



### Project overview

The Scottish Beavers Reinforcement Project began in 2017 in order to boost the original Scottish Beaver Trial population in Knapdale Forest, mid-Argyll. The project is led by Scottish Beavers, a partnership between the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) and the Scottish Wildlife Trust. It is taking place on land managed by Forest Commission Scotland and has been licensed by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), which is also coordinating the monitoring requirements at the site.

### Beaver releases

Over the past 12 months, the project has released six adult beavers into Knapdale Forest, three in October 2017 and three in the spring of 2018. All beavers have gone through a screening process carried out by qualified vets at RZSS to ensure that they are healthy and disease-free prior to release.



### How do we decide where to release a beaver?

When releasing a beaver into Knapdale, a number of factors are carefully considered by the project team to determine where the most suitable release site might be. These factors include the age and sex of the beaver to be released; which lochs we know to be uninhabited at the time; the long-term weather conditions for an area; the availability of food and potential lodge sites; and many other things, all of which are evaluated when the time is right.

Sometimes this can be an easy decision. For example, when a male was needed to accompany the female beaver known as Alba in the hope that they would pair up, it was a simple decision when we came to place the suitable adult male known

as Harris. In other cases, it may not be as straightforward due to factors such as having overlapping beaver territories and/or not having an obvious partner to help establish a territorial pair.

The release strategy is carefully planned based on a best case scenario, but needs to remain adaptive as there will always be an element of unpredictability when working in the field with wild animals.

### A first for the project

This summer, we were thrilled to discover that two of the beavers we have released so far have successfully paired up. Night vision cameras were used to capture footage of the pair grooming each other at the edge of their lochan, a sure sign that they have accepted each other.

The pairing of two captive-bred beavers in the wild is a first for the project and is a fantastic early outcome. We are very hopeful that the pair will go on to breed in the future.

See the video of these beavers at [goo.gl/exXgtb](https://goo.gl/exXgtb)



## Sad news

We were sad to hear that the body of an adult male beaver that we released in mid-April was discovered near the Faery Isles a week after its release. The beaver had travelled a long distance from the release site, through the forest and out to sea, where it swam several kilometres along the coastline. Whilst the exact cause of death is unknown, beavers have previously been known to suffer from spending too much time in saltwater.

Our project team will continue to work closely with expert vets to ensure the best care possible for the beavers as the project progresses.

## Beaver research in Devon

In 2011, a pair of beavers was released into a 2.8ha enclosure on the Culm grassland in Devon. The effects of the beavers have been closely studied ever since by the Devon Wildlife Trust and the University of Exeter. The enclosure was transformed in a relatively short period of time from having a single burn trickling through it, to having 13 wetland ponds holding 650m<sup>3</sup> of water interspersed with a mosaic of riparian and wetland habitats. Studies revealed that the beavers were helping with flood alleviation (30% reduction in water flow downstream of the enclosure) and dilution of pollutants (reductions in sediment loads, nitrogen and phosphorous downstream of the enclosure).



Ecological monitoring of the site has shown increases in the overall diversity of bat species and aquatic invertebrates in the enclosure. The monitoring was extended in 2015 to cover the first formal trial of a beaver release in England on the River Otter which has been licensed by Natural England. More details can be found on the website of Devon Wildlife Trust.

## National beaver survey

In 2017, SNH commissioned a study from the University of Exeter to survey beavers across their range in east-central Scotland as well as appealing to the public to record any sightings through the Mammal Tracker app. The survey initially took place throughout spring 2017, but was extended as new territories were being reported that had not been previously confirmed. The results from this survey should be published soon, providing us with a good overview of the distribution and extent of beaver territories in Scotland.

## Protection and management of beavers

The Scottish Beavers partnership is hopeful that beavers will soon be given formal protection in Scotland by becoming a 'European Protected Species' – the process to achieve this status has taken the Scottish Government longer to achieve than we had anticipated. Having this formal protection in place means that there will be an agreed national approach to managing beavers. This management approach will ensure that where, for example, prime agricultural land or infrastructure is subject to severe damage, the removal of the beavers (translocation or despatch) is an activity that can only be done under licence. An important element of the management process will be that all other practicable mitigation measures must have been tested and shown to have failed before removal is attempted.

## What's next for the project?

With assistance from SNH and local landowners in Tayside, the Scottish Beavers partnership is hoping to receive a number of beavers from the Tayside area to help boost the numbers in Knapdale this autumn.

Project updates will be published on the websites of the Scottish Wildlife Trust and RZSS as and when they happen.

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