

SCOTTISH BEAVER TRIAL



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Scottish Beaver Trial: Project Update No. 13 18th July 2011

This is the 13th update on the Scottish Beaver Trial (SBT) and covers activity between 1st April and 17th July 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?

It has been over three months since my last project update and the project has been as busy as ever, both with activity in and around the Trial site as well as SBT related work elsewhere.

After the hot and dry weather of April which saw Knapdale in almost drought like conditions, we have since returned to the normal summer weather pattern of sunshine and warm showers, interspersed with a bit more rain and the odd gale! Nevertheless, the area is beautiful at this time of year and the mild weather combined with long days mean that Knapdale is seeing the arrival of a host of summer wildlife as well as a growing number of human visitors. The SBT Field Team have become more restless over the coming weeks as they anxiously await the potential arrival of this year's beaver kits. The behaviour of the adults in some of the four family groups suggests that some of the females may have been pregnant. Over the next few weeks our sharp-eyed staff and volunteers will be carrying out weekly vigils to try and spot whether any kits have been born this spring and survived their first few weeks in the comfort of their home lodges.

On the subject of kits, albeit last year's youngsters, I received good news in late June when I heard that the Field Team had successfully caught one of the juveniles born to the Loch Linne family last year. The young beaver had proved to be a slippery customer over the preceding months and whilst other family members had been caught for health and tag checking purposes but this shy, elusive animal had evaded capture. After being harmlessly caught in one of our specially designed nets, the beaver, a young male was found to be in good body condition and with microchip and ear tags attached he was quickly released back into his home territory.

In my last update I mentioned that our two older juvenile beavers (a female on the Dubh Loch and a male on Loch Linne) would shortly be expected to naturally disperse from their home territories in search of a mate and to set up on their own. Whilst the female remains with her parents, the male now appears to have finally left home. Our hope is that he might in time find his way to the juvenile female and that they might form a new pairing, but as we are currently unaware of his location the Field Team will continue to search in and around the Trial site to try and establish whether he is still within the general area. Experience at Knapdale and elsewhere has shown that single beavers can disperse quite quickly and over relatively large distances in search of a mate. I would ask any local people to 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.



Loch Linne yearling, June 2011 (©SBT)

Interpretation & Education Activities

Since my last update there have been 16 SBT related talks, guided walks and events to a total audience of 470 people. Highlights have included the '**Be a Beaver Detective**' weekends held in Knapdale in April and July which provided fun beaver activities for children and families. SBT staff and volunteers also attended the Kilmartin Gala Day in May. Evening guided walks to the Dubh Loch site are currently taking place every week from June until September and these are proving popular with locals and tourists alike, with an average of 30 people turning up every Tuesday evening.

A **new information leaflet** has also been produced for the Trial. As well as being distributed to many locations in Argyll, the leaflet can be downloaded directly from

www.scottishbeavers.org.uk/docs/003_028_general_SBT_Beaver_Leaflet_1306419527.pdf



'Be a Beaver Detective' workshop, April 2011 (©SBT)



Dubh Loch Guided Walk, June 2011 (©SBT)

Research Activities

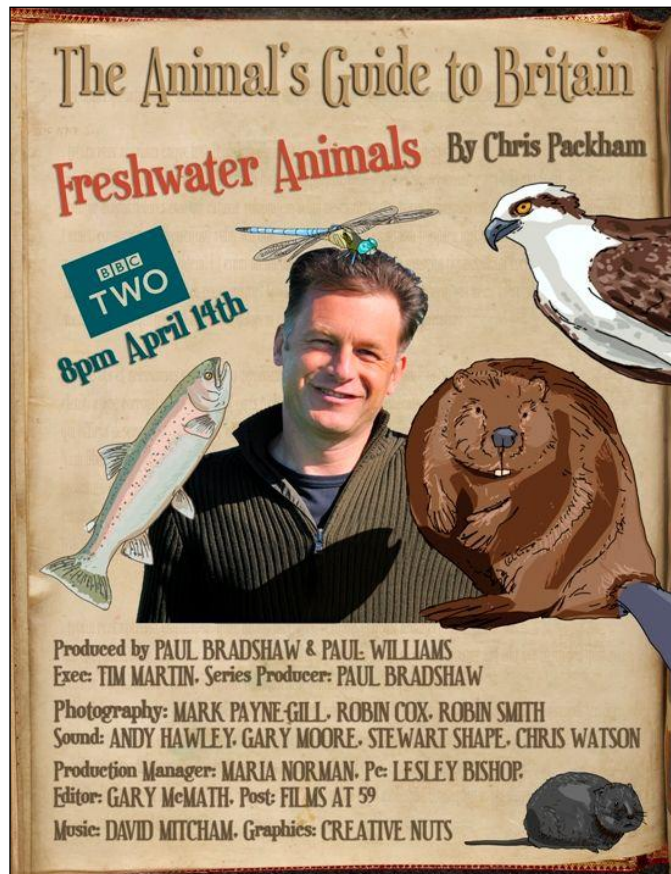
Although not directly part of the independent monitoring programme associated with the Trial, beaver related research led by RZSS is connected to the Knapdale beavers. Over the past few months scientific research has looked at the trialling of new Global Positioning System logger tags, veterinary health screening of beavers and captive husbandry guidelines. Much of this research will be published in independent scientific journals and provide further vital information on the physiology and management of these fascinating animals.

Staff, volunteers & organisation

We were sad to see Christian Robstad our Field Officer move on at the end of June. Christian had to return to his native Norway for family reasons and although he will be missed we are fortunate that Rob Needham our Assistant Field Officer is well equipped to fill Christian's boots (or should that be wellies?). As well as the Field Staff, we continue to be assisted by some very capable young student placements from UK and overseas universities who bring with them a great deal of energy and enthusiasm, perfect skills when you are required to monitor beaver field signs along 15 kilometres of steep wooded burns in the trial site! These students and volunteers also play an important role in assisting with data capture, digitisation and blog writing that are essential parts of this high profile scientific monitoring project.

Liaison & Communication Activities

Media interest in the project continues to be high and the past few months have seen some of the highest profile TV coverage to date. In April the Chris Packham BBC series '**The Animals Guide to Britain**' featured Knapdale and the SBT beavers, whilst in June the project was lucky to be the first remote location for the hugely popular BBC '**Springwatch**' programme. An estimated 4 million people tuned in over four consecutive nights to watch some remarkable footage of the beavers and to learn about some of the debate surrounding this trial reintroduction. In the past month the BBC's well known children's programme '**Live 'n' Deadly**' has also filmed in Knapdale, and as I write, **S4C** a Welsh language TV channel are recording on site spurred on by the interest in potential beaver reintroduction projects in Wales.



(The Animal's Guide to Britain ©BBC)



'Springwatch' crew broadcasting live in Knapdale (©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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