



ERICHT ADULT AND 3 KITS

PHOTO RHONA FORRESTER

## Scottish Wild Beaver Group promoting the reintroduction of the Eurasian Beaver

### INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our third newsletter of SWBG. We, the SWBG Trustees and helpers, have had another busy year and a very enjoyable one. Again we hope you enjoy what we have put together for you.

### The Kits!

Jean Oudney and Rhona Forrester had an excellent night visiting the Ericht in July, they watched a family of 7 beavers. Mum, dad, two yearlings and 3 kits. A very special evening and one which they will never forget. Rhona has also been keeping a careful watch on a new Beaver family near her home and one kit has been born there.



Above. An Ericht Adult photo.  
Below. An Earn kit.

Photos Rhona Forrester



# SWBG Newsletter



### Tours

Bob Smith has continued with his tours this year and has done an excellent job of promoting and educating, his many visitors, about the Beavers. Some have travelled from as far as Aberdeen and Devon.



Photos Rhona Forrester





Julian, Bob and Rhona



## Nature Nuts!



One of the film crew.



Julian Clary and Bob Smith

In July last year a filming crew got in touch with Bob about a new programme which was going to be going live in August this year featuring Julian Clary. It was all about people that are a bit nutty about wildlife. Well our Bob fits that category big time! He enjoyed a fantastic three days filming at the Erich and also Bamff, thanks to Paul and Louise Ramsay. I was lucky enough to join him on two occasions with camera in hand!

Rhona Forrester

Photos - Rhona Forrester



Paul Ramsay and Bob Smith with the film crew.



Julian and Bob out on the canoe at Bamff



Bob and Annie the Co-producer.



## The Necessary Beaver Conference March 2015



This one-off conference was held at the very picturesque Dunkeld Hilton Hotel by the banks of the River Tay. Speakers were invited from Scotland, England and Wales, and also from The Netherlands and the USA - an international conference that also drew delegates from all over Britain. The aim was to bring together the wealth of knowledge on beavers and their impact and benefits to the environment, also mitigation aspects and pointers from other more experienced countries on how to manage any beaver-human conflicts that may arise.

Starting us off was Dr Nick Dixon from the Scottish Crannog Centre at Loch Tay in the Highland Perthshire. Dr Dixon has spent the past 30 years studying the submerged crannogs from Scotland's past and described to us the proof of the beaver's long occupation in Scotland with beaver-gnawed trees going back 8000 years. He also shared with us a puzzle involving carbon dated beaver knawed sticks which the archaeologists are still at a loss to explain. Next up was woodland advisor Victor Clements who believes the reserves of trees in Tayside are perfectly capable of sustaining a beaver population, and in fact they improve the biodiversity of the riparian edge habitat by targeting non-native species like sycamore

and beech and allowing space wildflowers and native trees to grow in the space provided. Victor raised an interesting question on the life cycle of the aspen - fairly rare in Scotland but very common in other countries with beaver populations. He suggested that the reason Aspen trees are rare in Scotland compared to other countries may be due to the lack of beavers, as the beaver appears to play a key role in Aspen reproduction.

Dr Alan Law showed beavers have direct impacts on their environment such as the species they consume, and indirect impacts with their dam building. From their studies at Bamff Estate they found a tenfold increase in species richness from beaver habitat. He stressed the need to ask the right questions when investigating biodiversity and that using different indicators may influence results in a particular way.

Pieter Noordanus is a land agent from The Netherlands who works at providing solutions for farmers and landowners when conflicts arise in the multimillion ambitious "Room for the River" plan that the Government has implemented to combat the threat of flooding that endangered millions of people in The Netherlands, much of which lies under sea level.

Beavers, reintroduced in 1988, are one of the challenges that the Dutch have to understand and work with while implementing these flood prevention measures.

This pioneering landscape scale approach to farmland and water management works along with the beaver, harnessing the natural engineering capabilities of the beaver towards the goal of flood prevention. This natural engineering work which would be extremely costly to create with machinery the beaver completes free of charge - slowing the river down which helps to prevent damaging flash flooding

downstream, as well as creating a better habitat for wildlife. Specialist trained land stewards manage the whole picture by working with the farmers to find the best solution to issues, including the removal of the beavers by non-lethal trapping methods for relocation if necessary - however practical mitigation methods are practiced in the first instance as this has been proved to be most effective.

Sir Charlie Burrell manages a large estate in the south of England that was once farmed intensively. He turned this into a naturalistic grazing area that now provides organic pasture fed beef, venison and pork while allowing biodiversity to return to the surrounding environment. He does not have any beavers on his estate, and as a consequence he has had to use costly machinery to engineer the wetlands he needed that the beaver would do free of charge naturally.

SWBG's very own Bob Smith has been running a beaver education programme in the East Perthshire schools and has also been running tours around Blairgowrie to show our wild beavers to both the locals and visitors from far afield. The information that Bob has gathered shows that the beavers have a definite potential for eco-tourism, boosting the local economy.



Bob Smith in his fine kilt talking about beaver ecotourism. Photo: Jean.Oudney

Liz Halliwell is a mammal ecologist who provides specialist advice to Natural Resources Wales on the conservation and management of terrestrial animals including beavers. The Wildlife Trusts in

Wales are leading the Welsh Beaver Project and developing a reintroduction proposal for beavers. Liz presented an up to date review of this process, including the identification of suitable catchments, stakeholder consultation and the need for various fact finding trips to other countries with beavers, including Scotland.

Uwe Stoneman manages the RSPB reserve at Kinnordy in Angus and had to find solutions when the beavers moved into the loch and put in a beaver management plan that had different objectives to the RSPB plan (which has legal requirements to maintain habitats and favourable conditions for various species found there). Uwe found a way of co-existing with the beavers by understanding their needs and using the information to manage the dam building to keep the beavers happy without causing issues for the loch management or the surrounding farmers.

Peter Smith is the founder of the Wildwood Trust and is an ecologist with many years' experience in assessing environmental impacts and educational restoration ecology. Peter talked about the upland land management fails that resulted in the Boscastle disaster of 2004 and how this example has the potential to be repeated time and time again across the country. He showed us the test strategy that was conducted in Northumbria where a river system was changed to prevent downstream flooding disasters by implementing designs which ultimately proved too costly to implement but that beavers will do naturally for no cost at all.

Peter explained that in other countries beavers and salmon co-exist quite happily and in fact the beaver are beneficial to the salmon as they provide better habitat for the fish - the real reason for the concern in this

country is that the beaver management of the river will move this habitat along the river and out of the current owners land. Peter finished off by suggesting a solution is to take the people who gain financially by the beaver's return - that is the property owners in the flood plain and using this gain to compensate those farmers and landowners that lose out.

The Devon Wildlife Trust is leading two beaver projects monitoring the effects of a beaver reintroduction. Mark Elliot from the trust told us of a captive trial that has been running since 2010 in the uplands of North Devon and has shown a major increase in amphibians and capture of harmful chemicals such as nitrates and phosphorus by beaver dams. In addition the base flow of the water and constant supply of water provided by the beaver habitat is beneficial in periods of drought, and the extra storage capacity helps prevent major flooding events further downstream in times of heavy rainfall.

At the end of the day Alistair Cameron from Friends of the Earth followed Sir John with a quick update on how they made a successful legal challenge under the European Habitats Directive to support the Devon Wildlife Trust's bid to allow the wild beavers to remain in the River Otter and for their impact to be monitored and studied.

Mike Callahan is the owner and operator of a company in north eastern United States that specialises in the humane and long term resolution of beaver-human conflict. Beavers were reintroduced to Massachusetts in 1932 and when conflicts arose the solution had previously been to trap and relocate. However as the population grew this became less effective as others simply moved into the vacated space and the problem reoccurred.

An alternative cost effective long term solution is now practiced to work with beavers to allow them to co-exist with humans by using simple engineering designs to prevent the water level from rising high enough to cause localised problems in farmland and roads. These solutions have proved to have a 90% success rate over a 7 year period in a state that has 80,000 – 100,000 beavers.

Finally, Sir John Lister-Kaye gave a summary of the early years of campaigning for beaver reintroduction in Scotland and the origin and background to the Tay wild beaver population. He then went onto to describe the enormous benefits his beaver demonstration project in the Highlands has shown for biodiversity and educationally to the volume of people who have visited the Aigas Field Centre.

Sir John congratulated the local farmers and landowners who attended the conference to talk about their worries and warned that Scotland needs to get its act together on mitigation methods as soon as possible to work together with farmers worried about beaver issues.

This very full day of fascinating talks was followed by a panel session where questions were answered from the audience including a statement from a farmer with beavers on low lying land in Strathmore outlining his worries about his land and also a nearby golf course that had some trees cut down by beavers in the previous week. He was advised by the panel how to combat this issue by a simple solution to protect individual trees that is completely effective.

His concerns regarding potential flooding were acknowledged and advice from the delegates was that non-lethal mitigation methods are available and are an effective long term solution. Both Pieter Noordanus from the Netherlands and Mike Callahan from the USA

stressed the need to learn from experienced countries and not to try and “reinvent the wheel”.

The panel stressed that it is essential that effective mitigation and compensation strategies are implemented in the reintroduction of the beaver, and that the beavers can help improve the Scottish landscape for the benefit of all, saving the public purse millions of pounds in flood prevention management costs.



The panel question and answer session.  
Photo: Jean Oudney

### Planning the Scottish Beaver Conference

The SWBG held this extremely important and successful conference in March 2015 in the Dunkeld Hilton Hotel on the banks of the River Tay. At a committee meeting the previous spring, Louise Ramsay had suggested we bring together various experts at a conference to showcase the benefits that beavers bring to our countryside and with the Scottish Government due to make their decision on whether the beaver will be reintroduced later in 2015, it was felt this would be an ideal time to hold such a conference.

A sub-committee was arranged for this, consisting of Louise Ramsay, myself (Jean), Nonie Coulthard, Eddie Palmer, Catherine Lloyd and Paul Ramsay, and I agreed to run the conference with a lot of help and input from the rest of the committee who provided valuable guidance and advice throughout the year.

Over the next 6 months we arranged a venue and started to

plan speakers. We had to decide how many we wanted and most importantly what subjects they would talk about, as we needed to cover all aspects of beavers and rewilding. Invitations and requests for abstracts were sent - basically we needed a “blurb” from each speaker on what their talk would be about that we could use for publicity prior to the conference, and also a brief description of the talk for the handout showing each talk and timings that was given out on the day.

In organising events things never run smoothly all the time and true to form at a late stage in the proceedings we were let down badly by our venue who had double booked us. That was a slightly stressful time for me, sitting in my car at lunchtimes from work phoning round various venues getting quotes for alternative venues! Fortunately the end of the March was before the busy season as far as conference venues goes, as we had a couple of places to choose from. We decided on the Dunkeld Hilton Hotel which was in a lovely spot beside the river.

While attending the State of the Beaver Conference in Oregon, USA early in 2015, Louise and Paul met with Mike Callahan who said he would be prepared to travel to Scotland for the conference to show us mitigation techniques and discuss how his country manage beaver related issues. This was a very exciting last minute development as mitigation was an issue we wanted to explore thoroughly, and it will be so important if the beaver is reintroduced to Scotland.

So the day drew closer and we found interest in the conference was so strong and delegate numbers were so large that we outgrew our room in the hotel and had to be placed outside in the marquee. Although very pretty, unfortunately because it was usually used for weddings it had a

very light coloured fabric roof - ideal for weddings but not for viewing slides! We did have words with the hotel after about this, along with the annoying issues we had with the microphone to start with, but apart from these two issues it all went very smoothly and SWBG are delighted it was such a success.

After the conference bills were paid, everyone thanked who needed to be thanked, and then I went to work on the short report on the conference which was eventually presented to the Environment Minister in summer 2015 before her decision on the beavers later in the year. It had a brief outline of every talk and the main points of each, and also a list of the delegates and their organisations that attended the conference, showing how many organisations came along to support and learn from the conference. Again, the subcommittee were great in advising on content and proof reading for me - over the past year there must have been several million emails winging their way between us all!

The SWBG are very proud that the conference was such a success, and also that the sharing of information has been such a benefit, not just to Scotland and its beavers but to the rest of the UK as well. We hope that not only the Scottish Government will chose to reintroduce these amazing creatures that are so beneficial to our countryside, but will also protect them by managing any issues with sensible mitigation techniques learned from our European and American colleagues.

I would like to say thank you to the committee who gave me fantastic help and support in organising the conference, and well done to Louise for her great idea!

Jean Oudney



**Birnam Brownies 14<sup>th</sup> May 2015**

Audrey Pallister and Bob Smith done a presentation to Birnam Brownies in May. It didn't start well as Audrey wasn't sure where she was going and Bob was running late! However, as always, it turned out to be a great evening and enjoyed by all with the children getting really involved. Well done Audrey and Bob!

Rhona Forrester

Some photos from 2015 by  
Bob Smith



Have you seen any Beavers or Kits this year? Share your stories or photos on our Facebook page **Save the Free Beavers of the Tay** or get in touch with Rhona if you'd like them added to the next Newsletter or our Website.

[r.forrester62@btinternet.com](mailto:r.forrester62@btinternet.com)

If you haven't done so already have a look at our website

[scottishwildbeavers.org](http://scottishwildbeavers.org)

Follow Bob's Blog on Facebook

**Bobby's beaver and wildlife blog of the Ericht and round about**

Bob's Facebook page is doing great with over 400 followers now. Grateful thanks to all who post and share their photos on his page. Please feel free to post or share any photos of Wildlife or Beaver photos that you have.

Rhona Forrester

**BEAVERS IN SCOTLAND- TO PROTECT OR NOT?**

We should soon be getting a decision on the future of beavers in Scotland. The Scottish Government will have to decide whether they want to retain them or not, and if they do, the context in which they are retained will have to be clarified.

Most people in SWBG will want to see the beaver given full protection under the EU Habitats Directive, and it is easy to understand why this might be. Many of our iconic wildlife species have fully protected status so that landowners, developers and the general public all have to give due consideration to any actions which might impact upon that species or its habitat. In many cases, this protection is fully warranted. In others, the rules can be gold plated by government agencies, and people start to begrudge the species its place and the extra work and expense that it then costs them. There is a cultural attitude within agencies which says that the Scottish or British public think that animals are not safe unless they have full protection, and that anything a bit more laissez- faire cannot possibly work.

Farmers and landowners will prefer a situation where they have a freer hand to take action if it is required, and I have a lot of sympathy with this viewpoint. Do we give beavers fully protected status like badgers or bats, or do we let farmers set their own beaver densities (which might be zero in some areas), like they might do with deer, for example. Deer still have the protection of the law, setting protected seasons to safeguard breeding and young animals, and making it an offence to cause undue cruelty. For other animals, although they may not be protected, it is still an offence to destroy or degrade their habitat. The Wildlife and Countryside Act is a powerful piece of legislation.

I think we need to keep an open mind about this. The evidence before us over the past 10-15 years or so is that a beaver population has been able to get established and grow on Tayside, without any protection. Indeed, for a while we had government officials trying unsuccessfully to get owners to remove them. Our experience has been that landowners and farmers have been able to exercise a proportionate response to our beavers in most areas, and while many have been removed or culled, the greater number have survived and multiplied, and this is likely to be the case elsewhere in Scotland as well.

Can we have a situation where those people who want them can have them, and those who don't can do something about it, either by themselves, or by some authority on their behalf? If this is possible, then the road ahead will be less contentious than it might be with full protection. This will be one of the issues keeping the Environment Minister awake at night at the moment.

***Victor Clements** is a woodland advisor working in Highland Perthshire.*

## Beavers are adapting to treeless landscapes

Beavers are adapting to treeless landscapes in Scotland by building dams almost entirely out of stones and turf. In a recent survey carried out in Angus, some dams were found to consist entirely of stones carried from the stream bottom and meshed together with bankside vegetation. This is an excellent example of a species adapting its behavioural ecology to survive in sub-optimal habitats where trees are either absent or have been removed under ill-conceived and ecologically damaging riparian

management practices witnessed in Tayside recently.

**Image below:** showing dam built with stone and vegetation.



**Image below:** Water vole habitat created by beaver dam, highlighting the immense potential which beavers have to bring our Water voles back from the brink of extinction – if only the Scottish Government would afford the management of mink control the seriousness it warrants.



**Alan Ross**

## Meeting with the minister

Delegates from the SWBG recently met with Dr Aileen McLeod, Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform to discuss issues regarding her immanent decision on the future of beavers in Scotland. The group wished to focus specifically upon the immense potential value which beavers can contribute to our environment including – benefits to fish habitat and fish populations, wetland creation, benefits to pollinators and dependant agriculture, woodland creation, flood and drought management and eco-tourism, as well as discussing mitigation relating to beaver / human conflicts.

Other issues raised included highlighting environmentally damaging land practices reflecting the widespread disregard for habitat creation and protection for pollinators, upon which 2/3 of Tayside's fruit growers depend upon, as well as an almost total lack of upland native woodland / flood protective forestry, which even third world countries have adopted over recent decades.

The minister was also keen to examine the management strategies implemented by some European countries. In particular – the Netherlands which have similar beaver/farming issues as in parts of Tayside.

**Alan Ross**



## The 7th International Beaver Symposium

The symposium took place between 14th and 17th September at the Russian Research Institute of Game Management and Fur Farming, Voronezhsky Biosphere Reserve.



The symposium happens once every three years at a different place. I have attended events at Białowieża in Poland, Arnhem in the Netherlands, Freising in Bavaria, at Dubingai in Lithuania, Ivanić Grad in Croatia, and now Voronezh in Russia. Each symposium has been marked by particular high spots from the point of view of the study of the beaver and the interest of the venue. Many of us were uneasy at the choice of the Russian Research Institute because of its involvement with farming fur bearers, but I am glad I went because the Russians have taken a serious interest in beaver ecology for a long time, even if their orientation has been rather different from us in Western Europe.

The Institute of Game Management and Fur Farming has its splendid centre in the Voronezhsky Biosphere Reserve about three hundred miles south of Moscow. The area is not far from

the River Don and Rostov on Don, the port for the Azov Sea, which flows into the Black Sea, and so the Mediterranean.

Our hosts promised us a good time when the decision was taken to go to Russia at our meeting in Croatia three years ago, and they certainly

provided it. The weather was splendid. Early autumn in the vast area of southern Russia with leaves turning to gold, the crops gathered in, was breathtaking. The talks and presentations were numerous and interesting in many ways.

Two themes struck me as of special interest. The first was the continuing research into the genetic history of the Eurasian beaver. When SNH looked into the possibility of bringing beavers back to Scotland in the 1990s the conclusion was that since the remains of beavers that had been found in sediments in this country were more like beavers from Norway than elsewhere, according to physical measurement, we should have beavers from Norway. This was what the IUCN guidelines suggested at the time. Since the early 90s, however, it has become clear that the division of the surviving geographically isolated groups of beavers into eight subspecies is no longer justified.

Work on the mitochondrial DNA suggested a simple Eastern and Western division in the whole genome of the Eurasian beaver. By 2012 more work had been done on the molecular genetics of the beaver. Pavel Munclinger of the Charles University in Prague told us at the International Beaver Symposium of 2012 that even the eastern and western divisions did not hold up.

Dr Munclinger's presentation to the 7th IBS at Voronezh confirmed earlier findings. On the subject of 'right' and 'wrong' kinds of beaver for reintroduction programmes, he and other researchers agree that it is animals from mixed origins such as the beavers from Bavaria that should be used. I understand that the IUCN guidelines have been changed to allow for these advances in the science of genetics to help make decisions about reintroductions. The business about the integrity of sub-species is still a subject of contention all the same. One of the last talks of the symposium was given by Nikolai Kartashov, who was worried that incursion by introduced beavers would damage the sub specific status of the beavers of the Tuva River in Siberia. He described this sub-species as having distinct characteristics, one of which is that they do not build dams. This last point intrigued me. Where had I heard that suggestion before? Maurice Blanchet of beaver in the Rhône. Living in the mentioned this characteristic as one of the myths about the surviving population main stem of the Rhône those beavers were not known to build dams, but once they were protected and able to spread up tributaries they began to build.



Another theme of the last day of the symposium was the need to mitigate conflict. Two Austrian speakers spoke on this subject, focussing on the country round Salzburg. Conflict was inevitable in intensely farmed arable areas, they said, but the ecological importance of the beaver was such that the species would continue to be protected and measures taken to minimise impacts on agriculture. I thought this was a rather disappointing approach to the subject compared with the Swiss approach, as described in Christof Angst's brilliant 'Restoring Water Courses: The Beaver Is Our Ally' (*Revitalisation de cours d'eau: Le castor est notre allié*. [Revitalisation+de+cours+d%E2%80%99eau%3A+le+castor+est+notre+alli%C3%A9-4.pdf](#)). This document

combines restoration of rivers and the riparian edge with the provision of habitat for beavers, while minimising conflicts.

The symposium ended with a splendid enactment of a Russian folk tale, followed by a magnificent banquet. The next morning we embussed for a tour of the area that included a visit to the Palaeolithic site at Kostenky, one of the earliest sites in Eurasia to be found for the period of the first wave of modern humans that spread out of Africa. The site is characterised by the great quantities of mammoth bones and artefacts. Several figurines of female bodies, the so-called Venuses, carved from mammoth ivory were found there.

Eventually we returned to the Institute of Game Management and Fur Farming for our last night there before flying to Moscow the next morning.

Paul Ramsay Bamff Estate



## *In the Next Issue*

The Government's Decision!

Beaver Update

Tours

## Scottish Wild Beaver Group Trustees

Patrick Aird. Sue Aird. Eddie Anderson. Rhona Forrester. Jean Oudney. Louise Ramsay. Paul Ramsay. Shauna Redman. Bob Smith.

We can be contacted on [theswbg@gmail.com](mailto:theswbg@gmail.com) and a quick response is guaranteed.

We can also be contacted through our Facebook group **"Save the Free Beavers of the Tay"**

**Or directly at: Advice & Help: 07761104305**

Please use the above phone number for our beaver advice and help service. This includes a free volunteer tree wrapping service for any farmer or gardener who has a valued tree close to a waterway with beavers.

Photos supplied by Jean Oudney, Paul Ramsay, Alan Ross, Bob Smith, Rhona Forrester.



Photo. Rhona Forrester