

SCOTTISH BEAVER TRIAL



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Scottish Beaver Trial: Project Update No. 9 27 July 2010

This is the 9th update on the Scottish Beaver Trial (SBT) and covers activity between 11th June and 27th July 2010.

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.

What's been happening in Knapdale?

It is hard to believe that we are already nearly into August 2010. With so much monitoring work to be done on the ground and behind the scenes at the beaver trial in Knapdale, the time flies by. Out in the forest and on the lochs we are in the height of summer, which unfortunately on the west coast of Scotland tends to mean mild temperatures and lots of heavy rain showers! After the drier months of April, May and June we have had a few weeks of wet, blustery weather and water levels have risen again. Wildlife is still in full swing however and in between the showers butterflies flit along the woodland edges and dragonflies dart across the beds of flowering water lilies, which are a common site in Knapdale, but more of that later.

The beavers remain active and are enjoying the time of plenty in and around the lochs and burns as abundant green vegetation gives them a wide-ranging diet at this time of year. Particular favourites during this time of year are the underground tubers of water lilies, and we have recorded on several occasions some of the beavers making repeated diving sessions through the lily beds to dig up individual tubers which are then consumed with gusto. Although a fascinating insight into beaver behaviour there is a more important goal for us here, as it is vital that the effect of beavers on aquatic plants such as water lilies is recorded and analysed as part of the scientific monitoring of the trial. As part of this particular area of study the University of Stirling, working as one of the independent monitoring partners in the trial, is tasked with the job of regularly surveying the aquatic plants of the Knapdale lochs and assessing in what way the beavers are affecting these plant communities. Over the period of the five year trial, monitoring work such as this and other studies into woodland structure, dragonfly communities, fish populations, water chemistry and so on, all of which is coordinated by Scottish Natural Heritage, will give us a picture of how beavers impact the local natural environment. At the same time work is being carried out to look at how the beavers may be affecting the economy of the local area, through activities such as increasing tourism levels and conversely whether the beavers cause any economic damage, resulting from their felling and dam building activities. Such studies are the main purpose of the Scottish Beaver Trial.

You may recall from my last update that I reported the sad death of one of our adult male beavers, 'Tallak', in the wild shortly after his release on the 4th May. Post mortem results showed that he failed to adapt to life back in the wild and despite abundant suitable food sources he did not eat enough to sustain himself and subsequently perished. His young female mate 'Trude' however appears to have settled well for the time being and has taken up residence on Loch Buic, which is close to the original release site. With the help of local volunteers we are carefully monitoring her behaviour and condition, as it is likely that she will begin looking for

a replacement mate at some point and may therefore disperse. We hope that at some time in the future we may be able to find a replacement mate for her.

On a more positive note, we successfully released another pair of young beavers on 23rd June into Creag Mhor Loch, one of the original release sites. The new beavers, 'Eoghann' and 'Elaine' (pictured below) were released, following permission being granted by the Scottish Government, as a replacement pair for the original family of beavers which dispersed from the trial site after their release in May 2009. This release is considered vital in building and stabilising a small, core population of breeding beavers. As always the newly released animals are closely tracked and monitored in the first few weeks after release, and although they have carried out some quite lengthy explorations along the nearby waterways within the trial site, they now seem to have settled down and are doing well.

Staff & volunteers

We are very much looking forward to welcoming another new member of staff to the trial team in August. Nathan Dove will be joining us for six months as a temporary Field Assistant and will work alongside Christian Robstad our current, part-time Field Officer. Nathan joins us from the RSPB, where he has just completed a season as a Red Kite Protection Officer in Central Scotland.

Interpretation & education

This week (26-29th July) RZSS Education Officers working for the project are leading several evening beaver guided walks from the Barnluasgan Information Centre down to the Dubh Loch beaver site, as part of the wider 'Dalriada Project' summer events programme (www.dalriadaproject.org/). Please feel free to come along if you can.

Funding

I am delighted to announce that the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) has once again supported the Scottish Beaver Trial by awarding the project £20,000 over the next two years to allow us to construct a brand new purpose-built beaver quarantine and research facility at RZSS's Highland Wildlife Park in Kincaig and additionally bring in another two young beavers from Telemark in Norway, as replacements animals for Knapdale should they be required.

Liaison & communication

Up-to-date information on the trial can be found at the SBT website and the official blog. Recent reports and updates can be viewed in Beaver Facts > Publications and News > Project Updates on our website www.scottishbeavers.org.uk

If you have any questions about the Scottish Beaver Trial then please visit our website or contact me at:

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Eoghann swimming away from release crate at Creag Mhor on 23/6/10



Elaine just after release



Roisin Campbell Palmer – RZSS Beaver Team Leader



Christian Robstad (Part time Field Officer) carrying out monthly beaver field sign survey work

