



## 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 Forestry and Land Scotland and has been licensed by Scottish Natural Heritage, which is also coordinating the monitoring requirements at the site.

## A protected species in Scotland

Following decades of work, beavers officially became a European Protected Species (EPS) in Scotland on 1 May. This landmark occasion secures beavers as a protected native species in Scotland and grants them the same level of protection as otters, wildcats and dolphins.

This new status means that it is now an offence to deliberately disturb, capture or kill beavers unless an exemption licence has been issued by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

SNH has also set out a Management Framework that is used to manage beavers and their impacts. This includes details of mitigation techniques and the support available to landowners. For more information, visit [nature.scot](http://nature.scot).

## Beaver releases

Since September 2018, a further 15 beavers have been released in the Knapdale area as part of the Scottish Beavers Reinforcement Project. Of these, eight were released in August/September 2019 and are still being monitored via camera traps, with help from the Heart of Argyll Wildlife Organisation, as part of the post-release monitoring programme.

This brings the total number of beavers released as part of the reinforcement project to 22. Our licence permits the release of up to 28 beavers over the course of the project.

## Breeding success

Two pairs of Bavarian beavers released as part of the Reinforcement Project are known to have produced kits this year. This is a fantastic indication that they are settling into their new home well.

In addition to this, a pair of beavers released as part of the Scottish Beaver Trial are known to have produced two kits.



One of this year's kits caught on camera © Tom Collier

## New research highlights biodiversity benefits

Research published earlier this year by the University of Stirling has provided further evidence of the biodiversity benefits of beavers. The study, led by Dr Alan Law and Professor Nigel Willby, found the number of species uniquely found in beaver-built ponds in southern Sweden was 50% higher than in other wetlands in the region.

## How do we survey for beavers?

We use a variety of survey techniques to determine the status and health of the beaver population in Knapdale. These include:

**Field signs surveys** conducted on foot or by canoe. During this type of survey, we search for field signs, from a nibbled branch to a beaver lodge. The age of some signs can be assessed, such as the tell-tale orange colouring of freshly cut wood, which gives us even more information.

**Trapping** in land traps or by boat. We occasionally trap beavers in order to assess the health and identity of an individual. If a new beaver is caught, it is fitted with ear tags and a microchip and a blood sample is taken for DNA analysis.

**DNA analysis** to determine population structure and diversity. By analysing the genetic data within the population, we are able to assess how individuals are related to each other.

## Cabinet Minister visits Knapdale



The Cabinet Secretary on Loch Coille Bharr © RZSS, Scottish Beavers

Roseanna Cunningham, the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, helped to release one of the first beavers into Knapdale Forest in 2009. In July 2019, we were delighted to welcome her back to demonstrate how things have developed over the last decade.

The Minister heard from our team about the positive difference beavers are making. She also enjoyed a short boat trip on Loch Coille Bharr to see a beaver lodge up close.

## A champion for Scotland's beavers

In March, John Finnie MSP agreed to become the Species Champion for beavers. The Species Champion scheme is an initiative run by Scottish Environment LINK, with Champions committing to raising the profile of their chosen species both in the Scottish Parliament and throughout the country.

## Sad news

We have been alerted to several beaver mortalities over the past year. Sadly, five of the beavers released are known to have not survived, with the kits that were translocated over this period appearing to have fared particularly badly.

All translocation projects carry a certain level of risk and we continue to work closely with experts to ensure the highest possible standard of care during any beaver translocation.

If you find a dead beaver in the Knapdale area, it is recommended that you contact the Forestry and Land Scotland office in Lochgilphead by phoning 0131 370 5200. If you suspect a wildlife crime has occurred, please contact Police Scotland.

## The year ahead

With the Scottish Beavers licence expiring at the end of October 2020, the project team will be looking to do any final beaver releases in Knapdale in the spring. This will allow enough time to do post-release monitoring of individuals. In addition, we will continue to deliver our advocacy work to help secure a positive future for beavers in Scotland.

Scottish Beavers is a partnership between:

