

Cotswold Water Park Society
Position Statement on beaver re-introduction to Britain

History

The Eurasian beaver was formerly a native mammal to Britain and is thought to have survived in Wales until 1188, in Scotland until the 16th century and a remnant population is believed to have survived in Yorkshire until the latter part of the 18th Century. Beavers were hunted to extinction for their fur, meat and anal gland secretions.

Britain's mammal species have suffered a dramatic decline over the centuries, and wherever possible, steps should be taken to reverse this decline. The beaver has now been re-introduced across most of its former geographic range, with the exception of Britain and Liechtenstein. We believe that a re-introduction of this species to Britain is long overdue.

Beavers

Beavers are 'keystone species' which means that they have a major effect on shaping their environment, which also affects many, if not all, other species with which they share their environment. It is believed that beavers in Britain could create habitats suitable for up to 32 species in need of nature conservation action, including the threatened water vole, the otter and the great crested newt.

Human/Beaver interactions

We acknowledge that there are some concerns about beaver re-introduction but believe that the net gain from having this species once again shape our environment would far outweigh any problems that may result from their release. The experiences from those European countries where beavers have been re-introduced suggest that most problems are minimal and easily prevented and/or resolved. The Netherlands is one of the most densely populated countries in the world and beavers live here and are celebrated as a symbol of natural restoration. In Bavaria, the yearly damage caused by beavers is considerably less than the daily damage caused by game species. The advantage of the re-introduction of this species across most of Europe is that re-introduction, its consequences, and the appropriate management of beaver populations, have already been well-studied and thoroughly researched.

Re-introductions to Britain

In May 2008, the Scottish Government granted a conditional licence for the trial release of up to four families of the Eurasian beaver into Knapdale Forest, mid-Argyll, Scotland. This will become the first formal re-introduction of a native mammal to the United Kingdom following the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Reintroduction Guidelines and has been subject to considerable research over the last ten years. The trial will

determine if beavers can thrive in the Scottish environment and will look at their impact on habitats, other species and the local economy.

The Cotswold Water Park Society fully supports the Scottish beaver re-introduction trial and would fully support a similarly well-planned and managed trial re-introduction into lowland England. Natural England has commissioned a feasibility study for the re-introduction of beavers into England and we await the findings of this study.

We are pleased to be working closely with the Lower Mill Estate in the Cotswold Water Park who introduced a group of Eurasian beavers into an enclosed lake in 2005. The impact of these beavers on their environment is being closely monitored and it is hoped that the findings will provide further data to inform the debate on whether to re-introduce beavers into the wider countryside.

The Cotswold Water Park Biodiversity Action Plan 2007-2016 contains a vision for the Cotswold Water Park that by 2070, the Cotswold Water Park will be one the largest man-made freshwater wetland complexes in Europe and will offer a fantastic environment for many mammal species, including, it is hoped, the Eurasian beaver.

Contact details

For further information on any of the issues raised in the Position Statement please contact Dr Phoebe Carter, phoebe.carter@waterpark.org or call 01793 752413.

For information about the Scottish Beaver Trial please log onto www.scottishbeavers.org.uk or call 01236 617113.