

THE RETURN OF THE BEAVER



SCOTTISH
BEAVER
TRIAL



BRINGING BEAVERS BACK TO SCOTLAND

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THE RETURN OF THE BEAVER IN SCOTLAND



The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) and The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) have been granted a licence by the Scottish Environment Minister for a trial reintroduction of up to four families of European beaver to Knapdale Forest, Mid-Argyll in 2009. This is the first formal reintroduction of a native mammal to the United Kingdom and after an absence of 400 years beavers may once again live free in the rivers and lochs of Scotland.

Extensive research over the last ten years has shown beavers could thrive in Scotland. Many support their return and a recent consultation revealed 73% of those living in Mid-Argyll want beavers back. Other than improving biodiversity, the beaver may also provide good opportunities to develop wildlife tourism to the benefit of local businesses, as has happened on Mull with white-tailed eagles.

Why are beavers so important?

Beavers are a keystone species in our wet woodlands and flooded forests – a missing part of our native wildlife. Few species have such a significant and positive influence on the health and function of their habitats. Beavers modify their surroundings through felling trees and in some cases building dams. These dams hold water in periods of drought, regulate flooding and improve water quality by holding silt, sediment and acidic run-off. They also provide drought refuge sites for fish and can increase the production of invertebrate food.

How will beavers help our woodlands?

Trees and beavers have co-existed for millennia. Beavers feed on a wide range of vegetation including trees such as alder, aspen, birch, rowan and willow, and herbaceous and aquatic plants. This creates more robust and healthy woodlands which vary in age and stages of development.

Beavers contribute to this by coppicing trees, a natural process where a tree is felled but new growth is stimulated from the trunk base. This breathes new life into woodlands whilst providing beavers with tasty morsels such as bark, leaves and twigs and timber to build lodges and dams. Any drowned trees provide important habitats for other wildlife such as woodpeckers, various beetles and fungi.

Why Knapdale?

Knapdale Forest is the right kind of countryside for beaver. The trial site is a Forestry Commission Scotland woodland, managed in partnership with SWT as a wildlife reserve. It ranges in altitude with a number of small freshwater lochs with small interconnecting burns. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and part of a wider Special Area of Conservation. The extent of suitable habitat has been shown to be more than adequate for four beaver families and any population expansion during the trial.

Where will the beavers come from?

SWT and RZSS will collect 15 – 20 animals from the Telemark region of Norway in autumn 2008. The Scandinavian beaver is considered to be genetically closest to those once found in Scotland. The Telemark terrain is similar to that of the west coast of Scotland. The beavers will spend six months in quarantine before being released in Knapdale Forest in spring 2009.

How will you know where the beavers are?

Prior to release all the animals will be fitted with identification and tracking devices. Direct observation of the animals, their tracks and other signs will also be used to monitor their movements during the trial.

What part can I play?

The biggest contribution you can make to this project is to support it financially. Despite pledges of support we still need to raise more than £750,000 for this nationally important project to ensure it has all the resources it requires to be a success. This is your opportunity to be part of Scotland's most ambitious conservation project. If you live within the Argyll area then in time there will be opportunities to become involved as a volunteer working with the Beaver Field Officer, scientists and landowners to monitor and track the animals and their impact on the local environment.

Does this mean beavers will be back for good in Scotland?

The trial will see if beavers can thrive in the Scottish environment and their impact on habitats, other species and the local economy. These findings will inform any decisions about the future of beavers in Scotland.

BEAVER BASICS

Beavers were once common in many parts Scotland but were hunted to extinction in the 16th Century primarily for food and their insulating pelt. After an absence of more than 400 years, beavers will be back in Scotland in 2009.



In May 2008, the Scottish Wildlife Trust and The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland were granted a licence by the Scottish Government to reintroduce up to four families of European beaver into Knapdale Forest, Argyll. This historic trial will see if beavers

can survive in the Scottish environment and their impact on other species, habitats and the local economy.



The beaver is a keystone species – a species which affects the survival and abundance of other wildlife in the community in which it lives. It is the largest rodent in Europe, measuring 70 – 100 cm in length and weighing up

to 25 – 27 kg (about the same size as a chubby spaniel).

Beavers live in small family groups and have two or three young each year. They are active throughout the year and do not hibernate. Beavers are vegetarian; eating a wide range of plants and tree species.



Beavers prefer slow-moving, freshwater streams and lochs rather than fast-flowing rivers or canals. They live in waterside burrows or lodges, built of branches and mud, which have a submerged entrance. Beavers construct dams which create areas of slow-moving deep water and in time wet woodlands and flooded forests.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT
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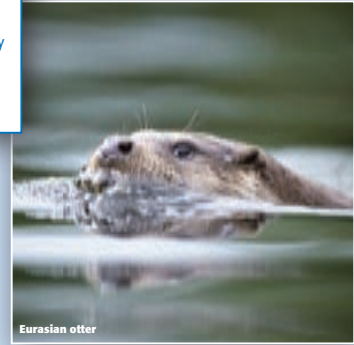
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Beautiful demoiselle

Dragonflies – Beavers create ponds which contain higher populations and varieties of invertebrates than faster waters. In some studies, the number of dragonfly species has doubled or even trebled after beaver activity. Knapdale's 13 species of dragonfly will undoubtedly benefit from the creation of beaver ponds and flooded forests.

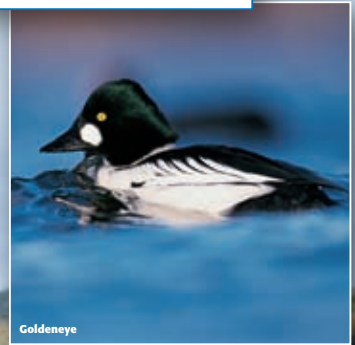
Eurasian otter – In Europe beavers and otters co-exist naturally. The beaver ponds, with their stable water levels, provide a valuable source of fish to local otters. Unlike otters, beavers do not feed on fish; they are entirely vegetarian. Otters are known to use abandoned beaver lodges as holts.



Eurasian otter

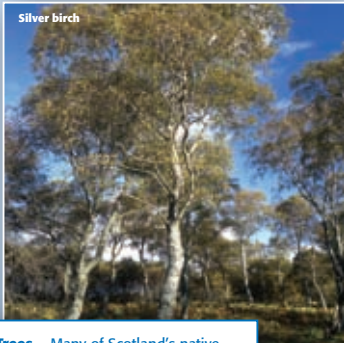
THE BEAVER: THE KEYSTONE SPECIES OF WET WOODLAND AND FOREST

Birds – By stabilising wetlands during dry periods, beaver ponds increase breeding habitats for a variety of birds. Teal and goldeneye in particular nest on beaver ponds and an array of fish-eating birds such as goosanders, mergansers, herons and kingfishers also benefit from the slow-moving waters created. The wet woodland habitat is more attractive to birds such as snipe.



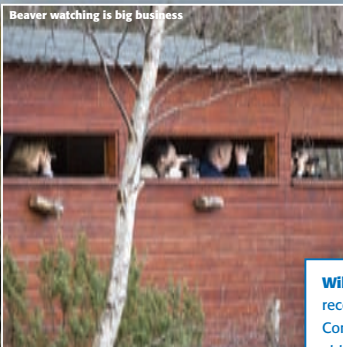
Goldeneye

The beaver truly is a keystone species. Here are some of the benefits that could come from the beaver's reintroduction...



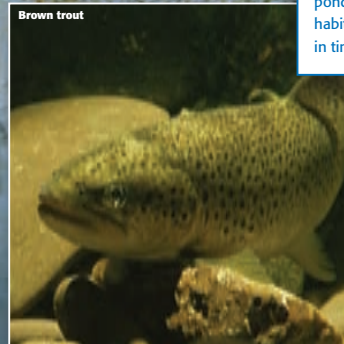
Silver birch

Trees – Many of Scotland's native tree species have naturally evolved over millennia alongside the beaver. As broadleaved trees are felled by beavers for food and construction, they respond by producing vigorous new growth. This process, known as coppicing, improves biodiversity by creating a more natural woodland structure with standing trees and open glades.



Beaver watching is big business

Wildlife tourism – A recent study by the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit at the University of Oxford suggested that a beaver reintroduction release site might bring in more than £2 million per year into the local economy.



Brown trout

Fish – An increase in aquatic and semi-aquatic invertebrates results in greater feeding opportunities for many fish species, and the deeper water of beaver ponds can provide important habitat during the winter and in times of drought.

Beaver reintroduction trial site



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