

Tayside Beaver Study Group – 7th Meeting
Minute of Meeting
Friday 22nd November 2013
SNH, Battleby

Present

David Bale (Chair – SNH)
 James Scott (SNH)
 Helen Dickinson (TBSG Project Officer)
 Louise Ramsay (SWBG)
 Ian Lorimer (SEPA)
 Scott Petrie (SLE)
 Ian Mackintosh (NFUS)
 Andrew Taylor (SG) (1st part of the meeting only)
 Roisin Campbell-Palmer (RZSS)
 Sean Dugan (BSWG, SFCC)
 Danielle Casey (SNH)

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed Scott Petrie who will replace David Gemmell as the SLE representation on the group, and Louise Ramsay. He also noted apologies from Jamie Farquhar (ConFor), Simon Jones (SWT) and David Summers (TDSFB).

2. Minutes of last meeting, Action Points and Matters Arising

Minutes

With some minor amendments, the minutes were agreed as accurate.

Update on previous Action Points

REF	ACTION	LEAD	STATUS
Action Points from 16 August			
AP3/4	Take forward exploration of separate tagging of captive beavers and wild beavers and possible approaches.	JS	ONGOING – All beavers caught as part of health screening process are PIT tagged. Possible tagging associated with licence conditions being explored for collections - JS
AP3/7	Contact Paul Ramsay to explore the possibility of electrofishing of his streams, to gain knowledge of the effects of beaver dams upon migratory fish. Inform the Beaver-Salmonid Working Group of this work.	SD / HeD	ONGOING – Sean contacted David S – awaiting a response. Going ahead with electrofishing on Lunan Burn. Louise stated she is still keen for this to go ahead at Bamff.
AP6/1	HeD to follow up on the issues with the beaver deceiver at Delvine.		DISCHARGED
AP6/2	DB to add a question requesting information on locations including National Grid References.		DISCHARGED
AP6/3	DB to add a request for email addresses to the land owner questionnaire.		DISCHARGED

AP6/4	DB to move the Data Protection information to the end of the questionnaire along with the question asking for contact details.		DISCHARGED
AP6/5	HeD and DS to discuss possible contacts on the main stem of the River Tay.		DISCHARGED
AP6/6	HeD to contact Scott Petrie to discuss SLE contacts.		DISCHARGED
AP6/7	HeD and IM to discuss NFUS contacts within the catchment.		DISCHARGED
AP6/8	DB to invite Gerhard Schwab, should he come to Scotland for other purposes, to a TBSG meeting to discuss burrowing in banks.		DISCHARGED – Gerhard not invited to TBSG as he did not travel to Scotland for any other reason.
AP6/9	RCP and HeD to draw up an action plan for taking the survey programme forward, including an initial meeting with volunteers and a training session. AR to assist with training.		DISCHARGED
AP6/10	AR to provide details on volunteers availability and lodges they are willing to survey.		DISCHARGED
AP6/11	SJ to make enquiries at local SWT centres about recruiting volunteers.		DISCHARGED
AP6/12	HD to speak to Claudia Rowse, SNH Rural Development Manager, about the feasibility of a socio-economic study in Tayside.		DISCHARGED
AP6/13	Claudia R to approach Dominic Moran for the methodology used at Knapdale.		DISCHARGED
AP6/14	JS to write a press release on the health and genetics study including a request for trapping sites and completion of the questionnaire. HeD contacts details to be provided.		DISCHARGED
AP6/15	JS to liaise with RCP to establish workload and risks associated with such a strategy based on practical experience gained at SBT.		DISCHARGED
AP6/16	HeD to explore opportunities to attend events in Tayside and agree these with SJ and JS.		DISCHARGED
AP6/17	IM to provide contact details to HeD re. the Angus Show.		DISCHARGED
AP6/18	DC to arrange the next meeting for late August.		DISCHARGED

3. Genetics and Health Study

The Chair thanked Helen and Roisin for their work on the genetics and health study.

Roisin presented an update on the genetics and health screening work so far. She is awaiting some results, and 5 traps are still in place. The study will be drawn to a close at the end of November. All releases have been back on site. Camera footage obtained throughout the trapping exercise suggests there are more beavers in the area than are being caught. Of the 5 post-mortems, some animals had been shot and some were roadkill. On genetics, there is no evidence of North American beavers. The further analysis of samples will take place in Jan/Feb 2014. All samples will then be stored in suitable conditions so that they are available for any further tests at a future date.

The group discussed the possibility of detecting diseases and the need, if any picked up, to put them in the context of diseases already found in the wild and the risk factor associated with them.

Further discussion needs to take place within the group on the option to carry out more trapping. The current round is coming to an end mainly due to vet availability for EM screening but also due to the resource intensive nature of the task (demands on Helen and Roisin's time) weighed against the rate of beaver capture. Roisin made a plea that group members spread the message that carcasses are made available as soon as they are known about.

The group discussed statistical viability and agreed that although the target number of ~30 samples was not reached, it is better to have some empirical evidence than none. The main difficulty is finding suitable trapping sites and obtaining landowner permission to use them. Ian M stated his wish to dispel the perception that farmers are anti-beaver – they are more concerned about the length of time it could take to resolve issues should any arise. People are nervous about what a potentially protected species on their land will mean for them. Scott informed the group that SLE is in the process of drafting an information sheet for SLE members. Hopefully this will increase the number of completed questionnaires being submitted. Both Scott and Ian M volunteered their time to help in any way they can.

- AP – Scott and Ian M to raise the issue of trapping and re-releasing when speaking to SLE and NFUS members, with a view to producing a list of confirmed sites should another round go ahead. They will also request that any carcasses found are made available to the group as soon as possible.
- AP – Roisin and James to contact the local vet to investigate the possibility of using their services should another round of screening go ahead.
- AP – James to speak to Constable Blair Wilkie, Tayside Police Wildlife and Environment Officer, local SGA and SSPCA about the importance of samples being taken from any animal that is found dead or injured.

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It is the consensus that a decision on further health screening should be taken only after the complete set of results from the current round has been looked at. If given the green light, Andrew T, James and the SG vet are to produce a project scope outlining resource and equipment requirements and a list of any possible / confirmed sites. Time required for work on mitigation must be borne in mind when making a decision on future rounds of trapping / screening.

David thanked Helen for her efforts in securing the sites used for this round of trapping.

4. Practical Mitigation

The Chair suggested that effort towards finding more cases for practical mitigation should be increased as this, along with the questionnaire, is a way to assuage people's fears.

Helen provided an update on conflict sites –

- 12 conflict sites so far, some raised through the questionnaire
 - 8 related to damming in lowland arable sites
 - 3 related to burrowing, 2 into floodbank defences
 - 1 related to beaver activity on an ornamental tree
- 10 of the 12 sites are clustered round the Kirriemuir, Angus area;
- PO has visited 6 sites;
- 3 were at trapping sites;
- 3 sites raised through the questionnaire did not wish for a visit from the PO.

Helen also stated that people are pleased to know they can contact someone and that their issues are being documented. Farmers are removing dams as soon as they can but some

resent having to do and others are discontent at having to do so from an animal welfare perspective.

The group discussed some examples of possible conflict and agreed the need to be credible when advising on mitigation. Some issues are easily resolved, others are more difficult. We must not give the impression that mitigation will be successful if that's not the case.

Tree Protection at Forfar – this is working well so far.

Beaver Deceivers at Delvine – Helen is going out in December to check success of both devices.

There may be an opportunity in the summer to explore electro-fencing of crops but this does not seem to be a big concern.

- AP – James / Helen to -update website
 - with information on clearing dams for drainage purposes at this time of year, explaining the risk of removing food caches and exposing lodges;
 - with enhanced mitigation advice, including what cannot be done;
 - with mention of the questionnaire and details on how to obtain a copy;
 - with list of press articles.

The group discussed the option of engaging with land owners and farmers through a series of on-site events. SLE has their 'Walkie Talkie' events – short site specific events covering a range of issues. Two similar events were held by BSWG for fishery interests and resulted in positive discussions between groups.

- AP – Scott and Ian M to consider separate and joint stakeholder engagement events and confer with Helen and James to produce a programme of events for 2014. Events should be spread throughout the geographical area of beaver presence. They could be linked to other events already in place and should aim to engage all audiences. Draft programme to be circulated for comment shortly after the festive holidays.

These events would have to be promoted in such a way as to assure people that no decisions have been made yet and that this is an opportunity to influence the outcome of the debate. Sean is interested in any events in the Tayside area and on the model to be used with a view to taking something similar to the fishery interests.

The group agreed a cut-off date for the questionnaire to accord with the programme of events..

James raised his concerns over possible future costs of mitigation and management. It is unlikely there will be government funding for future management. Other organisations, such as SWBG, may be able to secure funding, similar to the Bat Conservation Trust. At the moment, however, it is impossible to say what funding will be available.

5. Update on Land Owner Questionnaire Dissemination and Returns

Helen informed the group of the types of responses received. Thirteen questionnaires have been submitted –

- On the question on what advice land owners feel they need
 - 8 on removing beavers
 - 2 on mitigation.

The group discussed ways to promote the questionnaire to increase uptake. Whilst the questionnaire is on the SLE website, it was reiterated that it is not on the TBSG website as a means of eliminating spurious responses.

- AP – Helen to keep an audit trail of where the questionnaire has been advertised and promoted.

6. Update on lodge productivity study and plans for next year

Roisin reminded us of the agreed methodology used by observers.

Update –

- Kits seen at 4 of 6 lodges
- Average of 2 kits per lodge
- Evidence of older offspring too
- 2 other lodges had adults but no kits seen
- Camera traps reveal evidence of multiple beavers at more sites
- Received reports of other lodges but need to be strict about how information is gathered
- Desire to repeat the survey in Aug/Sept next year

- AP – Helen to produce a draft programme for next year's lodge productivity study.

7. Plans for follow up to the 2012 SNH Beaver Distribution Survey

The group discussed the timing of the proposed follow-up distribution survey and agreed that, to get the best information in terms of population spread and density, it would be judicious to leave this until autumn 2014. This will be an expensive piece of work, covering a larger area than the former study, costing in the region of ~£30k.

8. Update on external communications

Helen presented a list of publicity to date. She attended the Scottish Game Fair which resulted on some questionnaires being submitted.

- AP – Helen to write an article for the Tayside and Grampian section of the SNH Nature magazine

9. BSWG Update

Sean presented an update on BSWG work to date –

- the main task over the coming months is to begin to draft a report to go to the National Species Reintroduction Forum;
- Initiating research projects in Scotland, and looking abroad for scenarios that can be applied here;
- Looking for sites to hold more field visits especially dams in salmon rivers; looking to begin research work in Tayside;
- The overlap map (map showing overlap between salmon rivers and potential beaver habitat) is due out soon;
- The University of Southampton PhD starts in spring 2014; it is a 3-4 year project so will not be complete in time to report to the Minister- will be reported as ongoing research;
- Carrying out gap analysis to see what information is still needed;
- On Miramichi Salmon Association, they receive match funding from the Canadian Government and practical work, ie. notches in dams, is carried out by the Fisheries Boards.

Research so far includes exploring passability of dams in Lunan Burn. The project provided interesting results which Sean will share with the TBSG as soon as they are written up.

The Chair relayed the general message given by Duncan Halley at a recent event – that beaver / salmonid interactions are not an issue in Norway where he believes the situation (species and

geography) is similar to Scotland. We also discussed the possibility of BSWG commissioning scientifically valid electrofishing for salmon above and below beaver dams on suitable sites in Norway.

- AP – Roisin to confer with Sean and contact Frank Rosell for advice on the cost of electrofishing.

TBSG has offered to assist financially with this work if funds are available, the results of which will be built into the TBSG report. BSWG will state in their report to National Species Reintroduction Forum that the research is ongoing.

10. Website

The group agreed that, in order to publish minutes on the website as soon as possible, they should be confirmed by correspondence 2 weeks at the latest following circulation. They discussed whether a Project Officer blog would be worthwhile and agreed that the minutes, progress reports and list of press articles are sufficient for keeping people up-to-date on the work of the group. A blog could take up too much time to service well.

11. Any other business

Helen informed the group of a felled tree at Loch of Lowes landing on the road. It was agreed that she should be involved in mitigation and monitoring at this site.

The SWBG has provided information gathered from the education work. This work can be repeated next year if required.

All outstanding action points

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AP3/7	Contact Paul Ramsay to explore the possibility of electrofishing of his streams, to gain knowledge of the effects of beaver dams upon migratory fish. Inform the Beaver-Salmonid Working Group of this work.	Sean / Helen	ONGOING – Sean contacted David S – awaiting a response. Going ahead with electrofishing on Lunan Burn. Louise stated she is still keen for this to go ahead at Banff.
<u>22 November Action Points</u>			
AP7/1	Raise the issue of trapping and re-releasing when speaking to SLE and NFUS members, with a view to producing a list of confirmed sites should another round go ahead. They will also request that any carcasses found are made available to the group as soon as possible.	Scott / Ian M	

AP7/2	Contact the local vet to investigate the possibility of using their services should another round of screening go ahead.	James / Roisin	
AP7/3	Speak to Constable Blair Wilkie, Tayside Police Wildlife and Environment Officer, local SGA and SSPCA about the importance of samples being made available from dead or injured animals.	James	
AP7/4	Update website - with information on clearing dams for drainage purposes at this time of year, explaining the risk of removing food caches and exposing lodges; - with enhanced mitigation advice, including what cannot be done; - with mention of the questionnaire and details on how to obtain a copy; - with list of press articles.	Helen / James	
AP7/5	Consider separate and joint stakeholder engagement events and confer with Helen and James to produce a programme of events for 2014. Events should be spread throughout the geographical area of beaver presence. They could be linked to other events already in place and should aim to engage all audiences. Draft programme to be circulated for comment shortly after the festive holidays.	Scott / Ian M	
AP7/6	Keep an audit trail of where the questionnaire has been advertised and promoted.	Helen	
AP7/7	Produce a draft programme for next year's lodge productivity study.	Helen	
AP7/8	Write an article for the Tayside and Grampian section of the SNH Nature magazine	Helen	
AP7/9	Contact Frank Rosell for advice on the cost of electrofishing.	Roisin / Sean	