



## Scottish Beaver Trial: Project Update No. 6 1<sup>st</sup> February 2010

This is the sixth update on the Scottish Beaver Trial (SBT) and covers activity between 11th November 2009 and 31<sup>st</sup> January 2010. A more detailed report on the first stages of the SBT will be available in the coming weeks.

### 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?

The past few weeks have seen some of the coldest weather that has been recorded in the U.K. for many years, and Knapdale was no exception to this. The freezing temperatures that persisted through December resulted in large areas of open water in the trial area becoming covered in a thick layer of ice and this had an effect on activity with many areas being impassable for the animals and their human trackers alike. Beavers do not hibernate and remain active through the winter months, although activity levels and movements can be markedly reduced by severe cold temperatures. Such weather was reminiscent of the Norwegian winter climate our beavers would have been used to and the cold snap illustrated how important their carefully prepared food caches were, which the animals had built up close to their lodges in the preceding autumn months. Jenny Holden, our Field Officer noted that 'breathing holes' had developed in some of the lochs where beavers were present, showing that the animals were still active, although there appeared to be fewer fresh feeding signs in the area.

November and the lead up to Christmas saw a period of intense activity by field staff as we set out to live trap all animals as part of the ongoing monitoring programme of the trial. By carefully weighing and measuring the animals to check their body condition, we are able to see how they have coped through their first few months post release. All the resident family members in the Loch Linne group were caught, using both pre-baited 'Bavarian traps' and the Norwegian boat and net trapping method, before being fitted with replacement radio tags and then re-released (see pictures attached).

The Loch Coille Bharr family has remained on the neighbouring Dubh Loch and have experienced many weeks of iced over conditions. The recent melting of the ice is now allowing field workers back into the site and efforts have begun to live trap this family of three in order to assess their body condition and refit new radio tags.

The dam built by this family remains, and plans are underway by FCS to re-route the flooded footpath around the new beaver pond in an order to re-open this section of public path. Efforts to locate one of the juvenile females from this group who left the family soon after release last year have been stepped up and a systematic sweep of the coast from Carsaig northwards to Ardfern will soon be beginning to search for any signs of her and the two other missing beavers.

The single remaining adult male beaver from the Creag Mhor Loch family was trapped by field workers a few days before Christmas as part of the live trapping monitoring programme. On examination his body condition was

found to be poor and following welfare procedures developed by RZSS veterinary surgeons, the decision was taken to bring this animal back into captivity for further investigation and treatment. We are currently awaiting the results of vet testing to establish whether or not he will be fit to return to the trial in the future. An effort to trap his missing mate and/or daughter from the Creag Mhor Loch family was thwarted in early winter when flooding on the River Add, just north of the trial site caused the burrows built by the missing beaver(s) to be abandoned, and appeared to result in the animal(s) leaving this area. The ongoing search for this animal(s) continues with the assistance of dedicated local volunteers and to date many kilometres of watercourses in the area have been searched for any signs of these animals which we are very keen to relocate back to the trial area.

## **Research & Monitoring & Tracking**

- On the 17-18<sup>th</sup> December 2009 SNH hosted the first meeting at Knapdale of the various independent monitoring partners associated with monitoring of the Scottish Beaver Trial, who comprise the Research & Monitoring Coordination Group. Organisations represented included SNH's Scientific Advisory Committee, The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, Historic Scotland, Argyll & Bute Council, Macauley Land Use Research Institute, Stirling University, British Dragonfly Society and Oxford University.
- For further information on the independent monitoring of the Trial please see SNH's website at [www.snh.org.uk/scottishbeavertrial](http://www.snh.org.uk/scottishbeavertrial).

## **Staff & Volunteers**

- The continuous tracking and monitoring of the beavers is a very demanding task and to increase our capacity on the ground SWT and RZSS are currently in the process of recruiting an additional part-time Field Officer to work alongside Jenny Holden and the other project field staff and volunteers. Advertisements are currently in the press and we hope to have someone in post by early spring.

## **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](http://www.scottishbeavers.org.uk)
- The beaver trial appeared on the BBC's 'One Show' on 18<sup>th</sup> November and the trial was the subject of an Observer magazine feature on the 6<sup>th</sup> December.
- A successful Scottish Beaver Trial public drop in session was held on the night of 13<sup>th</sup> January at Tayvallich Village Hall, Knapdale, and gave local people the chance to meet the project team, be updated on progress with the trial and also ask questions. The night also saw the first ever public viewing of the 'Return of the Native' film, which is a 40 minute long documentary on the first stages of the trial.
- The fourth Scottish Beaver Trial Local Stakeholder Forum meeting was held at the Cairnbaan Hotel on the 15<sup>th</sup> January, with 20 people in attendance. The minutes from this and previous meetings will shortly be available on the trial website.

## **Future release proposals**

- The proposed release of a fourth pair of beavers to the Un-named Lochan (South - grid reference NR 788886, see attached map), in the spring of 2010 is now approaching its final stages of planning. Along with SNH, the lead independent monitoring authority, a wide variety of local stakeholders have been contacted and we are currently awaiting their comments on the proposal before finalising details with SNH. 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.
- Along with this proposal SWT and RZSS have recently written to SNH and the Scottish Government to propose that where necessary, replacement beavers may be used in the trial, in particular sets of circumstances where important breeding animals are lost to the project either due to mortality or long-term dispersal from the trial site. We are currently awaiting the final outcome of this matter and will ensure that once finalised the details of this proposal are made available on the trial website as soon as possible.

## Interpretation & Education

- On 11-12<sup>th</sup> November RZSS ran a 'Global Classroom' event at Edinburgh Zoo. This event saw the beaver trial discussed by 145 high school pupils from all over Scotland and included a live, internet link with one of the beaver trapping team at Telemark University College in Norway, where our beavers were captured.
- 12 high schools, including the local Lochgilphead High School, have now participated in a 'Zoos and Conservation' lesson which includes the Scottish Beaver Trial as part of its national Curriculum for Excellence content.
- On the 15<sup>th</sup> December the trial partnership hosted the first ever 'UK Beaver Seminar' at Edinburgh Zoo, which attracted 80+ delegates from all over the UK to listen, learn and debate about beaver re-introductions from a host of speakers including experts from Germany and Norway. We hope this will be the start of an ongoing national beaver seminar/forum in the UK.

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

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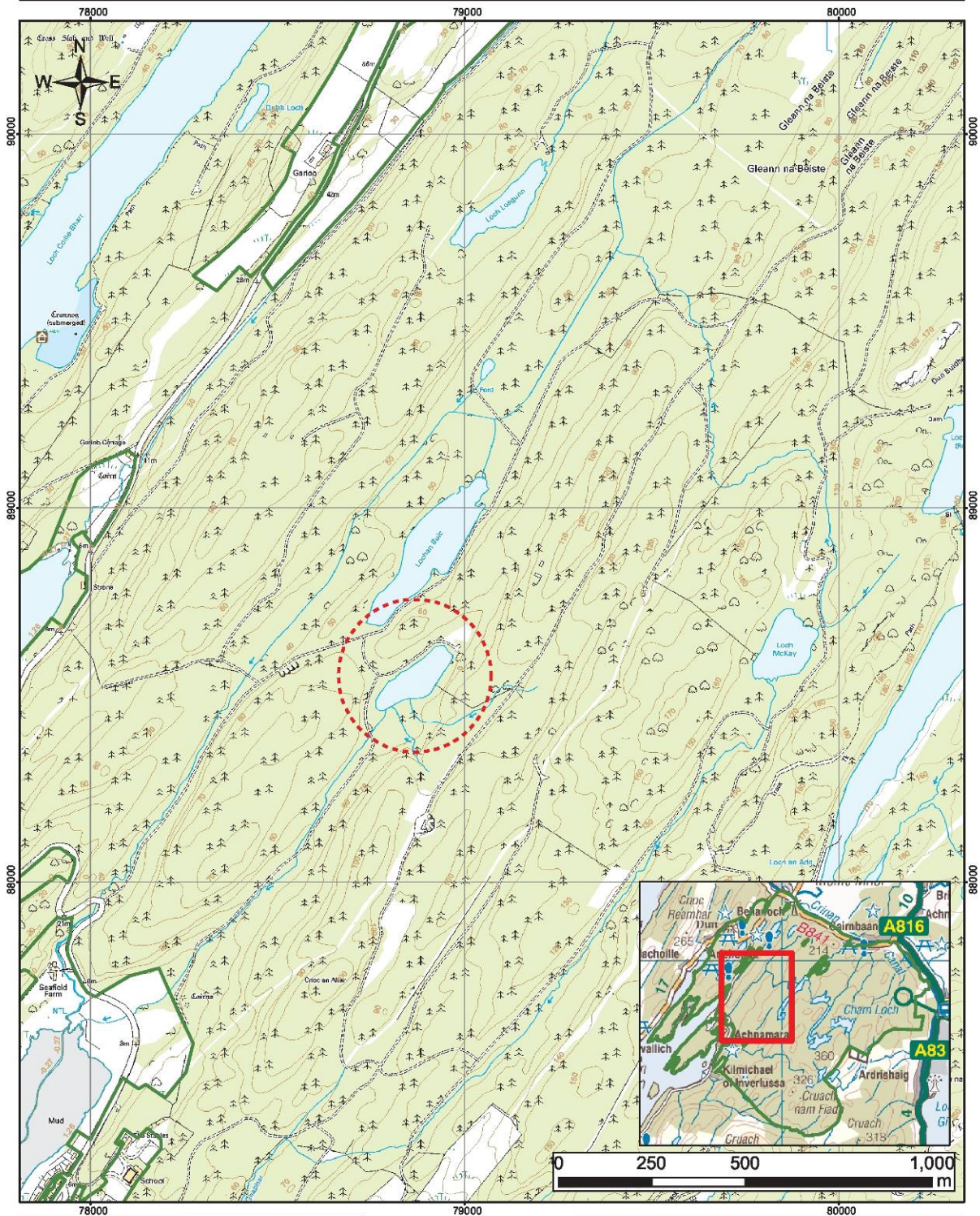
### Jenny Holden with Bavarian style beaver trap



Norwegian netting capture method



# SBT: Proposed Spring 2010 release site



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 Trial area  
1:10,000



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