barnluasgan car park.
- Oak Wood Trail above Loch Barnluasgan to have upgrade to stone steps.
- Proposed viewing platform at Dubh Loch in planning stage.
- FCS will be revisiting the site Visitor Management Plan in the near future, taking into account visitor views and experiences.
- New remote people counter sensors at Barnluasgan car park and visitor centre.

No questions arising.

### 5 Update on Beaver trial Monitoring Programme – Karen Taylor, Scottish Natural Heritage

- Reminder of SNH role – to lead and coordinate independent monitoring and report to SG
- An outline of how the SBT Independent Monitoring Programme works was given.

- All reports produced by the Independent Monitoring Partners were made available on the SNH website as soon as they were ready - [www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/safeguarding-biodiversity/reintroducing-native-species/scottish-beaver-trial](http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/safeguarding-biodiversity/reintroducing-native-species/scottish-beaver-trial) although findings are still interim at this stage.
- KT talked through some of the interim findings of the Aquatic Macrophyte (water plant) independent monitoring. Knapdale is important for its aquatic macrophytes and beavers eat these. The monitoring is trying to establish whether any changes in the water plant communities are a result of beaver affects but this requires time.

#### Questions Arising – responses:

- Jamie Mellor: Is there enough time in this trial to establish what the effects of the beavers are?  
KT: 5 years is a short period of time to try and clarify effects but monitoring must be done over a set time frame and we need to draw a line somewhere.  
Colin Galbraith: Some effects and behaviours of beavers are being learnt.
- Jim Malcolm: Can more than one family live in each loch?  
SJ: yes, if in a large loch where young pairs are able to create their own new territory separate from the resident pair. However the first beavers in a new area tend to grab as much territory as possible and therefore you need higher population levels and pressures to cause sub-divisions of large territories. This hasn't been seen in Knapdale to date.
- Jamie Mellor: Will the current browsing pressure on macrophytes and woodlands remain as we are seeing now?  
SJ: The beavers will continue to eat macrophytes and fell trees as long as they live in those waterbodies.
- Jamie Mellor: Can you say at the end of the trial what is the minimum density of trees that beavers need?  
SJ: Beavers can be found in many wetland habitats, some with low tree and shrub cover (e.g. drainage ditches in agricultural land in Bavaria), but what is being seen in Knapdale to date appears to be a good reflection of some of the effects of beavers on woodlands, i.e. coppiced patches of broad-leaved trees scattered around the shores of lochs. Nearly all felling activity is within 25 metres of water's edge.
- Jamie Mellor: We don't want beavers in our drainage ditches.
- Ian McKee: Important to understand if the beavers are taking a sustainable amount of native woodland around the waterbodies? This can be being modeled.
- Mike Macintyre: Knapdale does not have great amount of native broadleaf forest and perhaps there is not enough woodland for the beavers, they must find another resource?  
SJ: Knapdale appears to have sufficient woodland to support beavers and has some good habitat for them. There is not a great deal of aspen which they favour, but in other European countries they live in farmland with scattered woodlands (e.g. Norway) and even open moorland conditions (e.g. Denmark, Baltic States). There appears to be plenty of suitable habitat in Scotland.

KT: Beavers also evolved to take a vast array of plant species and they are not restricted to native broadleaf woodland.

- IMcK: The beavers stick within 25m of the water and therefore are not aware of the large areas of sitka spruce and oak woodland in Knapdale anyway.

SJ then suggested that as result of the discussion surrounding this topic that it may be appropriate for a site visit at the next meeting.

**ACTION POINT 4:** SJ to arrange site visit to Loch Linne for stakeholders ahead of next Stakeholder Forum.

- MM: The beaver impact could be modelled, as it is geographically based. Landowners could then determine the risk and take preventative measures if required? Important to show people the facts.

CG: Important to look at potential beaver effects over a larger area.

- Peter Slann: What are the depth-temperature loggers mentioned in RN's slide?

RN: They monitor the changes in environmental factors that occur when beavers dive underwater.

KT: Lots of water related monitoring – water depth loggers, rain gauges, stageboards at multiple sites around the trial area.

## 6 Open Q & A session

- Jamie Mellor: What will we learn from the Tayside beaver situation?

Andrew Taylor updated the forum on today's decision by the SG Environment and Climate Change Minister to tolerate the unlicensed beavers in the Tayside area until the end of the Knapdale trial and monitor them until 2015. The Knapdale trial may give different results from the Tay results. Several organisations including RZSS, SWT and NFUS are to be invited to join a Tay Beaver Management Group looking at these beavers. Opportunity, perhaps to look at beaver-salmon interactions? Not an ideal situation in terms of how these beavers got there.

- Jamie Mellor: What is the suitability of the Tayside population, i.e. genetic provenance?  
SJ: Uncertain at present. They appear to be Eurasian beavers (*Castor fiber*), but probably mostly from Bavarian stock which was artificially formed from both western and eastern race Eurasian beavers.

- Jamie Mellor: Can the Tayside population be contained?

AT: Scottish Government do not wish to see them spread from their current locations. They will be monitored by SNH.

- Jamie Mellor: Will you ensure that landowners do not release any more?

AT: Any unlicensed releases are illegal.

- Jane Allen: Will you release a new partner for Trude at Loch Buic?

SJ: Currently considering, but depends on what is in the best interests of the Trial process.

- Charlie Self: Could you move a young male that has not dispersed yet to join Trude?

RN: Could consider sub-adult (Barney) from Loch Linne. SBT and SNH are currently considering the options.

- CS: Could sub-adult female from Dubh Loch (Mille) and Barney be put together on a separate loch?

KT: SNH and SBT are looking into various options and possibilities and what management lessons we could learn from intervention, if required.

SJ: Learning from the management of beaver populations could be important outputs of the trial.

- Jamie Mellor: Do young male beavers disperse long distances to find mates?

SJ: Beavers disperse as far as they have to find another suitable beaver and habitat. This can be tens of kilometres, but in wild populations elsewhere in Europe up to 70% of young beavers can die whilst dispersing.

- Jane Allen: After another three years there is no way that Tay beavers could be controlled, as they cannot be caught. Therefore Knapdale trial is a waste of time and money.

AT: SBT is licensed by Scottish Government and will remain. It is being actively monitored and is meeting its licence conditions.

Colin Galbraith: the only scientific evidence we currently have is from SBT and although the Tay situation is a bad one it does not undermine SBT, if anything shows why we must have proper, independent scientific studies. Tayside could give information that Knapdale is unable to, i.e. about beaver – salmon interactions.

- James Livingston: What is the legal status of the beavers on Tayside?

AT: They are not protected, so landowners could act if they wished.

- There followed a discussion about the health status of the beavers in relation to the parasite *Echinococcus multilocularis* which has been recently found in a beaver of Bavarian origin.

AT: The parasite is not found in Norway and all SBT beavers had detailed health screening. Some risk in the Tay area, but this will decline over time as cannot be spread beaver to beaver. Risk is comparable to that of imported dogs.

- JL: When will SNH know how many beavers there are on Tayside?
- KT: There are plans for a Tay beaver survey to be carried out this summer. Estimates of number of beavers originally indicated 8-20 animals, but perhaps now many more. Report later this year.

**Post script:** Robin Malcolm was unable to make the meeting but wished to state his personal view that due to the poor success rate of finding and catching missing beavers then the SBT exit strategy could not be implemented.

SBT response: Experiences from the SBT to date show that skilled field staff can successfully live trap beavers resident in families or pairs within their territories. However the trial is also learning important lessons about the practical difficulties of tracking and catching single dispersing beavers which move from their home territories and out of the trial area. SBT are confident that should the Scottish Government request the exit strategy be implemented then given time this could be carried out.

## **7 AOCB**

There was no other business.

## **8 Date of next meeting**

September 2012 – date tbc. To include an opportunity for a site visit to the trial site before the meeting.

Before concluding the meeting the Chairman thanked all involved and informed those in attendance that due to the forthcoming council elections that he would be stepping down as Chairman. SJ and CG thanked the Chairman for all his efforts and stewardship of the Local Stakeholder Forum.

### **In Attendance**

Councillor Donnie Macmillan, Ward 3: Mid Argyll, Argyll and Bute Council (Chair)

Alan Kent, Argyll Advertiser  
Andrew Taylor, Scottish Government  
Charlie Self, AGWA  
Colin Galbraith, RZSS  
Darren Dobson, Cairnbaan Hotel  
Fiona Campbell Byatt, neighbour  
Ian McKee, Forestry Commission  
James Livingston, neighbour  
Jamie Mellor, NFUS  
Jane Allan, neighbour  
Jim Malcolm, SBT volunteer  
Karen Taylor, SNH  
Marina Curran-Colthart, LBAP Officer, Argyll & Bute Council  
Mike Macintyre, neighbour  
Robert Needham, SBT (minutes)  
Peter Slann, neighbour  
Simon Jones, SBT (minutes)

### **Apologies:**

Stan Phillips, SNH  
Robin Malcolm, neighbour and NFUS  
Drew Macfarlane Slack, Scottish Land and Estates  
Patrick Mackie, Environmental Health Department, Argyll & Bute Council  
Roisin Campbell Palmer, SBT