

Note to SNH after being sent Press Release 26/11/10

As someone who has been involved with the reintroduction of beavers from the time I was a main board member of Scottish Natural Heritage in the early 1990s, I am disappointed at the recent turn of events with regard to beavers in Scotland.

This matter came up at the last meeting of the National Species Reintroduction Forum and there I expressed my view that some of the thinking was not sensible.

I have just received your press release which contains this paragraph.

The animals are being recaptured because it is illegal to allow their escape or release into the wild and because their welfare may be at risk. There was no consultation with local people; there was no licence issued for their release; there is no monitoring of their welfare; and there is no certainty that they are the appropriate species or type of beaver for Scotland.

My views are:

I agree that these beavers should not have escaped and the presence of breeding beavers is contrary to a reintroduction carried out in the correct manner. But unlike escaped aliens present in Scotland, such as grey squirrel, Sika deer, Canada geese, etc etc, these beavers are not an alien species.

Therefore the exact reason for removing them should be explained very carefully and should be biological correct.

Reasons given include:

Animal Welfare. A suggestion that there may be an animal welfare issue is just plain wrong. That individuals might be lonely is just not a biologically sensible suggestion. I can see no animal welfare issues at all. Although an animal welfare issue could be created by trapping in winter if there are any families with dependant young.

Appropriate species or type of beaver for Scotland.

Not Norwegian. I just don't accept the rationale that all Scottish (and therefore UK) Beavers should be of Norwegian origin. I have read the scientific arguments but just do not accept them as the only route to restoring European beavers to Scotland and UK. There are alternative arguments to use a wider spectrum of genetic donor stock from Europe for a successful British reintroduction, rather than a possibly bottle-necked Norwegian stock. I think the thinking here is biased because of the Knapdale project and the amount of invested money.

Possible American beaver. I just do not believe this scare; the suggested risk should be explained and this could be checked through genetic testing.

Another Scenario.

There could be another way of dealing with this issue and that would be to try to get as much data as possible out of this group of beavers in the wild, and then decide whether to trap out or to use them as an alternative experiment in the short or long term. Even in the short term SNH should know exactly how many animals, breeding pairs, etc, there are, rather than ad hoc trapping.

In a time of serious financial restrictions the costs of continuing the high degree of research and monitoring funding into the Knapdale project is certainly problematic, especially as many people thought early on that this was unnecessary if more use was made of mainland European knowledge.

Additionally, the Knapdale project will not address the two key issues for beavers in the UK, and they are the relationship with agriculture and game fisheries.

Beavers in the Tay watershed will be in an ecosystem with game fisheries and agriculture so these relationships can be examined.

In such an experiment, the animals could be captured and blood tested – and if not American or some exotic race – could be returned.

Finally, your press release states that this decision was taken by the National Species Reintroduction Forum but as I argued at the second meeting, this forum is not representative of the Scottish public, and should not (and does not) have powers to decide.

I think that SNH should review this decision – I think it could be very unpopular and not supported.

Roy Dennis.