

# The beavers are back!

*Simon Jones, Scottish Beaver Trial Project Manager, provides an update on the beaver reintroduction*

It was 5am on a fair morning in late May and the Scottish Beaver Trial (SBT) team was driving towards the remote outhouse which had become the temporary overnight home for 11 very important creatures. Spirits were high... today was the perfect day to begin releasing beavers.

The process of releasing three families of European beavers into three carefully selected sites in lochs deep in the heart of Knapdale Forest, Mid-Argyll had been planned with almost military precision.

The release teams included SBT Field Officer Jenny Holden and myself, experts in animal care from the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland and officials from Scottish Natural Heritage who were there to ensure the release followed the licence agreement given to the SBT from the Scottish Government. Staff from host partner, Forestry Commission Scotland, were also on-hand to supervise the

release of the beavers into their land along with representatives from Norway, the original home of these animals. So, with everyone in place, we were ready to get beavering!

We had a lot to do before the release itself. All the beavers had to be fitted with individual radio tags attached to their tails or backs (depending on their age) so as not to impede their natural movements and each beaver was given a final health check by a vet.

Finally, the two beaver families scheduled for release that day were given the green light and we set off to undertake the first UK reintroduction of a native mammal into the wild.

With a beaver family of four safely tucked up in their individual crates in the back of the van, Jenny's team made its way to Loch Coille Bharr. Coille Bharr is the closest release site to the Barnlusgan Information Centre, which has been newly refreshed with interpretation about the trial. The loch is also home to the SBT Detective Trail, a one-hour walk around the loch for fit walkers who want to try their luck at spotting Scotland's first wild beavers in over 400 years.

My team took our beaver family to be released into Loch Linnhe. Pairing up to carry the crates, we made our way carefully down to the loch side where we had already positioned an artificial

beaver lodge. Made from straw bales and willow branches, it was scent-marked with bedding taken from the beavers in the holding facilities to make them feel more at home.

Anticipation and excitement levels were running high as the first crate was positioned at the entrance of the artificial lodge. As the crate door was removed, I lightly blew some air at the beaver; a gentle and unobtrusive way of persuading it to move. In a quick, decisive movement, we saw a flick of a beaver tail as it disappeared into the lodge. The others followed soon afterwards.

We'd stocked the artificial lodges with enough food to keep the beaver families going for the next two days and no one was expecting to see more of them that day. You can imagine our surprise when after only a few moments we saw a beaver emerge from the entrance of the lodge. It dipped into the water, apparently eager to swim around and explore its new environment.

When both teams regrouped, it was great to hear that like us, Jenny and the others had the pleasure of seeing their beavers diving straight into the water and making themselves at home immediately.

The following morning, the SBT staff were joined by Minister for the Environment, Roseanna Cunningham MSP. Helping with the release of the third family, Ms Cunningham said, "Welcoming beavers back to Scotland marks an historic day for conservation. These charismatic creatures are not only likely to create interest in Scotland from further afield but crucially can play a key role in providing good habitat for a wide range of wetland species."

So, after an absence of over 400

**LEFT TOP TO BOTTOM**  
Simon Jones leading the release of one of the beaver families

**Released beaver with radio tag**



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# Project news

SCOTTISH  
BEAVER  
TRIAL



**RIGHT**  
Minister for the Environment, Roseanna Cunningham MSP, and SWT Chairman, Allan Bantick, helping with the beaver release.

years and after more than 10 years of meticulous planning and preparation, Scotland is home to the wild beaver once more.

Our beavers are now busy settling into their new homes, making their own lodges and establishing territorial boundaries. In time, the juvenile family members will be forced out by their parents to mate and establish their own territory.

Fresh green plants are being harvested and consumed with gusto and the first few tasty willow trees have been felled and stripped of their bark. The stumps will sprout again and throw up new shoots over the coming months.

For the next five years, the animals will have free rein to roam the lochs, burns and woodlands of the trial area under the watchful eyes of those who will track, record and measure their movements.



You can keep up-to-date with progress from the field by visiting [www.scottishbeavers.org.uk](http://www.scottishbeavers.org.uk) and reading our Field Officer's Blog. SWT is proud of the part we have

played in this important event and a big thank you goes to all our members and supporters who have generously donated to support this trial. Well done to all involved.

**With thanks to our many supporters including:**



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Albert George & Nancy Caroline  
Youngman Trust



## A line of defence for Highland wildlife

Paul Gallagher, Habitat & Species Officer, sheds some light on the water vole project



An important milestone in SWT's work to protect water voles and other wildlife was reached in early May, with the appointment of Lois Canham as the SWT's new Mink Officer for the North Highlands. Her task is to work with locals to set up a 'cordon sanitaire'; a line of defence in the form of a series of mink-monitoring rafts stretching from Ullapool on the west coast to the Dornoch Firth on the east.

A survey in 2008 revealed that the highly destructive American mink (*Mustela vison*) is not yet established to the north of this line, making the area a valuable stronghold for vulnerable species including nationally important water vole populations.

At the same time, the lengthy process of eradicating mink to the south of this line will continue.

As the project progresses, the hope is that it will be possible to shift the cordon sanitaire south to a new defensible line, eventually linking with the highly successful mink eradication work that has been undertaken in the Cairngorms National Park.

Similar work in other areas such as the Outer Hebrides has shown that with persistence and determination, this ambitious project is achievable.

**LEFT**  
Water vole © Darin Smith