

Beavers in the wild

✘ The Scottish Beaver Trial team has released a new male beaver to partner a lone female as part of the five-year trial reintroduction of beavers to Knapdale Forest in Mid-Argyll. The male, who was captured in Norway by colleagues at Telemark University College, brings the number of resident wild beavers in Scotland to 12 (including two recently born kits).

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

✘ The two-year old male was released on Tuesday 14 September 2010 afternoon by project staff at the loch where the lone female beaver has settled. Prior to release the immediate area was marked with the male's scent to encourage the female to welcome the new arrival and to stimulate interest in her future mate. The male was released directly from his transportation crate on to the loch and project staff are now monitoring his movements closely.

Present at the release and now hoping that romance will blossom was SBT's Project Leader, Roisin Campbell-Palmer, who said:- "This male is at an age where he would naturally disperse from his family group in search of a breeding partner so we are really hopeful that this arranged introduction will be the start of a very happy relationship.

"Over the next few weeks we would hope that there will be clear signs of acceptance as the pair get to know each other. Although breeding won't take place this year, we hope they will build a lodge together which would be a good sign that

they intend to remain together and potentially breed.”

✘ On a recent visit to the project site, RZSS’s patron, HRH The Princess Royal, was given an insight into the impact these once native mammals have already had on their local environment, from lodge building to dam creation.

Simon Jones, SBT Project Manager said:-“With the recent news that two of our beaver pairs have bred, we have high hopes that this new pairing will settle in, get on well and add to the beaver population in Knapdale, but we have no guarantees that the relationship will be smooth sailing.

“Introducing a new beaver to another beaver’s established territory, even if it is that of one single female, could cause some disputes. We hope, possibly after some tail slapping and signs of natural caution, our female will follow her breeding instincts and pair with the suitable male.

“We have already seen changes that the existing beavers have made on the forest and lochs of the area and by establishing a further breeding beaver pair we hope to see a true measure of their impact in coming years.”

The independent scientific monitoring of the Trial’s beavers is being undertaken by Scottish Natural Heritage, and it is their final report at the Trial’s conclusion, that will help to decide the long term future for beavers in Scotland. Twenty-five European countries have already reintroduced beavers back into the wild. Beavers are a native species to the UK and were once a common sight before they were hunted to extinction by man in 16th century. Beavers are known as a keystone species; they bring many benefits to wetland environments and improve habitats for many other animals including invertebrates, birds and otters.

The male was released following permission granted by The Scottish Government that allowed a replacement beaver to join the lone female and create a new breeding pair after her

previous partner died. Prior to release, the male underwent quarantine and an in-depth health assessment to ensure he was healthy, free of disease and fit for release. Having complied with all the necessary importation checks, he was transported from Edinburgh Zoo before being released into one of the four occupied lochs in Knapdale Forest.