

November 2013

SWBG Newsletter

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Welcome to the first ever newsletter from SWBG. We hope to run a copy biannually with updates of what has happened over the previous 6 months or so informing everyone of past events that the group has been involved in. We will also be giving news on the beaver families that we are watching and any other wee bits of information that we have.

To date it isn't known exactly how many animals are in the Tay catchment area until another detailed survey is carried out. However, working on the premise that we have approximately 38-40 active beaver sites, with an average of 4-5 animals per area plus dispersing animals, and animals that remain hidden or unobserved, it would be safe to suggest there may well be over 200.



**One of the two beaver kits born on the Ericht this year**



**Adult Earn Beaver**

This year has been a very busy year for the SWBG trustees and helpers. We have delivered over 40 tours to various rivers, hosted over a hundred visitors at Bamff estate and visited many schools. We have also set up a couple of stalls at local events, presented to several groups and re-vamped the website. We have assisted TBSG in the health screening programme and assisted them in the capture and release of some animals. Add to that the various media coverage from the BBC and STV, with possibly more to come, it has been a very busy but also a very positive year.

This edition is an update on most of what we have carried out and achieved over the last 12 months. So we hope you enjoy what we have put together for you. Further information and more expansive reports can be found on our website [scottishwildbeavers.org](http://scottishwildbeavers.org)

**SCHOOL VISITS**



Strathmore Primary School

This year SWBG embarked on an education programme delivering a presentation to as many primary schools within Tayside that would have us. Over the first 6 months of the year, members visited various schools and delivered a presentation to around 700 children. The kids were treated to a PowerPoint presentation, a beaver quiz and various props. The Royal School of Dunkeld in particular gave us the whole in-take to present to, including the infants, in total over 140 kids in the one day. One of our trustees, Paul Ramsay, gave a talk to Aberfeldy primary school in Gaelic which he truly delivered with aplomb. It's pleasing and very positive to note that to have the children so engaged in nature and in particular the beaver, is truly heart-warming.

*Did you know that beavers can hold their breath under water for over 15 minutes?*



The P5 class of Rattray Primary displaying their work and wearing beaver masks.

On our travels, we visited Rattray Primary School and talked to P5 and 7. The P5 teacher was very interested in the subject matter and progressed things further with her class. She downloaded the SBT education pack and encouraged her class to make "Story boards" about the exploits of "Oslo" the beaver who had moved home from Norway and had relocated to Scotland. The story itself is very heart-warming but the children's

work portraying the story was incredible and I had the privilege of being asked to judge their work. These were all lovely pieces of work and it was very difficult to pick the best three never mind a winner, but I eventually picked three with the help of family, SBT, SWBG, SWT and friends. I was also kindly donated 3 cuddly toys, 2 beavers and a squirrel to give to the kids. When I arrived at the school to hand over the prizes the class all had beaver masks on that they had made. To say this was inspiring and an absolute treat is an understatement and brought a tear to my eye.

Bob Smith



Meigle Primary School visit

Winners of the story board competition at Rattray Primary school: Jasmine, Tara and Riona with their teacher Mrs McIntyre.



**SCHOOL VISITS continued—Feedback from the schools we visited**

We get a lot of feedback from the school visits in the form of a questionnaire and the feedback is generally very positive. The children really get involved with the presentation and the quiz. On one occasion we received a very lovely letter from Meigle Primary School which you can see below.



Beaver skull



Beaver pelt and hat



Bob with beaver pelt



Lower mandible of beaver skull

To: Hall 2000

Thank You for talking to us about beavers  
 we found it very interesting and exciting.  
 The hat that Campbell wore was very hot  
 I don't think we would buy one! We enjoyed  
 taking part in the quiz and it was very nice  
 to meet you both. Thank you for the stickers  
 We hope you visit again!

Srom

P3.4.5

Cara Meigle Primary School ☺

Struan Q Campbell  
 Martha

Ellie Amy Amie Deven K  
 Atlanta Katie

John Keira Katie Craig  
 Carolann Jamie Elmor



**Kirkmichael Presentation.**

On June the 5th, SWBG trustees Paul Ramsay and Bob Smith gave a talk to the Session House in Kirkmichael. Paul delivered an excellent presentation to around 20 people and this was very well received by all. The attendees were all very interested in the subject and there were even a few that organised a tour with Bob after the event. We had set up the room with various pictures and props, including a beaver pelt and skull. The pelt in particular was a great topic of conversation and everyone was intent on getting a feel of it. Bob left a DVD with some of the films he had made for the group to watch at their leisure which was again gratefully received. So all in all another positive presentation and hopefully we managed to recruit a few to our cause.



Beaver dam at Bamff estate

*Did you know that beavers can hold their breath under water for over 15 minutes?*

**SUPER STALLS**



David and Bob at The Big Weekend

Over the summer SWBG delivered two stalls in the Blairgowrie area. The first one was at “The Big Weekend” which turned out to be an incredible day. The Big Weekend is a newly formed event held in Blairgowrie to highlight all that the town and local area has to offer from food to tourism, shops to wildlife. SWBG took this opportunity to pitch a tent and highlight the beaver tours and our visits to schools. The marquee was well attended by all trustees. We had a very busy stall throughout the day and pleasingly we had a lot of interest from the children, some of which we had spoken to at their primary schools.

The second event was the Blairgowrie Highland Games. This was another fantastic event. We had one existing, 2 previous and 2 upcoming trustees helping out. We also had a couple of donations that we raffled on the day and we raised an amazing £150.83 profit towards the cause. Again, the stall was geared towards the youngsters and we had a beaver quiz for the children. We hope to repeat both events and hopefully more next year.



Mungo, Tina, Bob and Victor at the Blair Highland Games



Jean, Bob and Rhona at Blairgowrie Highland Games



Beaver dam at Bamff estate



Bob and the Perth Guides

**September Perth Guides**

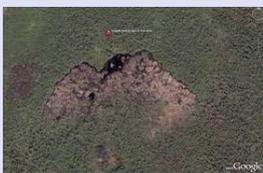
Bob Smith and I delivered a presentation to the Perth Guides. We received a very warm welcome. The girls completed the quiz with great enthusiasm and hopefully learned a lot about the beavers

Rhona Forrester



Two Erichth youngsters

*Did you know that the largest beaver dam in the world is in Canada? This was spotted by Google Earth and is 850 m long*



Aerial photograph of the largest beaver dam found

**More presentations and talks**

Some of the Perth Guides



**October Presentation to Pitlochry High School**

On the afternoon of Oct 10th, I visited Pitlochry High School with Richard Paul, a colleague involved in SWT and Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust, and were hosted by biology teacher, Alex Omelasz and twelve S3 students. We gave a joint presentation about Scottish beavers. We covered the Knapdale and Tayside beavers and some aspects of beaver biology and the



advantages of beavers in the landscape and some possible problems and mitigation methods. We based it on a

power-point presentation and there was much interest in the skin, hat and gnawed branches. Perhaps the most enjoyable part was the quiz at the end and there was eager participation in teams! The winners received a small reward in the form of natural history booklets. Copies of the quiz and Rhona's information leaflets, together with a copy of Beavers by Andrew Kitchener, were left with the teacher, Alex .

**Tim Fison**

**October Talk to St Andrews Wildlife Society**

My welcoming committee were Izzy Tween, a third year ecology student who came to Bamff to do field work for her Final Dissertation, and Bryony a student at Oban High who was visiting St Andrews to see if she would like to go to that University. The swimming beaver on the first slide appeared on the first screen and we were ready to go. We had a very enjoyable evening and were rewarded when the audience applauded warmly.

**Paul Ramsay**

**SWBG QUIZ**

SWBG are holding a quiz which can be entered via the website [scottishwildbeavers.org](http://scottishwildbeavers.org) Here are some pictures of a few of our first entrants



Tallie from Kilgraston School



Carly, Ellie and Dean from Dunbarney Primary School



Kenzie wearing the beaver mask he made and holding a chewed beaver stick



The Ericht "runt"



Adult Ericht Beaver



Ericht Beaver Kit



Mum and a kit on the Ericht



Bob on one of his tours

## Tours by the Ericht

*Abhainn Eireachd*, the "beauteous river" in Gaelic, has become even more so with the arrival of the wonderful beavers. They have been in the Ericht since 2007 and possibly even longer. From Erica and her descendants, we currently have a population of 7 beavers at the local lodge. There are the current breeding pair, 3 yearlings and 2 kits. Last year provided us with 4 kits which only 3 survived and of the 3, one was of a very diminutive stature and we didn't believe it would survive the winter. However, survive it did and was often seen very close to its mother throughout the summer months. The "runt", once the kits were born, appeared to be totally infatuated with its younger siblings and could be seen shepherding them in and out of the lodge, patrolling the river prior to the kits appearing and bringing food to the burrow. It was to these scenarios that one of our members accompanied just short of 100 people over the summer months to the river to watch these wonderful creatures. By intent or luck, he has been getting a lot of interest from far and wide, and there have been visitors from all over the UK and even some from Belgium and Italy. The tours themselves, have accomplished an amazing 95% sighting rate, which is a brilliant result considering the many vagaries of Nature. Also of note is the Eco-tourism data gathered, 86% of people on the tour spent money in one or more local businesses prior to or after their visit. This is a very pleasing fact that can only help in the continued existence of *Castor fiber* to their native shores. On the tours, we have had a real mix of visitors. As you can imagine, all are nature lovers, but we have had solicitors, geologists, teachers, Councilors, a couple of vets and even an MP. Not only have we seen the beavers but we have also seen a massive amount of river wildlife. This ranges from the kingfishers to heron, Roe Deer to water voles, goosanders to geese, and warblers to dippers. The *Abhainn Eireachd* was well named by our fore-fathers, it is beauteous and joyful indeed. For a more expansive and detailed observation of the riverside visits, please have a look on our website [scottishwildbeavers.org](http://scottishwildbeavers.org)

### Bob Smith

Over the summer months I embarked on taking tours to the River Ericht. I received feedback from the 63 people that I took to the river and polled, and as you will see, the outcomes were positive and hopefully some of this data will be used by TBSG and the Environment minister.

Q1 – How did you find out about the tour?...I honestly thought the top scorer on this would have been either the SWBG website (11%) or facebook (14%), but it was in fact "Word of mouth" with 31%. Second place was the Tourist Information centre with (16%).

Q2 – What best describes your situation here today?...87% of the people polled remarked that they "were on a day out specific to the tour" and 13% were "on holiday away from home".

Q3 – How many people were on the tour today?...92% were over 16 year old and 8% were children. There were a total of 63 people polled though I missed around 20 or so as they were prior to the questionnaire being developed

Q4 – Where is your normal place of residence?... 30% of people were from no more than 10 miles away, 27% from England and 25% from other parts of Tayside. We did have a couple from Italy and a couple from Belgium as well. Last year 2012, I had people from Germany, India, Ireland and Spain.

Q5 – What wildlife did you see on your visit?...An amazing 95% of people that were polled spotted the beaver, 65% also spotted kingfishers, 35% spotted dippers and an amazing 76% of all the people I had down spotted something or another over and above what was on my list.

Q6 – How many local businesses did you support today?...There were 87% of those polled that supported at least one business on the day of the tour

Q7 – Have you enjoyed your experience here today?...Pleasingly 100% of people polled enjoyed their experience

Q8 – Would you consider returning to the area for a revisit?...Again this was 100% in the positive

Q9 – Do you believe that beavers should be allowed to remain in the wild?...Pleasingly again, this was 100% in favour

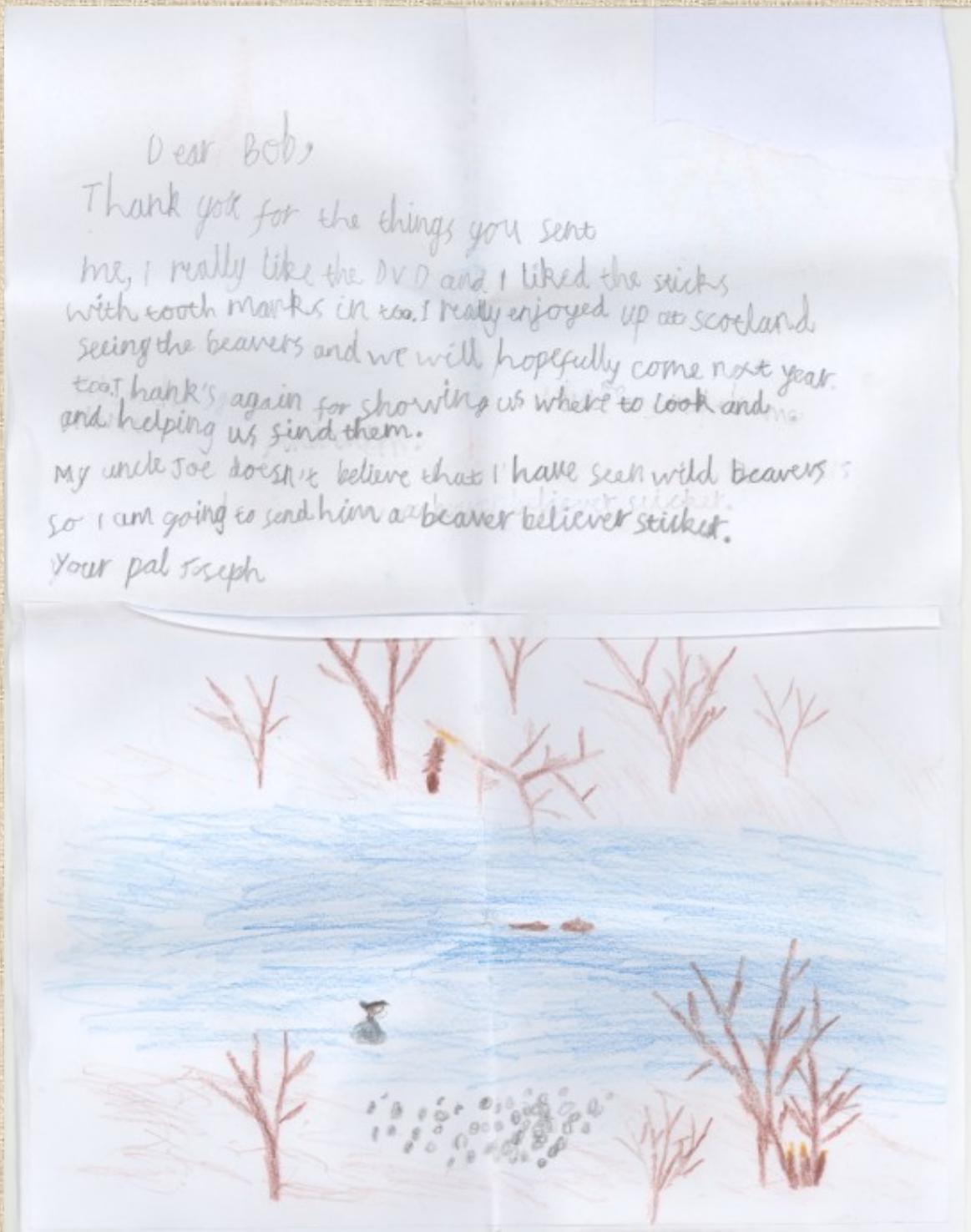
Q10 – Are you supportive of a full beaver reintroduction in Scotland?...97% said yes

So, as you can see, in the main, the feedback from the tours has been very positive and good things are obviously being said to others. I have already had notice of a few revisits from a couple from Wiltshire and a couple from Manchester. So roll on 2014 and **VIVA LE BEAVER**

### Bob Smith

### Tours continued....

Though we haven't taken many children to the river, we have had a few. The letter below is from a young lad Joseph Blease, whose father contacted me in the summer regarding a visit to see the beavers. Joseph and his father Jim, came up all the way from Penrith and spent the weekend camping (at the end of September in their car no less) by the river. I was able to show them where to sit and hopefully see the beavers. The first night wasn't all that successful but the Sunday evening they managed to see a couple of beavers and a dipper, which Joseph has done a remarkable job in replicating. After the event, I sent Joseph a few "I'm a Beaver Believer" stickers, some beaver chewed sticks, a DVD of some of the videos I had taken and a few more bits and pieces. Below is a letter of appreciation from the young man and as you will read, he is hopefully bringing his family up to Scotland next year.



## Summer with the Bamff Beavers

After the near extinction of the Eurasian beaver by 1900 and successful beaver reintroductions all over mainland Europe, conservation organisations began to discuss bringing the beaver back to the UK in the 1990s. However, consultation led to disagreement and delay over years so some environmentalists decided to start a number of private demonstration projects in large enclosures. The first of these took place at Bamff in East Perthshire when, in 2002 Paul and Louise Ramsay brought in two Norwegian beavers, after they had been quarantined in Kent. Later two Polish beavers and a number of Bavarian beavers arrived. Two families, kept in very large enclosures, have been breeding now since 2005 and 2006 respectively, and have made a significant impact on the Bamff landscape, converting a ditch into a series of ponds and swamps by building a series of fine dams.

The summer of 2013 was a good one for beaver visitors at Bamff, and the beavers themselves were very obliging too, appearing to be viewed, photographed and filmed to the satisfaction of many. The first visitors were in early May. Soon after that there was a visit of 50 students from Napier University who came for a daytime visit to see the habitat. Not long after that a group of 23 from Dundee Naturalists' Society came one evening. The next group were Wildcru from the University of Oxford. This group came in daytime and reported having seen dams, felled trees, beaver lodges and tracks, voles, frogs, and various small birds. All this group felt that legal protection would be needed at least until the species was re-established. We then had a student who is studying Wildlife Film Making at the University of the West of England in conjunction with the BBC here and he chose to make his film about the Tay beavers. The film is called 'Beaver Fever'. We then had a visit from a group from Baldrigon Academy in Dundee. Soon after a group of 13 volunteers came to stay to do work in the woods, and their visit was enhanced by beaver watching. A third year student from St Andrews University spent some time camping at Bamff this summer while she conducted a survey of invertebrates in beaver pools and streams for her undergraduate dissertation in zoology. Tim Fison came with members of the Pitlochry branch of SWT, and had another good evening's viewing. On 11<sup>th</sup> July we had our first recording of kits being sighted and the visitors kept coming through September as well. On the week-end of 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> October Reforesting Scotland proved overwhelmingly the most popular. Later there was a discussion in the Alyth Town Hall about re-wilding. A range of interesting views were expressed. Members understood that tree cutting is not the same as deforestation. The beavers themselves have done well this year. During a dry summer, we've had no problems with floods. If anything, the beavers have been rather helpful in retaining water, some of which is available to livestock. All in all the beavers have brought us another year of interest and wonderful visitors.

**Louise Ramsay**

**Bamff**



**Evidence of a tree climbing beaver at Bamff. The limb was roughly 7 ft off the ground and it shows not only the beavers perseverance but also his tree climbing skills.**

**Beaver—The “Keystone” species**

The beaver is known as a “Keystone” species. A **keystone species** is a species that has a disproportionately large effect on its environment relative to its abundance. Such species are described as playing a critical role in maintaining the structure of an ecological community affecting many other organisms in an ecosystem and helping to determine the types and numbers of various other species in the community. Here are some of those wonderful creatures that are now exploiting the works of the beavers. These images have been caught by a few of the people that frequent the river to watch the beaver and are seen regularly to watch the beaver and are seen regularly



**GOLDFINCH**



**ROE BUCK**



**KINGFISHER**



**HOVERFLY, LADYBIRD & SHEILDBUG**

From the dead woody debris left behind by the beaver, habitat and food is provided for all these animals



**COAL TIT**



**HERON**



**DIPPER WITH STICKLE-  
BACK**



**TOAD**

Even the food raft that the beaver makes for its winter cache provides shelter for fish and amphibians which in turn provides food for predators.



**DRAGONFLY**



**WREN**



**MERGANSER AND CHICK**



**DAMSELFLY**

**SBT Update****BRINGING BACK BEAVERS TO SCOTLAND**

**Beaver impact on a tree in Knapdale**

The beavers were released into Knapdale Forest in the Heart of Argyll in 2009. They have since been busy settling into their new home; from building lodges to nurturing newborn family members.

Four beaver families have now been reintroduced and visitors are welcome to explore this stunning woodland and spot the signs of beaver activity.



**Beaver watching in Knapdale**

The SBT is a partnership project between the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS), the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) and hosts Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) to undertake a time-limited, five-year trial reintroduction of Eurasian beavers (*Castor fiber*) to Knapdale, Mid-Argyll.

The licence for the Trial was granted by the Scottish Government in May 2008, with the first beavers being released in May 2009. The Trial will run until 2014. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) co-ordinates the independent scientific monitoring of the trial, reporting progress to the Scottish Government and monitoring how the conditions of the licence are being addressed on the ground.

Five kits were born in Knapdale this spring, making a total of 13 births since the start of the Trial. Only time will tell how many will make it through their first winter, and come the return of the longer days of spring 2014 (the last one of the Trial, but more of that later) we will be carrying out intensive watches to assess the new year population. The Trial team know from previous experience that apart from the pre-winter 'construction phase', beaver activity starts to slow down at this time of the year. They emerge later and do not venture as far from the home lodge. This makes a great deal of sense if you are an animal trying to conserve energy ahead of a long winter, but it means that keeping track of all the individuals is a real challenge for field workers, and a proper head count can only be accurately carried out again the following spring.

**Interpretation & Educational Activities**

The SBT Educational Team has been involved in 37 educational events over the late summer and early autumn months, as the guided walk season draws to a close and there is a peak in larger festival type events. In September and October, highlights included the team delivering educational activities in 'Beavers at the Botanics' at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh, the 'Best of the West' festival at Inverary Castle, the 'Art in the Landscape' event at Loch Melfort and 'Natural Curiosity' at Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh. We published an article entitled 'The Battle for British Beavers' in the August issue of 'British Wildlife', which outlined the current situation regarding the wider status of beavers in Britain and explored some of the key arguments which may decide their future.

**The End is nigh...**

In just seven months' time, the five year scientific monitoring programme for the Trial draws to a close as the field-based part of the SBT will be close to completion at the end of May 2014. From that point, there will be another 12 month period when all the data is analysed, reports will be produced and handed over by SNH to the Scottish Government for consideration. At some point in 2015, we will hear from the Minister of Environment and Climate Change with their decision on the future of beavers in Knapdale, Tayside and Scotland as a whole

**Simon Jones**

[www.scottishbeavers.org.uk](http://www.scottishbeavers.org.uk)

Scottish Beaver Trial: Project Update No. 21 6th November 2013  
Project Background

**SWBG are fully supportive of the SBT**

## TBSG Update

TAYSIDE  
BEAVER  
STUDY GROUP



Newly released male  
Ericht kit with a yellow  
ear tag

### The Tayside Beaver Study Group Progress Report

To date a total of 18 beavers have been sampled as part of the health and genetic screening programme. Ten traps are currently in position. All trapped animals have been successfully re-released to their territories bar one animal that died on recovery from anaesthetic and could not be revived. Detailed independent post mortem results were inconclusive and did not identify a cause of death. A detailed review was also carried out by the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland veterinary department which again did not reveal cause of death. No signs were identified as being associated with the capture or health screening procedure.

All beavers sampled have been identified as Eurasian using physical characteristics, however this will be confirmed with genetic analysis. All were classed as being in good body condition with no abnormalities or signs of disease. Laboratory testing is on-going and full results will be published at the end of the project.

Lodge productivity surveys were carried out during the summer period. Of the lodges surveyed where kits were observed, two kits per family group were identified. It is hoped to expand the survey in summer 2014 to include a greater number of lodges and gather further data on the productivity of the Tayside population.

Land owner/manager questionnaires are now in circulation, aimed at documenting the experiences of individuals with beaver activity on their land. Responses have identified key areas for concern as being burrowing into flood defence banks and damming in drainage channels leading to potential flooding of arable land. Response numbers have been low to date and further effort will be directed to increasing uptake.

Current mitigation trials include tree protection and flow control devices.

Helen Dickinson (TBSG)

**SWBG are fully supportive of the TBSG**

#### Are the beavers in Tayside a native species?

The Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber*) was native in Britain until its extinction around the 16th century.

The North American beaver (*Castor canadensis*) is a separate species not native in Europe or Asia. It is very likely that the Tayside beavers are the Eurasian species. This is being confirmed through a Scottish Government approved trapping and health screening programme with samples being taken for genetic analysis.



Images of recent beaver health screening procedure at Bamff.

## Mitigation of the Impacts of Beaver

The blocking of culverts under roads and drainage ditches in agricultural land is something that upsets people. So far as beavers are concerned a culvert is a place through which water is escaping and the same goes for a ditch; the solution is to dam the culvert or ditch so that the water cannot run away. We humans see things differently. We want that culvert or drain to stay unblocked so that the water can flow through it.

One way of dealing with such problems is to remove the dam, either by taking it out with an excavator or blowing it up. The difficulty with this approach is that, the beavers may well return and rebuild it and go on doing so. The struggle about the dam may become a time consuming war between humans and beavers. Eventually human patience will run out and they will kill the animals. Unfortunately there are still people in North America who resort to dynamite and lethal trapping, but there are other ways of solving this conflict of interest.

One of these is the pond leveler (of which there are several designs), which is installed where a dam has been built. In this case a decision has to be made as to what level the beavers' urge to keep the water at a higher level can be reconciled with the human need to keep it lower. The dam is dismantled to the desired level and an alkathene drainage pipe of suitable diameter is inserted. The pipe has to be long enough to extend several metres upstream of the dam and, preferably, a metre or two downstream. It is held in place a few inches above the stream bed by steel re-bars, sunk into the bed. The inlet to the pipe has a cage of wire mesh erected round it to prevent beavers from blocking it. Once all this is in place and the dam is rebuilt, the system is ready for the beavers. Night comes and a beaver will head for the dam. It will notice that the water level is lower and look for the leak that has let the water run away. Mystified by the absence of any obvious leaks in the dam and not thinking to investigate the upper end of the pipe that now runs through its dam, the beaver will probably give up the search.

This kind of leveler works very well where the culvert drains the outlet of a pond. Inserting one of these systems into a ditch that has been dammed may be less successful, but is still worth a try. The key to success is that the beavers continue to see the dam as being worth maintaining. If they feel frustrated by their failure to control the water level upstream of the dam they may abandon it and build a dam elsewhere. This may prove to be just as inconvenient for humans as the first dam, so it is important to get this right. Surveys in the USA have shown that where they are properly installed pond levellers are more than 90% successful.

Paul Ramsay



Flow device at Bamff Estate. Note the "cage" on right hand picture is far enough away from the dam to deceive the beaver.



### OUR TRUSTEES

Tim Fisons, Rhona Forrester, David Grant, Jean Oudney, Louise Ramsay, Paul Ramsay, Shauna Redman and Bob Smith

We can be contacted on [theswbg@gmail.com](mailto:theswbg@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: 0791911227

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.

Editor....R Forrester, Sub-Editor ....B Smith

Pictures supplied by R Forrester, Bamff estate, J Oudney, Katy Murphy, Mike Pennington and B Smith  
Kind thanks to TBSG and SBT for use of their publications