

Watch out for beavers!

✘ An additional breeding pair of two beavers, one male and one female, has now been released into the wild in Scotland as part of the Scottish Beaver Trial (SBT), a project which marks the first formal trial reintroduction of a native mammal back into the UK.

The Trial, which is a partnership project between the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) and the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), aims to determine how beavers will prosper in Scottish habitats and to assess their impact in the current Scottish environment by monitoring them over a five-year trial period.

The pair, which were transported from a holding facility at the Highland Wildlife Park and released into the wild on 4 May and after nearly a week in their new home, have been settling in well. This release follows the release of three beaver families, 11 beavers, into the Trial site at Knapdale Forest, Mid-Argyll, in May last year. All animal releases follow the conditions outline as part of the licence issued by the Scottish Government.

Prior to the release, two artificial lodges were created by the project team to provide temporary shelter until the pair can build a lodge of their own. Food and used bedding will be placed in these lodges to encourage them to settle in this new loch and make it their home.

Roisin Campbell-Palmer, SBT Project Leader said: "Whenever you release an animal into the wild it is a nerve-wracking moment and you want to give them the best chance at adapting to their new environment. Knapdale is ideal for beavers and already we have seen our other animals really making it home and doing what comes naturally to them. The two beavers are in good health, having passed all the required veterinary health checks and we are confident they should settle in well."



There are great hopes for the future of this pair and the other beavers, as Campbell-Palmer continue: "Following arrival from Norway, these beavers underwent a six-month quarantine period in England before being transported to the Highland Wildlife Park, where they have lived together for several months, giving them a chance to get used to life in Scotland. Even our harshest weather is nothing compared to the cold they have been used to. With plenty of food and space to explore we hope that this pair along with the others may start breeding in the coming months and years."

Simon Jones, SBT Project Manager, explained more about the decision to release a fourth family almost one year into the Trial.

Jones said: "It was always a possibility for us to release a fourth family of beavers as part of our Trial. Our licence from the Scottish Government permits us to release up to four families and we feel that by having four breeding pairs in Knapdale our Trial stands the best chance of creating a viable population of beavers. It is very important that we create the most natural conditions possible for our wild beavers to allow the results to inform decisions about the impact a wider beaver reintroduction might have on Scotland's environment.

Over the course of the Trial, all our beavers will be tracked closely by the project team. The release of a fourth pair will provide important additional field data and hopefully show how neighbouring families of beavers interact with one another."

The Scottish Beaver Trial could determine whether or not beavers are reintroduced into the wild across Scotland. Twenty-five European countries have already reintroduced beavers to their wild lands. Beavers are a native species to the UK and were once a common sight before they were hunted to extinction by man. Beavers are known as a keystone species and bring many benefits to wetland environments and improve habitats for many other animals including invertebrates, birds and otters.

The release of the fourth family of beavers was discussed with Scottish Natural Heritage, which is coordinating the

independent scientific monitoring of the Trial.