

**Wildlife Trusts Wales, Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and Shropshire Wildlife Trust**  
**Draft Beaver Position Statement**  
**The River Wye Catchment**  
**December 2017**

The Wildlife Trusts have been at the forefront of Eurasian beaver *Castor fiber* reintroductions to Britain. This has been through licenced reintroduction trials and enclosed beaver projects. The first licenced beaver reintroduction to Britain took place in 2009 as part of the Scottish Beaver Trial (a partnership between Scottish Wildlife Trust and the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS)).

The Eurasian beaver is a native species to Britain, but they became extinct by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century due to human persecution<sup>i</sup>. Beavers have also faced a similar fate across Europe, but they have now been successfully reintroduced to over 24 European countries<sup>ii</sup>.

Research has shown that beavers can provide ecological, societal and economic benefits<sup>iii, iv</sup>. Through modifying their habitat beavers can create wildlife refuges, increase biodiversity, improve water quality, modify water flow and increase water storage capacity<sup>v, vi</sup>. These benefits are becoming increasingly important, especially now due to the unpredictability of climate change leading to more frequent and severe flooding events. The reintroduction of Eurasian beavers offers a cost-effective and natural solution to help address these serious problems, as well as deliver opportunities for the tourism industry through eco-tourism<sup>iv</sup>.

Whilst we fully support the reintroduction of beavers to Britain, we recognise that some negative impacts can occur as a result of beaver activity, such as unwanted felling of trees, interference with human infrastructure and localised flooding. Therefore, the reintroduction of beavers to a catchment requires careful consideration and, unauthorised beaver releases do raise some concerns. There is a risk the habitat may not be suitable for beavers, which could have a potential impact on human land-use where beaver management networks have not yet been established. There is also a risk that the wrong species (the North American beaver *Castor canadensis*) may be released into an area. Unauthorised releases can undermine the efforts of organisations like The Wildlife Trusts involved with restoring the species in a coordinated manner.

The Wildlife Trusts fully support the managed reintroductions of beavers to Britain in order to minimise any detrimental effects whilst maximising the positive impacts of beavers<sup>ii</sup>. We believe the benefits from beavers significantly outweighs their costs<sup>iv</sup>. Other European countries have demonstrated that beaver activity can be managed effectively so both people and beavers can co-exist. We can learn from the examples of our European and North American colleagues<sup>ii</sup>.

Whilst managed beaver releases are the ideal situation, it is accepted that established beaver families may be discovered that have resulted from natural spread, escapes from enclosures or unauthorised releases. It is important that the impacts of such families are carefully considered before any action is taken to ensure the correct decisions are made. compliance with legislation and European Directives. We consider it important to learn from those that have experienced this first hand. In 2010 beavers were discovered on the River Tay in Scotland. This population was then monitored alongside the official Scottish

Beaver Trial in Knapdale, Scotland. Following the completion of the Scottish Beaver Trial in 2014 the Scottish Government officially recognised the Eurasian beaver as a native species in 2016<sup>vii</sup>. In 2014 a family of beavers were discovered on the River Otter in Devon. In 2015 Natural England granted a licence to Devon Wildlife Trust for a five-year beaver reintroduction trial. The trial will run until 2020 and is being monitored alongside Devon Wildlife Trust's enclosed beaver site<sup>viii</sup>. Over the years there have been the occasional report of beavers on the River Wye, but until recently there has not been any conclusive evidence. We do not know where the River Wye beavers have come from, but we may be at a stage in the Britain where beavers are dispersing to new areas naturally and this is an opportunity to monitor beavers in the wild. The discovery of beavers on the River Wye will lend us this opportunity.

Given the right conditions, the Eurasian beaver can be of overall benefit to wetland ecosystems, where their activities can benefit many species, including humans<sup>iii, vi</sup>. Beavers will be a valuable tool in contributing to the sustainable management of extensive wetland ecosystems<sup>vi</sup>. We consider the presence of beavers in the British landscape as the return of a lost native species that has the potential to provide huge ecological and socio-economic benefits<sup>iii, iv</sup>. We welcome the opportunity to work with local communities, statutory organisations and Non Government Organisations to ensure that both beavers and people can co-exist in Britain.

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<sup>i</sup> Kitchener, A. 2001. Beavers. British Natural History Series. Whittet Books, Suffolk.

<sup>ii</sup> Campbell-Palmer, R., Gow, D., Campbell, R., Dickinson, H., Girling, S., Gurnell, J., Halley, D., Jones, S., Lisle, S., Parker, H., Schwab, G. and Rosell, F. (2016). The Eurasian Beaver Handbook: Ecology and Management of *Castor fiber*. Exeter: Pelagic Publishing, UK.

<sup>iii</sup> Law, A., Gaywood, M., Jones, K.C., Ramsay, P. and Willby, N.J. (2017). Using ecosystem engineers as tools in habitat restoration and rewilding: beavers and wetlands. *Science of the Total Environment*. **605-606**: 1021-1030.

<sup>iv</sup> Campbell, R., Dutton, A. and Hughes, J. (2007). Economic impacts of the beaver. Wildlife Conservation Research Unit. Oxford University.

<sup>v</sup> Parker, M. (1986) Beaver, water quality and riparian systems. Proceedings of the Wyoming Water and Streamside Zone Conference. Wyoming Water Research Centre, University of Wyoming, Laramie, 1, 88–94.

<sup>vi</sup> Puttock, A., Grahma, H.A., Cunliffe, A.M., Elliott, M., Brazier, R.E. (2017). Eurasian beaver activity increases water storage, attenuates flow and mitigates diffuse pollution from intensively managed grasslands. *Science of the Total Environment*. 576: 430-443.

<sup>vii</sup> Gaywood, M. (2017). Reintroducing the Eurasian beaver *Castor fiber* to Scotland. *Mammal Review*. **48**: 48-61.

<sup>viii</sup> Devon Wildlife Trust (2017). Beavers – Nature's Water Engineers A summary of initial findings from the Devon Beaver Projects.