



Scottish Beaver Trial: Project Update No. 5 11th November 2009

This is the fifth update on the Scottish Beaver Trial (SBT) and covers activity between 5th October and 11th November 2009. A more detailed report on the first stages of the SBT will be available before the end of this year.

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.

How are the beavers doing?

Loch Coille Bharr

Night tracking and field sign survey work recently carried out by field staff and volunteers has now shown that the Loch Coille Bharr beaver family has moved from the main loch to the smaller neighbouring Dubh Loch. Whether this turns out to be a permanent move remains to be seen. The reason behind the continuing expansion of a beaver dam on a ditch between the two lochs has now become clear as the animals are attempting to create a stable area of open water, which allows them waterborne access to rich feeding areas and most importantly their lodge.

The first wild beaver lodge in Scotland for nearly 400 years was discovered in late October by field staff carrying out survey work. Tucked well away in a quiet corner of the site, the lodge is an impressive structure, measuring nearly two metres high by five metres long and is made up of compacted mud and beaver-cut sticks (see picture below). The lodge is likely to contain at least two chambers for the family to live in and is a sign that the animals have firmly established a territory at the site and are now calling it home.

The dam built to create the beaver pond is having varying effects at the site (see picture below). Initially there were worries that the flooding may have been affecting a feature of the Special Area of Conservation (S.A.C.) and therefore, under the terms of the Trial licence, the dam would have to be removed. However investigations by SNH revealed that the area was outwith the S.A.C. and this meant that the dam and pond created could stay. This is good news for the beavers and their new pond but Trial managers and the landowners, FCS, now have to find alternatives for re-opening or re-routing the Loch Coille Bharr footpath for walkers.

One of the juvenile females from this family, that split from the main group not long after release and settled in the Fairy Isles area of the Trial site, has not been recorded for some weeks now and therefore we are keen to find her location as soon as possible.

Loch Linne/Fidhle

The family of three at this site have, like their neighbours, been busy tree felling and dam building in preparation for the coming winter months. A dam under construction on the outflow from the main loch was removed by staff and volunteers last week. It was considered by SNH to be potentially affecting the water levels in the loch, and therefore potentially compromising a feature of the S.A.C. Two hardy, canoe-based night trackers had their efforts

rewarded last week as they came across evidence of the second wild beaver lodge in nearly 400 years! This time on Loch Linne. This is another sign that our second family have also settled into their new home.

Creag Mhor Loch

The single adult male beaver from this family remains busy in his winter preparations and five regular feeding areas have appeared around the loch edges. The location of his missing mate and/or daughter has now been discovered on the River Add, a few kilometres north east of the release site and live-catch traps are due to be put out at the site later this week in a first attempt to catch the itinerant animal(s). It is unclear whether there are one or two animals at this site at present, but we aim to recapture and relocate them back to the release site as soon as practically possible. All recapture operations both within and outwith the Trial area are being lead by Roisin Campbell Palmer, who is the Beaver Project Team Leader for RZSS and an experienced beaver trapper.

Research & Monitoring & Tracking

- As a result of Jenny's unfortunate injury we are running slightly behind with tracking and recording work, but with the extra help of additional staff and volunteers we are now catching up on the on-going survey programme. Following the targeted recapture work on the River Add, Roisin will soon be beginning the process of systematically catching up all beavers as part of the monitoring programme, in order to assess their physical condition and replace any lost or damaged radio transmitters.
- For further information on the independent monitoring of the Trial please see SNH's website at www.snh.org.uk/scottishbeavertrial.

Staff & Volunteers

- Jenny is making a speedy recovery and is now able to carry out most duties, with the exception of field work. Hopefully she will be back to full fitness by Christmas.

Liaison & Communication

- Up-to-date information on the trial can be found at the SBT website and Jenny's blog. Recent reports and updates can be viewed in Beaver Facts > Publications and News > Project Updates on our website www.scottishbeavers.org.uk
- The beaver trial is due to appear on the BBC's 'One Show' on 18th November.
- The discovery of the first beaver lodge of the Trial resulted in a press release which was covered by The Press & Journal, The Daily Record, The Daily Telegraph, The Scotsman, The Daily Express, The Metro, The Scottish Sun, The Herald on the 4th and 5th November 2009.
- It was hoped that we could run the next Local Stakeholder Forum in November, but with delays in fieldwork mostly resulting from Jenny's injury and the need to catch up itinerant animals, we will probably be unable to host another meeting until the New Year. I will be in contact with local stakeholders about this meeting soon.

Future release proposal

- Planning continues regarding the release of a fourth pair of beavers to a new location within the Knapdale trial area next spring. The Scottish Government licence permits the trial partners to release up to four families of European beavers into Knapdale as part of the trial reintroduction and we feel that this is an important step towards making the small beaver population here more robust and better able to deliver the aims of the five year trial. Further details of this planned release will be made available in the coming months.

Interpretation & Education

- On 6 November 2009, the RZSS Education Team ran a live online link-up between Edinburgh Zoo and a member of our beaver catching team in Norway. Another link-up is due to happen again next week as part of a 'Global Classroom' event with students at the zoo investigating beavers and the process of the Scottish Beaver Trial.

If you have any questions about the Scottish Beaver Trial then please contact:

Simon Jones, Scottish Beaver Trial Project Manager - sjones@swt.org.uk & 07920 468556

Knapdale beaver lodge – October 2009



Knapdale beaver dam – October 2009

