

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

General

Are European (Eurasian) beaver the same species that was present in Britain?

Correct! The European beaver (*Castor fiber*) is the only species of beaver native to Britain. It used to be widespread across England, Wales and Scotland until the 16th century, when it was hunted to extinction for its fur, meat and 'castoreum', an oil used in perfumes, food and medicine.

What records exist of beaver in Norfolk?

In Britain, beavers date back to 2 million years ago, with fossil remains having been found along the Norfolk coast. Therefore, ever since humans first arrived in the UK (c.12,000 years ago) we have lived alongside, and benefited from this species. Paleo-archaeologists think that early humans learned to build shelters by stealing logs that beavers cut, and that they used beaver channels to trap fish and beaver meadows to hunt for grazing deer in.

While beavers disappeared from our landscape approximately 400 years ago, hints at our shared past did not. Beaver references can be found around Norfolk, for example, the village sign of Babingley depicts a beaver wearing a bishop's mitre; legend has it that St Felix of Burgundy was shipwrecked but saved from drowning by a colony of beavers in the river. To show his gratitude he anointed the chief beaver as a bishop.

Further local references:

- [The ladies at the Castle Acre almshouse wearing beaver hats](#) (Last accessed 08/03/2021)
- [The brave bishop beaver of babingley](#) (Last accessed 08/03/2021)

What do beavers eat?

Beavers are herbivorous; they eat plants and do not consume fish. They feed on aquatic plants, grasses, herbaceous plants and shrubs during the summer months and woody plants in the winter.

What happens if beavers come into conflict with humans?

With more than 200 formal beaver reintroduction projects having taken place across 27 European countries, various effective management techniques have been identified and summarised in the [Beaver Management Handbook](#).

These techniques have been very successful in reducing localised flooding, protecting individual trees or woodland and preventing burrowing into banks.

In addition, beavers are restricted to suitable rivers, streams and lakes, usually staying within 20 metres of the river bank and seldom ranging further than 100

metres. They do not like crossing land between watercourses, and therefore do not readily spread between catchment areas.

Could beavers become an uncontrollable pest?

Beaver population growth is generally very slow for the first 10-years following reintroduction. Once available territories are filled, competition between individuals limit numbers within a set area (beavers are highly territorial and will actively stop other beavers settling on a claimed stretch).

Accordingly, research has shown that beaver pair capacity on the Glaven is just three families. Removal to another site can be a practical option, ensuring that the correct procedures and protocol are followed.

References:

South, Andy & Rushton, S. & Macdonald, David & Fuller, R. (2001). [Reintroduction of the European beaver \(*Castor fiber*\) to Norfolk, U.K.: A preliminary modelling analysis](#). *Journal of Zoology*. 254. 473 - 479. 10.1017/S0952836901000978. (Last accessed 08/03/2021)

Can we assess the short, medium and long-term impacts of beaver?

Much research has been carried out to explore and record the impacts of mature beaver populations on other wildlife and the riparian landscape, and these have been reviewed in the scientific paper 'Ecological impact of beavers *Castor fiber* and *Castor canadensis* and their ability to modify ecosystems' by Rosell et al.

References:

Rosell et al., 2005: [Ecological impact of beavers *Castor fiber* and *Castor canadensis* and their ability to modify ecosystems](#). *Mammal Review* 35:248-276. (Last accessed 08/03/2021)

How would cost of beaver impact compare with that of other wildlife?

Deer damage to England's agriculture has been estimated at £4.3 million, or £33 per km² per annum (Wilson, 2003). Rabbit damage has been cited as £44 per km² per annum for Britain (Rees, 1985), depending on the incidence of myxomatosis.

In contrast to this, the Swedish government has concluded that their beaver population of 100,000 have no economic impact on a national scale.

Furthermore, the Norwegian Forest Owners Association do not consider damage to timber is significant enough to insure against. Equally, fisheries authorities in Norway - where there is a valuable salmon sport industry - consider there is no need to fund research given the minimal impact by beaver.

References:

- [A Preliminary Estimate of the Cost of Damage Caused by Deer to Agriculture in England](#) (C.J. Wilson, 2003). (Last accessed 08/03/2021)

- Humane control of rabbits. In: Humane control of land mammals and birds (D.P. Britt, ed.) pp 96-102 (W. A. REES, 1985). Universities Fed. Anim. Welfare, Potters Bar, UK.

Will the presence of beaver on a river affect the Catchment Management Plans and Flood Risk Management?

Beaver would not be reintroduced to a river catchment if it were believed that there could be a significant adverse impact on the delivery of Catchment Management Plans and Flood Risk Management strategies.

In addition, there is no substantive evidence that beaver cause significant flood damage. In fact, the effects of beaver on a river catchment can reduce the impact of flooding by slowing water down and reducing sediment load.

Where local flooding may occur (e.g., through blocked culverts), this can be effectively prevented or managed.

Beaver structures can alleviate pollution, by increasing oxygenation and retention of pollutants (Rosell et al., 2005).

References:

Rosell et al., 2005: [Ecological impact of beavers Castor fiber and Castor canadensis and their ability to modify ecosystems. Mammal Review 35:248-276.](#) (Last accessed 08/03/2021)

Could beavers affect current agri-environment management agreements that farmers and landowners may have entered into?

Agreement would be reached with Natural England and other regulatory bodies to ensure that agri-environment schemes would not suffer as a result of beaver reintroduction.

All reintroduction plans require approval from Natural England and the Environment Agency before they are enacted.

Is the reintroduction of beaver the start of a larger reintroduction programme e.g. wolves, bears and lynx?

The Glaven Beaver Project is only concerned with assessment of the potential for reintroducing beaver to suitable areas in Norfolk.

Unlike many other species, beavers were driven to extinction by over-hunting for their meat, fur and medicinal by-products, not because of habitat loss or because they were deemed 'a problem species'.

This means that they could be reintroduced relatively easily as suitable habitat is still present. Beaver have also existed alongside farming, fishing and other human activities and due to their limited range, their presence would create minimal disruption. They do not pose any danger to livestock or people.

Glaven Beaver Project

Is there sufficient habitat for beaver reintroduction?

The suitability of the proposed site for the beaver enclosure has been surveyed by a beaver specialist. This has involved an evaluation of the quality of the habitat and the abundance of food materials available. The [carrying capacity](#) of the site has been assessed and this will continue on an annual basis.

Once capacity has been reached, the young beavers will be moved to other sites.

How would the beaver reintroduction be managed?

The reintroduced beavers will be provided with individual tags and regularly monitored by a designated team. A frequent maintenance regime will be in place to survey the fencing, and the health of beavers will be continually assessed.

Any undesirable impacts of beavers will be managed by the same team.

Who will have responsibility for beavers in the long-term?

Norfolk Rivers Trust maintains ultimate responsibility for the beavers inside the enclosure.

Day-to-day management will also be undertaken by Norfolk Rivers Trust.

Would the IUCN guidelines on reintroduction be followed?

Yes. The IUCN guidelines and procedures will be followed (see Section 8.2).

Would the reintroduction have approval from the regulatory bodies?

Yes. The reintroduction will need the approval of the Environment Agency and Natural England, along with landowner consent. A very high standard of fencing will also be required, following strict specifications.