

Tayside Beaver Study Group – 4th Meeting
CONFIRMED NOTE OF MEETING

Wednesday 28th November 2012
 SNH Battleby Office

Present

David Bale (Chair – SNH)
 James Scott (SNH)
 Neil Mitchell (SNH)
 Ian Lorimer (SEPA)
 Alan Ross (SWBG)
 David Gemmell (SLE)
 Ian Mackintosh (NFUS)
 Andrew Taylor (SG)
 Simon Jones (SWT)
 Roisin Campbell-Palmer (RZSS)
 Danielle Casey (SNH)

Apologies

David Summers (TDSFB)

1. Welcome

DB welcomed NM who will be assisting the TBSG, particularly with the trapping program for genetic and health studies, for 4 months.

2. Note of last meeting and previous action points

The note of the last meeting was agreed as accurate.

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.)	JS	OVERTAKEN – a condition for trapping at any location is agreement by the landowner that beavers will be released at point of capture unless for exceptional reasons.
	ONGOING – RCP has provided her note. HD will now discuss the options with Nick Halfhide (SNH).	HD	
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.	NM	CARRIED FORWARD
	CARRIED FORWARD – IM to provide NM with contact details and publication dates.	IM	
Action Points from 16 August			
AP3/1	Circulate information on European studies of population and spread of escaped beavers.	RCP	DISCHARGED
AP3/2	Liaise with SEPA over the possible scenarios relating to mitigation work to be	JS	DISCHARGED

	carried out on David Gemmell's land and the likelihood of requiring a CAR licence.		
AP3/3	Provide JS with NFUS meeting dates.	IM	ONGOING
AP3/4	Take forward exploration of separate tagging of captive beavers and wild beavers and possible approaches.	JS	ONGOING – awaiting legal advice on treatment of captive populations.
AP3/5	Establish a sub-group which will formulate an action plan for trapping, testing, releasing, etc.	JS	ONGOING
AP3/6	Create a map of landowners who are willing to participate in the health and genetic studies.	NM, IM, JF, DG and DS	ONGOING
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	ONGOING
AP3/8	Provide DS with Beaver-Salmonid Group contact details.	JS	DISCHARGED
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	DISCHARGED

3. Dissemination of Commissioned Survey Report

The group discussed some concerns about releasing detailed maps showing the exact locations of lodges and other signs of beavers. It was pointed out that there is legislation in place to deal with disturbance of European Protected Species and other illegal activities.

The group agreed that SNH has an obligation under the Environmental Information Regulations to publish the report in full given that none of the information contained within the report is subject to exception. It will be published on the SNH website sometime after 10 December when the Minister is available.

DG stated that the report gives the impression that farmers are not concerned about the impacts of beavers when in fact there is huge concern, particularly amongst arable farmers. JS confirmed that only a handful of farmers were interviewed for the report. IM suggested that farmers are willing to live with beavers if the problems can be resolved.

JS informed the group that there are ~530 landowners on the Tay SAC. They have all received a copy of the map showing possible beaver locations. Only 1 has responded to express interest while another 3 have raised concerns over re-release of beavers on designated habitat and asked for a Habitat Regulations Assessment. There is, however, SWT, RSPB and a few other sites that can be used for trapping.

IM agreed to provide an NFUS quote for the SNH press release connected with the publication of the report.

4. Genetics and Health Study

The meeting discussed the need for testing to see if the Tayside beavers could be carrying *Echinococcus*. It was agreed that not to do so would leave an important question concerning the possible introduction of a serious, non native parasite into the wild unanswered. The minister would certainly wish to have this question addressed before making a decision on the reintroduction of beavers to Scotland. Having established this, it was important for the TBSG to understand what testing would entail. This went beyond the health tests for the Knapdale beavers as they were known to come from a country which is currently free of *Echinococcus*.

RCP informed the group there is one person in Scotland capable of testing for *Echinococcus multilocularis* in live beavers and he works for RZSS. It is a veterinary procedure involving surgical equipment. It is possible to do in the field, but is not really a viable option in this case, because it would require the vet to be on local stand-by. Instead, the plan is to transport the animals to Edinburgh Zoo for the procedure in a travel crate. The animals will be anaesthetised a small camera inserted through an incision in the abdominal area, to inspect the liver. The turn around time will be 6 hours maximum (mainly determined by travel time). Any animals showing EM cysts will be euthanased. Only adult animals will be tested in this way as it is only animals imported directly from infected countries that are likely to be carrying the parasite. Young animals will just be subject to the general health screening tests in the field. Traps will be operational from dusk to dawn and will be checked early each morning.

The group agreed that a pre-Christmas trial will be carried out on Dec 10-15, on SWT and RSPB land and at Delvine, to test out the logistics and other practicalities. It was also suggested that being able to test animals in captive collections would provide useful information on possible origin of imported animals and whether they could be used for reintroduction/reinforcement.

All animals trapped and tested are to be microchipped so that we do not risk checking them more than once. It will also help to identify any animals subsequently found to present some significant issue re their health or genetic origins.

SG and SASA (Science & Advice for Scottish Agriculture) are developing scat survey techniques which should be able to identify if EM had got into the primary hosts. Such hosts (eg foxes) host adult EM tapeworms in the gut. These excrete eggs in their faeces as part of the alternating host cycle. These eggs are then ingested accidentally on vegetable food by the secondary hosts (primarily voles) but may also include beavers. The eggs hatch and encyst themselves in the liver and other organs. If the secondary host is then eaten by a fox, the cysts develop into adult tapeworms in the gut and the cycle continues.

IM asked about the potential for tested animals to be sterilised. Such an operation would increase the amount of time under anaesthesia. It would also do little to stem their increase at this time as so many would remain unsterilized. If, in 2015, an eventual decision was taken not to reintroduce beavers, the population would still be small enough to remove from the area.

AR raised concerns about trapping/testing carrying on into the breeding season and the impact on lactating females. RCP informed the group that trapping will be undertaken during mating season and there is a risk that females in early pregnancy could be trapped. However, given the short turnaround, there will be no impact on mating. Heavily pregnant females will not be transported and trapping will hopefully be completed by the times kits are due to be born and females are lactating.

JS confirmed that a sample size of only 5-10 would still be useful as it would provide more information than can be obtained from post-mortem.

The group agreed that the use of motorised boats whilst trapping is not a viable option. It would involve a petrol engine and require at least 2 people – one to control the boat and another to ‘net’ the animals. It is the preferred method if the water conditions are correct but it would create a complex situation regarding land ownership and access rights. RCP stated that it is easier to trap beavers in winter (via Bavarian traps) as vegetation dies back. However, they become inactive by December and mating season is January-February. They start to become active again by the end of February – pre-spring; before vegetation grows back. RCP is the first port of call should anyone find trapped animals.

SNH confirmed they would not licence the re-release of any North American beavers discovered as part of this process. The group agreed that any North American beavers should be euthanased.

RCP advised the group that samples taken for the health/genetic study would be stored and would be a valuable resource for other researchers. The RZSS would normally make these available but in this instance they would belong to RZSS and SNH on behalf of the TBSG. The group agreed to this in principle but wished for a Memorandum of Understanding to be drawn up to set out the conditions for sharing.

The group agreed that the approach to land owners by NM would provide a good opportunity to gauge the views of land owners concerning beavers. A standard set of questions would help to focus the information gained. This would also assist with our report to the Minister for 2015.

5. Website

Draft text for the website was presented and discussed. This was necessary before the contractor working on the website can create a mock-up of what it could look like. It would be good to get the site up and running before publication of the population survey report. The site will also address criticisms that people do not know what the group is doing and it needs input from everyone, not just SNH. This includes photos. It probably won't go on beyond the lifespan of the group but there is a need to ensure a mechanism is in place to deal with issues in the long-term. The site should include generic, self-help advice for certain issues and a FAQ page (see [SWT's Beaver Trial FAQ page](#)). The group agreed that SNH should be the 1st point of contact for anyone with queries on beaver related issues. The contact details should be generic in case individuals move on and change role.

Project Officer

AR informed the group that SWBG has applied to a community wind farm group for funding for a beaver project officer (PO). This could be geographically limited and focused on education and engaging with the public and landowners. He hopes that this and the TBSG PO could work together. He is currently awaiting a response on the application.

SJ advised AR to wait until the group can get a PO in place to cover the whole Tay catchment.

6. Practical Mitigation

Delvine Beaver Deceiver

SJ showed some photos of the Beaver Deceiver installation at Delvine. It cost approximately £500 per pipe using high spec materials but, with further work it may be possible to find cheaper and more flexible spec materials to reduce cost. With experience, the procedure would take 2 people about 4 hours to put in place.

DG confirmed that it works well in normal weather but water levels rise in heavy rain. Installation of the device needs to be looked at and improved.

IL stated that this location did not require a CAR licence but that this may not always be the case, especially given concerns over fish passage. Gauges were not installed at Delvine as there were too many confounding factors.

The group agreed that there is a need to find suitable sites where it can practice culvert protection.

Other Issues

- Trees at Forfar
BEAR have felled some trees as a precaution. The trees were left and now show signs of beaver activity. The site has been earmarked for protection. It is possible to use this site for trials – culvert protection, tree protection, trapping. It is Government owned land and there are about 20 big trees.
- Floodbank at George Flemings land
This offers an opportunity to gain experience on protecting flood banks from beaver burrow activity.

7. Opportunities for further research

Socioeconomic

Impacts of the Knapdale trial are being studied. The group considered the possibility of a similar study in Tayside, perhaps by extending the Knapdale contract. This would provide information on benefits and costs of beavers which could be included in advice to the Minister.

Productivity of lodges

Studying the productivity of lodges would provide information on the genetic robustness of populations and, therefore, their suitability as founder populations. This would need to be in place by July 2013 to allow enough time before reporting to the Minister in 2015. SWBG would be happy to assist with this work.

8. AOB

The group agreed that a management strategy, that will inform Ministerial decisions, should be an output of the TBSG. It will draw on scenarios from here and abroad and will cover topics including land use, socioeconomics and ecology. It will be finalised in time for the Ministerial decision in 2015.

9. DONM

The next meeting will be in February and will include a site visit. Avoid 11 and 12 Feb – NFUS Centenary Conference.

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	with contact details and publication dates.		
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AP3/5	Establish a sub-group which will formulate an action plan for trapping, testing, releasing, etc.	JS	Discharged
AP3/6	Create a map of landowners who are willing to participate in the health and genetic studies and contact them with details.	NM, IM, JF, DG, DS.	ONGOING
AP3/7	Contact Paul Ramsay to explore the possibility of electrofishing of his streams, to see if they show any effects of beaver dams upon migratory fish. Inform the Beaver-Salmonid Working Group of this work.	DS	ONGOING
Action Points from 28 November			
AP4/1	Add links to notes of all meetings and other relevant papers to website once it is up and running	JS/NM	
AP4/2	Remove “Dam building apart” from statement in main findings on the population survey report.	DB	
AP4/3	Provide a quote for the news release in relation to publication of the population survey report.	IM	
AP4/4	Develop a pro forma of standardised questions to survey landowners. See RZSS’s Europe and SBT’s land use questionnaires. This will help build a picture of issues, perceived or otherwise, and public perception.	NM	
AP4/5	Circulate information to the group of action required if dead beavers found inside the traps.	JS	
AP4/6	Carry out a pre-Christmas trial on Dec 10-15 on SWT, RSPB and other sites to sort out logistics and procedures.	NM, RCP	
AP4/7	Contact owners of private collections seeking permission to test their animals.	NM	
AP4/8	Discuss and agree contact details for the website. SNH will probably be the 1 st point of contact but in a dissemination role. Call-out contact for collection carcasses is also needed but this could be part of SNH’s dissemination role.	DB, JS, NM	
AP4/9	All to canvass members of their groups/organisations for examples of FAQs and send these to NM. NM to inform David	All, NM	

	Summers of this action.		
AP4/10	Draft an FAQ page and circulate round the group for comment. The language used should be accessible by the general public. It should include FAQs on a number of issues including damming and legislation.	DB, JS, NM	
AP4/11	All to send any beaver related photos for use on the website to DC.	All, DC	
AP4/12	Discuss job descriptions for 1 or 2 POs. If there are to be 2 POs (SWBG and TBSG), their roles would need to be distinct from one another.	AR, JS, SJ	
AP4/13	Send images of beaver deceiver installation to DC for the website.	SJ	
AP4/14	Send a copy of the practical mitigation DVD to IL.	DC	
AP4/15	Speak to George Fleming about burrows in floodbank – whose land is it on; is the burrow still active? This offers an opportunity to gain experience on practical mitigation.	NM	
AP4/16	Discuss methodology of socioeconomic study with Martin Gaywood, SNH, and Dominic Moran, SAC.	JS	
AP4/17	Provide methodology for studying the productivity of lodges.	RCP	
AP4/18	Discuss and draft an MOA in relation to sharing spare samples derived from the health/genetic testing with universities (which will belong to SNH/RZSS).	JS, RCP	
AP4/19	Set up a doodle poll for the next meeting in Feb.	DC	