



EARN BEAVER RHONA FORRESTER



SWBG Newsletter



SCOTTISHWILDBEAVER.ORG.UK

Welcome to our 5th Newsletter! We, the SWBG, Trustees and helpers have had another busy year giving talks, visiting schools, planting willow and working alongside others, in particular on the Stakeholder Group: Scottish Beaver Forum*, and through participation in Scottish Environment Link, to help protect our Scottish beavers. This is a critical time for beaver conservation and we hope you will respond to the Scottish Government's Consultation Paper on the future of beavers in Scotland before 6th March. More information about how to do this is available on our website www.scottishwildbeavers.org.uk. I hope you enjoy reading our latest Newsletter.

Some amazing things that beavers can do, and are already doing in Scotland.

In recent times, to our delight, a great deal of publicity has been given to the ability of beavers to mitigate flooding by slowing the flow of water from the uplands to the lowlands, and a project to bring beavers into an enclosure in the Forest of Dean for just this purpose, was given [vocal support](#) by Michael Gove, the UK Environment Minister last autumn

Our favourite animal is so transformative that sometimes people find it hard to believe how many benefits it can bring. Quite apart from being beautiful to watch and photograph, and brilliant builders of wildlife habitat, can beavers really mitigate both drought [as was being claimed in California in recent years](#) and flooding in the UK? The answer is yes, that both of these are true - both being aspects of the same behaviour - that is to say dam building. This is not an occasional and minor beaver habit. In the right context dam building can cause a massive landscape transformation in a remarkably short time.

At [Bamff, in Perthshire](#), for example, where I live, the beavers have built at least thirty dams in around ten years. Some are five feet high, and one is around 100 yards long. The building of dams slows the pace of water as it flows down from the uplands to the lowlands and out to sea. On the one hand, this provides pools of water retained on the land in times of drought for livestock, wildlife and humans. On the other it means that [water takes more time to get from the uplands to the sea](#), so after a shower of rain, the peak flow (the moment when the flood is at its highest) is much lower, as it is spread out over a longer period of time and so is much less likely to flood your house. It can be slowed down from hours to days.

Here at Bamff, in the uplands, this has all happened in woodland and wetland areas, but such changes are often not so popular on low ground farms. Some beaver supporters (and many opposers) feel that beavers and low ground farming are just incompatible and that on the low ground, beavers will just have to be removed. While this may sometimes, sadly, be true, it is also the case that the land between the low ground farms and the waterways is one of the places where beavers can do the most good. This is because of another beaver impact that is perhaps mentioned less, and that is [the measurable ability of beaver wetlands to absorb farm fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides from the run off](#). Unchecked these pollutants cause great harm to rivers and to the marine environment when they reach the sea, which is why SEPA run checks on “diffuse pollution” and publish an [interactive map](#) showing poor water quality in much of the lowground areas where beavers are resented by farmers. Nitrates and phosphates cause algal blooms in coastal waters which use up oxygen needed by fish, and this is on top of the problems caused by over-fishing and climate change. With no fish in them, these areas are known as Oceanic Dead Zones. Places which (quite apart from their intrinsic value) used to support many fishermen’s livelihoods and provide food for millions of people are now entirely unproductive and the traditional fish supper becomes less and less affordable. Oceanic Deadzones have [extended fivefold in the last fifty years, around the world](#) since chemical farming began and sadly they are plentiful and around the coast of Britain. Such farming, carried out to produce affordable food, destroys a valuable source of first class protein in the process. By growing chips we are damaging the habitat of fish.

[Beaver wetlands, allowed to develop naturally, grow abundant water plants which consume the nutrients](#) in the run off before they reach the waterways, and the sea. Beaver dams grow biofilms which absorb and neutralise pollutants. [Beaver dams also catch and hold back silt](#) which would otherwise wash downstream and also harms fish in both river and sea by damaging breeding grounds. We believe that low ground farmers should therefore be encouraged to allow beavers to set up home on the edges of their farmland, to prevent farming for food resulting in the loss of fish in the sea, and other problems caused by farm chemicals. There would be some sacrifice of land but it is nothing to the food that is lost by not doing this, now and in the future. Besides this could be managed by mitigation, controlling the depth of water held back by the dams to a level high enough to protect and encourage beavers but not so high that vast areas are flooded. The Dutch and Swiss Governments are already using beavers in the landscape for such ecosystem services. We should do it here too.

In the post-Brexit, post-Common Agricultural Policy scenario, there is an opportunity for public money to be redirected to allow this, and away from more extractive land-use, and SWBG is calling for this. Not only would beavers and fish benefit from this policy, but so would many wetland species, including our vital pollinators. We need to encourage natural processes to mitigate the damaging impacts of human activities, and beavers can play a remarkable role in this, if we can only cut them some slack!

Louise Ramsay, Co-Convener SWBG

Some amazing things that beavers can do, and are already doing in Scotland.

Photos: Paul Ramsay



Derek Gow visits Bridge of Earn



Derek Gow, beaver expert, conservationist and farmer from Devon, visited Bridge of Earn Institute for our family fun day. He answered many questions from adults and children about the local beavers. The children all had fun colouring in and learning more about the beavers. A great time was had by all. Kirsten Brewster and Elliot Mccandless done a fantastic job arranging everything and running the stall.

LET'S CELEBRATE THE BEAVERS!

**Kingfisher.** Bob Smith

I know it's a kingfisher but this one is sitting above which was once a beaver winter food raft. Beavers often gather branches, trees, twigs etc. just before winter; this is their food cache to rely on if and when times get rough through the colder months where food may not be so easily accessible. The trees that they coppice will regrow in the main but the dead wooden debris lying about is home, food and habitat for beetles and other insects etc. and will attract shrews, mice, voles and by extension, foxes, badgers and owls among many other predators. The beavers that I watch usually take willows and those chewed twigs, given the correct medium, will regrow. Underneath this raft, fish will shelter as there will be a multitude of small insects etc. to feed on. Given the amount of small fish, you will find predators. One such is our wee kingfisher. We also have otters, goosanders, herons etc. visiting this spot regularly. Due to the high volume of insects, there are a myriad of smaller birds feeding, which brings in and supports a pair of Sparrow hawks. We have had, unfortunately, a few mink on

the river (due to human intervention may I add) over the years and they have decimated the water vole population, but because of otters profiting from the presence of beavers, the mink have declined if not vanished. The voles have also shared the beaver burrows for protection and are now on the increase. Aren't beavers great in providing not only habitat but also a food source for a multitude and diverse population of other species? So, after you have looked at a beaver chewed tree and think that it's damage, Armageddon, vandalism etc. step back and have a closer look and rethink as Mother Nature doesn't do things lightly and She wastes nothing. Beavers are here for a reason and I haven't touched on anything like 10% of their benefits (these include flood mitigation, improved hydrology, reduced CO2 levels, etc.) Seriously, these animals are just incredible. Unfortunately due to man's mismanagement and meddling in our ecosystem the more recognised apex predators have been eliminated but predators there still are; Otters, badgers, foxes etc., all of which

**Ericht Beaver.** Bob Smith

can take beaver kits if not adults. So, rather than decry the reintroduction of this species, (Castor fibre- the Eurasian beaver), let's celebrate its return and work with it. Let's live and work with nature rather than have knee-jerk reactions against it, after all, we are ALL part of the same incredible ecosystem. We've lost enough of it as it is. Can we really afford to lose much more? So, please learn about how different creatures react and interact with each other and you will find that if man doesn't meddle, nature is very symbiotic and will prosper for the good of all.

**Ericht Beaver.** Bob Smith

Bob Smith. Nature lover and tour operator.
Facebook. Nature Nuts photography

RHONA'S BEAVER EDUCATION UPDATE

EDUCATION VISITS 2017

Strathallan School.



My very enjoyable visit to Forgandenny Primary School was on the 24th May. The beaver presentations were to the whole school but in separate classes. The children were already very knowledgeable about the beavers, some coming from farming backgrounds, and they all had lots of questions for me after my talks. I really enjoyed my afternoon as did the teachers and children.



Dunbarney Primary School

The talks to Dunbarney were the 3rd and 4th of May, two full mornings, so I was delighted to have Kirsten Brewster the SWBG Intern join me and her help and input was invaluable. Again the children were all full of enthusiasm and enjoyed getting hands on with the beaver pelt and all the other bits and pieces that we take with us.

Kirsten and I enjoyed a trip to Girvan Primary School on Monday 13th March. The SWBG had been sent an email from Sarah Blackie asking if anyone would like to come down and have a stall in the school about beavers. We jumped at the chance and it was definitely a trip worthwhile. We certainly both enjoyed our day as did all the children and teachers that visited our stall.



Paul Ramsay & I gave a presentation to Kettins Primary School on 3rd March. The children, as usual, had lots of questions for us both.



I gave another talk to Junior Science at Strathallan School on the 9th of May. Thanks to the teacher Mrs Julie Summersgill. Again the pupils showed lots of enthusiasm and made some fantastic posters, some of which you can see above. I'm booked again for this year too and looking forward to it already.

DEREK GOW TALK

On Friday 27th of October 2017 SWBG hosted another talk, this time by ecologist and farmer Derek Gow. This took place in the Soutar Theatre at A.K.Bell Library in Perth. Derek is a specialist in reintroductions and has worked extensively on Water vole conservation as well as the Eurasian beaver in more recent years. The talk was well attended on the night and Derek was full of enthusiasm for the beavers awaiting protection in Scotland. He described the historic evidence for beavers across the UK.

James Nairne SWBG Trustee



Photos: Jean Oudney SWBG Trustee



BLAIRGOWRIE AND RATTRAY HIGHLAND GAMES

Sunday 3rd September



Above: Kirsten Brewster along with two of our new SWBG Trustees. James Nairne and Elliot Mccandless.

The stall was a great success and very busy throughout the day.



Above: Louise Ramsay, James Nairne and Paul Ramsay.

Below: Kirsten Brewster, James Nairne, Elliot Mccandless and Rhona Forrester.



SWBG former trustee Bob Smith was asked to do a talk about beavers to his old school and has shared his experience with us.

Over the last 5 years I've delivered a good few beaver talks to schools and in September I was asked if I could deliver one to the Royal School of Dunkeld by a teacher friend of mine. Dunkeld holds a special place in my heart as I lived there in my formative years and I actually attended the primary school from primary 5 to 7. On arriving I was met by my pal and we set up the first room for the first group. It had transpired I was actually talking to every class in the school which was about 220 kids. Thankfully the talks were broken up by doing no more than two classes together but it was still an all day and very tiring event. Having initiated the delivery of school talks with SWBG, this is anything but a chore and I just love it. The presentation that I use is tried and tested now and can be tailored to take around 30mins to deliver which just gives enough time for questions. The presentation covers most topics and one of the topics is obviously what beavers eat. After talking to one group about the beavers diet and caecotrophy (ingestion of caecal feces for nutritional purposes), the kids loved the latter as you can imagine, we then discussed a few other items such as habitats, lodges, dams etc. It was when we started to discuss the positive impact the beavers have to the ecosystem that I had to laugh at one of the kids' answers. I had previously made sure the children were all aware the beavers are herbivorous and do NOT eat fish. So, imagine my amusement when I said to the children "Right guys, beavers are actually good for fish even though they build dams. They don't eat fish as they are veggies, so who can remember what they do eat"? Enter the wee wit with the perfect timing "Their own poo Bob, oh, and bark". I must admit this was the best and funniest answer I've heard from any of the children I've delivered a talk to even if it is true. It is truly amazing how much information children can soak up and I always find the gorier or funnier the story, the more likely they will remember it. If we can capture the children's interest in nature at Primary school hopefully they will come to love and respect it.



Springwatch Bob Smith and Rhona Forrester

In March 2017 I was approached by an old acquaintance that I had taken to see the beavers a few years back. Tom is a freelance photographer and filmmaker that has covered most of the UK's fauna. Tom had been contracted by the BBC to cover my local family of beavers in Tayside and was looking for my assistance for Springwatch. Not long after Tom being in touch I was contacted direct from the Springwatch team to see if I was available to do a bit of filming with them. Always eager to promote the beavers when I can, I was more than willing to help out. This was a bit more of a task than I'd originally envisioned as I had to secure the landowners permission to have access, get numerous waivers and disclaimers signed, secure a second location (just in case of a disaster) and all the previous paraphernalia mentioned before. Thankfully Paul Ramsay allowed us to film at Bamff as a 2nd location if required and this offer was eagerly taken up for doing a pre-recorded show.

The 2 weeks prior to the live shows I was asked to keep an eye on the river to see what times the animals were appearing. It was essential that the animals were showing between 2000 and 2100hrs so Springwatch could air them "live". The full fortnight that I had spent at the river every night had the beaver family appearing between those hours regularly so all looked promising. On the Friday prior to the live shoots, it was decided that was when the pre-recorded show would be filmed. I met the crew late afternoon and was introduced to them all. They were all lovely and I informed Martin Hughes-Games that I had actually taken his Uncle and Aunt on a beaver tour about 3 years ago, this was a regular source of amusement as the evening progressed. After a look around for the best locations to film, our shoot finally began. I must admit I was impressed with the technology being used, state of the art camera's, drones, quality sound instruments etc. Martin and the crew were very interested in the work that castor had been up to and although there were only a couple of minutes shown on the Monday night, we had actually recorded a couple of hours worth of beaver facts, dams, lodges, workings etc. As I was away on holiday on the Saturday I couldn't help out at the live show but Rhona took my place.

Bob

I got a very warm welcome from the BBC team and was then introduced to Martin. I took them down to the river where they started their rehearsals. I watched with great interest. We then returned to the location where the campervans were and was treated to a Pizza for tea! I then got the chance to speak to more of the BBC crew and Nia, who was in charge of the live filming. I then joined her in the vehicle and watched the programme go live from the studio. It was amazing to watch Michaela Strachan and Chris Packham live doing their rehearsal before the show started.

Rhona



BIRDS, BEAVERS & BIODIVERSITY.

John Lister-Kaye, renowned environmentalist, nature writer and founder/owner of Aigas Field Study Centre near Beaulieu in Inverness-shire, gave an excellent talk in the AK Bell Library theatre on 7th April for Scottish Wild Beaver Group. The subject we gave him was 'Birds, Beavers and Biodiversity.' He arrived with a family of taxidermy beavers - a mother and 2 kits which made an excellent stage set. The event was very well attended and much appreciated by the audience. He told us at the outset that he did not intend to stick rigidly to the title, and in fact his fascinating talk ranged widely over related topics, including wildcats, and a reading from his award winning book 'Gods of the Morning'. Sir John managed to touch on the tricky subject of beavers and farmers with tact, and won the support of a broad spectrum of the audience. The event was very successful for the Group and money was raised from ticket sales and from the sale of our popular t-shirts and mugs. This was the first in a series of talks planned by Scottish Wild Beaver Group.

Louise Ramsay Co-Convener SWBG



Photos taken by Paul Ramsay Bamff Estate showing the work of the beavers.

Dams are built to retain and manage water levels. This can ensure that the entrances to their living quarters remain submerged allowing them to enter and exit safely.



***The Scottish Beaver Forum** was established in 2017 and consists of a wide range of stakeholders, representing land use, fisheries and environmental interests. Scottish Natural Heritage chair the Forum where SWBG trustee James Nairne has been particularly valuable in presenting our position to the Forum because of his considerable legal experience and keen understanding of ecology.

The recent discussions around farming support post-Brexit have not gone unnoticed. In fact through our representative's input to the Scottish Beaver Forum and our recent admission to the Scottish Environment LINK we have collectively put much thought into this topic. Scottish Wild Beaver Group is aware that many farmers are working alongside nature, but there are also those that do not seem to recognise their role as custodians of the environment. Beavers are a keystone species because of their unique ability to create wetland, in turn creating space for many species and improving water quality. Wetland is becoming increasingly rare in the world, including in Scotland. We believe that farmers who support native wildlife and provide ecosystem services such as wetland creation and improved water quality should be rewarded.

Through the Scottish Environment LINK we have had the opportunity to feed into some of the organisations' sub-groups and to consider the various blueprints for policy that have been produced. LINK members have highlighted in their position paper that they want to see a continued investment in public support of rural areas but that public money for public goods should direct this.

http://www.scotlink.org/wp/files/LINK-Future-of-Farming-and-Rural-Land-Management_March2017.pdf

The Scottish Wildlife Trust have put forward a four tier model for agricultural support; the first tier being regulation to incorporate soil health then there are three payment levels; Natural Capital Maintenance, Enhancement and Restoration respectively.

<https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/our-work/our-advocacy/policies-and-positions/land-stewardship-policy/>

Although we recognise that there is a role for mitigation of reintroduced beavers, overall we feel that widespread culling is not appropriate because of the benefits that beavers bring. They are both a Natural Capital asset themselves but also have the ability to further restore Scotland's wider environment thus improving our shared Natural Capital. With less than 400 beavers in Scotland (compared to 60,000 in Norway) there is little need for culling. Instead, more appropriate mitigation needs to be invested in and trialled where necessary. Beavers are not a problem 'to be gotten rid of' but inconsiderate land management decisions resulting in soil degradation may well be!

Kirsten Brewster SWBG Member

Scottish Wild Beaver Group Trustees

Sue Stirling- Aird. Elliot Mccandless. James Nairne. Rhona Forrester. Jean Oudney. Louise Ramsay.

We can be contacted on scottishwildbeaver@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.

JOIN US!

We would be delighted if you would join us and become a member of the Scottish Wild Beaver Group.

Members are invited to complimentary beaver walks and receive updates on our activities through newsletters.

Members are also invited to our events and offered opportunities to take part in voluntary activities such as tree wrapping and willow planting.

Please print off the Subscription form on our membership page <http://scottishwildbeavers.org.uk/donate/> and complete accordingly.

THANK YOU!