

Tayside Beaver Group – 3rd meeting

Thursday 16th August 2012
SNH Battleby Office

Present:

David Bale (DB) (SNH) – Chair
James Scott (JS) (SNH)
Danielle Casey (DC) (SNH)
Ian Lorimer (IL) (SEPA)
Hugh Dignon (HD) (SG – Wildlife Management Unit)
Simon Jones (SJ) (SWT)
David Summers (DS) (Tay District Salmon Fishery Board)
Roisin Campbell-Palmer (RCP) (Royal Zoological Society Scotland)
Ian Mackintosh (IM) (NFUS)
Alan Ross (AR) (Scottish Wild Beaver Group)
Jamie Farquhar (JF) (ConFor)
Ross McEwing (RM) (Royal Zoological Society Scotland)

1. Welcome and apologies

Welcome to Ross McEwing of the Royal Zoological Society Scotland. Apologies received from David Gemmell of Scottish Land and Estates.

2. Note of last meeting and Action Points

The note was agreed as accurate.

AP2/1 – RCP to provide 2 sides of A4 outlining priority diseases, methods, resources (money and time), sample size, IUCN guidelines and any other useful information related to health and genetic testing. She will use this to present a proposal for the necessary research work.

DISCHARGED

AP2/2 – JS to liaise with SG over the politics of killing beavers for testing as compared to re-release (once Roisin has provided her note.)

ONGOING – RCP has provided her note. HD will now discuss the options with Nick Halfhide (SNH).

AP2/3 – JS to attend SWBG meetings to discuss further and agree the procedure for the legal handling of beaver samples.

DISCHARGED – JS is welcome to attend the SWBG meetings.

AP2/4 – JS to take forward the suggestion of forward population modelling using the results of the current survey as a baseline.

DISCHARGED – JS is awaiting the results of the report. This links to the work proposed by Glenn Iason.

AP2/5 – All to send details of their ‘contributions in kind’ to DC.

DISCHARGED – nothing received so far but this can be covered as and when possibilities for contributions arise.

AP2/6 – JS to set up the group taking forward the mitigation work to be carried out on David Gemmell’s land.

DISCHARGED – we need to be certain of the legal requirements. JS has a new action point to liaise with SEPA over the possible scenarios and the likelihood of requiring a CAR licence.

The work may be considered as trash removal, for which a licence is not required. A licence is required, however, for pipe laying. In terms of timing, summer would be better. We should aim to avoid autumn/winter when animals will be food-caching.

AP2/7 – JS/DB to come up with an alternative name to the ‘Tayside Beaver Group’ as this could cause confusion with the ‘Scottish Wild Beaver Group’ website.

DISCHARGED – JS is working with a contractor on the website. It will be a standalone site. Associated groups will have links to it from their own websites.

The group agreed on ‘Tayside Beaver Study Group’ as the new name.

AP2/8 – JS to write an article for Farming Leader by 27th July that raises awareness of the Group and lets people know what to do.

CARRIED FORWARD – IM to provide JS contact details.

AP2/9 – Kate Maitland to scope the possibility of JS attending NFUS meetings to raise awareness.

DISCHARGED – new action point for IM to provide JS with meeting dates.

AP2/10 – RCP to send information on Bavarian beaver management to DC for circulation to the Group.

DISCHARGED

AP2/11 – SJ and RCP to confer about information available of similar experiences in Europe and pass to DC for circulation.

DISCHARGED – German paper is currently being translated to English.

AP2/12 – Danielle to set up a Doodle poll for the next meeting sometime in August.

DISCHARGED

3. Genetics and health studies

Health

The group considered the proposed health screening options presented in RCP’s paper and agreed on option D – full health screening. This is the scale of testing carried out at Knapdale and results will therefore be comparable. The approximate cost is £7.5k (excluding cost of trapping, post and packing of samples and vet call out fees for blood sampling). A sample of at least 30 animals is needed for the results to be statistically viable. It was recommended that all samples go to the RZSS for handling but SNH is nervous about work being carried out by those making the proposals. Assurance was given that all work will be carried out by labs independent of the RZSS. Caution was advised over public reaction to positive results when testing for native diseases and parasites. However, the process must be open and public and Ministers will want answer to all the possible questions. A procedure needs to be agreed for dealing with animals that have tested positive for native and/or non-native diseases. SG vets are to see details of the proposed health checks once they have been confirmed.

With the Defra risk assessment on *Echinococcus multilocularis* in mind, it is important to test for non-native diseases from a public health point of view. There has been an increase of Johne’s disease in farm animals and, although it can be vaccinated against, it was suggested that it would be interesting to find out if beavers are carriers. It is a water-borne disease with no known current wildlife vectors.

All personnel will be properly trained and the welfare of the animals will be paramount. SNH cannot provide any staff resource for the health and genetics studies.

Genetics

The RZSS's Beaver Genome project has produced a list of 348 genetic markers which will be used when testing the Tayside beavers. These markers can identify the degree of relatedness between European and Tayside beavers. The RZSS has developed tests which can produce comprehensive results within 2 hours, including whether the animal is European or Canadian. They also have tools that can help manage a reintroduction or augment a population if needed. Genetic studies can also provide retrospective information on the origins of the beaver population in Tayside.

The group thought it unlikely that information collected on the source of escaped beavers could be used to prosecute owners of private collections but that prosecutions for any future escapes could not be ruled out.

The question of which evolutionary unit should be used to found a new population, if that is the final decision, is beyond the remit of this group. Ministers and others will make any such decisions based on the information we provide.

The cost for 30-50 samples will be between £5k and £10k. The 30 or so samples must be randomised which will depend on the spread of territories and participation of landowners. If it looks like the population has been supplemented (individuals deliberately introduced) more samples will need to be taken. Testing must be carried out within the next 6 months as their current stock of chemical reagents needed for the process expires in February 2013.

Blood samples are needed for the best genetic tests. This requires trapping, again raising the question of what to do with animals after trapping. We need to seek agreement from landowners before re-releasing animals back onto their land. Re-release will be at the exact point of capture. We have the option to use carcasses to augment the study but we would have to be certain of where they came from. There was some discussion about tagging animals which have been tested and those which have tested positive.

The group discussed a systematic way of approaching landowners. We could use SASA or RPID information or simply target core areas first. It was suggested that maps from the survey could be used to help identify landowners through NFUS, TDSFB and SLE. When contacting them, we should highlight the option to provide carcasses to augment to study. We await the results of the population survey before confirming the procedure to be used.

There was some discussion of the benefits of tagging captive populations separately from wild ones – to prevent leakage and aid return of escapees.

It was agreed that all health and genetic related testing should be carried out in one block of about 6 weeks in order to reduce costs. It is easier to catch beavers whilst they are swimming so boats will be required. Trappers must ensure there is no conflict with fishing interests when carrying out their work. Lamping will also be used.

Ministers have made the decision to tolerate the current beaver population in Tayside. There is no intention on the part of SG to remove/euthanise any of the trapped animals. The group will consider the appropriate course of action should this position change, eg. for reasons of disease, etc. This means that it is essential to be able to license the release of trapped beavers before the capture process is started. Indeed agreement by land owners for the re-release of trapped beavers at the trapping location would be a pre-requisite for deciding where to trap in practice.

4. Update on Tayside population survey

The draft final report indicates there are 145 animals. The number has been extrapolated from direct lodge observations and activity within known territories. The final report is expected towards the end of August '12. The next step is to produce a timetable of the various studies to be carried out. Ideally trapping would occur in autumn. JS is exploring the option of a project officer to take the work forward (JS is moving to another role within SNH but will continue to work with the Tayside Beaver Study Group to some extent).

5. Habitat selection study proposal by Glenn Iason (Hutton Institute)

The group is supportive of the study notwithstanding the following points:

- there are reservations of the usefulness of the study in Tayside
- beaver numbers in Tayside are small
- the population has not yet utilised all the available habitat options and they are very adaptive
- the results will be based on a snapshot in time
- the results won't necessarily be representative of a Scotland wide population.

SNH is happy to support the proposal but the group's money will not be used to pay for it. Glenn Iason is seeking funding from other sources. The Beaver-Salmonid Working Group may be interested in the results of this study.

6. Conflict Management

Update on research report regarding use of derogations in Europe

- the report is being quality assured by solicitors for legal accuracy. It will be sent to all members as soon as it is approved for release.

Discussion around paper on Beaver Management in Norway by Parker and Rosell previously circulated – what might we wish to aim for in Scotland if beavers are reintroduced? Can we trial this in Tayside?

- the Norwegian situation is very different
- they have domestic legislation as opposed to European
- landowners own small areas of land and there is more collaboration between them
- beavers are hunted (in spring).

The group agreed it is a long way off before it can provide its views on conflict management within EU legislation but that it makes sense to manage issues before problems arise.

Verbal report on any recent management issues/action arising in Tayside

JS has received photos of beaver damage to barley crops. This has limited agricultural impact. He is meeting Transport Scotland (TS) to discuss gnawing signs and ring barking of poplars. TS are keen to understand how this could affect their work and the risks involved.

AR expressed concerns about advice given to landowners about handling beavers. He is concerned that, although they have the right to shoot the animals, landowners are not being encouraged to try other means of managing them. Landowners are being encouraged to send carcasses to the group. AR was given permission to handle dead animals under JS's licence.

7. Public relations

Website - the group is keen to have the website up and running before anything is published. Content will include proposals for and results of various studies.

Press releases – SNH and SG will draft press releases and will seek comment from a relevant member of the group.

8. AOB

Autumnwatch – Springwatch went to Knapdale. They want to come back in autumn but as a bigger investigative piece looking at beavers throughout Europe. Filming starts in early September. It may be too early in the group’s proceedings to provide anything useful but it is interesting to the BBC as it is a breaking story. The group hasn’t been approached directly but the main characters will be involved, including landowners, fishery board, SNH, etc. It would be an opportunity to show other countries what is happening in Scotland. Agreed that SJ would get in touch with the Autumnwatch team.

Archnetwork – no-one from the group has submitted an application for the trip to Bavaria in October. HD and Nick Halfhide (SNH) are planning a short visit to Bavaria next year. Others are welcome to join them.

9. DONM

The next meeting will be in 2-3 months time. The next meeting will hopefully include a visit to David Gemmell’s land to view any demonstration mitigation work.

REFERENCE	ACTION	LEAD	STATUS
	Action Points from 14 June		
AP2/2	Liaise with SG over the politics of killing beavers captured for testing as compared to re-release (once Roisin has provided her note.) ONGOING – RCP has provided her note. HD will now discuss the options with Nick Halfhide (SNH).	JS HD	ONGOING
AP2/8	Write an article for Farming Leader by 27 th July that raises awareness of the Group and lets people know what to do. CARRIED FORWARD – IM to provide JS contact details.	JS IM	CARRIED FORWARD
	Action Points from 16 August		
AP3/1	Circulate information on European studies of population and spread of escaped beavers.	RCP	
AP3/2	Liaise with SEPA over the possible scenarios relating to mitigation work to be carried out on David Gemmell’s land and the likelihood of requiring a CAR licence.	JS	
AP3/3	Provide JS with NFUS meeting dates.	IM	
AP3/4	Take forward exploration of separate tagging of captive beavers and wild beavers and possible approaches.	JS	

AP3/5	Establish a sub-group which will formulate an action plan for trapping, testing, releasing, etc.	JS	
AP3/6	Create a map of landowners who are willing to participate in the health and genetic studies.	IM (NFUS), JF (ConFor), DG (SLE) and 1 other.	
AP3/7	Contact Paul Ramsay to explore the possibility of electrofishing of his streams, to see if they provide any effects of beaver dams upon migratory fish. Inform the Beaver-Salmonid Group of this work.	DS	
AP3/8	Provide DS with Beaver-Salmonid Group contact details.	JS	
AP3/9	As there is due to be a lot of activity between this meeting and the next, it was agreed that we should keep each other informed of progress by e-mail, so that we can maintain awareness and each have the opportunity to be involved as necessary.	All	