

The Beaver's Back!



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Hello! I'm Richard, Research Manager for Natural Sciences at Glasgow Museums.

What do you all know about beavers?

[Hello teacher, please have that discussion now.]

What you might not know is that for the first time in 500 years, wild beavers are living in Britain. This may sound like good news, but not everyone is happy about it.

Future Scientists must understand that there are different sides to each story and solutions are not always simple. Scientists need to be able to understand others' views and also persuade people through their words.

Your Natural History Adventurer challenge is to explore the beaver's story and create pamphlets that argue why bringing back beavers is a really good – or really bad – idea.

Good luck!

Richard



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Things you may or may not know about beavers:

- Beavers use swimming goggles! They have a set of see-through (or transparent) eyelids that allow them to see underwater.
- Only humans build bigger structures. The largest beaver dam in existence is located in Wood Buffalo National Park in Alberta, Canada. It stretches for 850 metres and is visible from space.
- Beaver homes, called lodges, are dome-like constructions built from branches and mud.
- Beavers don't mind the cold. They stay active throughout the winter and keep using their ponds even when the water is covered with a layer of ice.
- Beavers are one of the largest rodents on Earth. Their large front teeth never stop growing. They keep their teeth from growing too long by wearing them down by constantly nibbling on wood.

Here's a short film about beavers with David Attenborough showing just how amazing their dams are: www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuMRDZbrdXc&feature=youtu.be.

Note, this clip is of North American beavers.

Here is the story of how the beavers came back to Britain:

In May 2009, three families of beavers were released into Knapdale Forest in Scotland. These were the first wild beavers in Scotland in nearly 500 years. They had been safely captured in Norway and were looked after by vets before being safely released into a lake.

However, beavers are also living around the River Tay, Scotland, where they have been introduced without official permission, and have been the cause of some concern to local landowners!



Pamphlet challenge: Meet the stakeholders

Some people are very happy about the return of the beavers, but others are not.

Here are four stakeholders, each with a different opinion about whether or not beavers should come back to Britain. A stakeholder is somebody who is interested in something because it makes a difference to their lives.

Your job is to read all four stakeholder positions and create two pamphlets. One pamphlet will be written by one of the stakeholders who is for the return of the beavers, and one will be written by one of the stakeholders who is against it.

Stakeholder 1: Louise the farmer (against bringing beavers back)

'Hi there, my name is Louise McGregor and I'm a farmer here in Knapdale. I love nature as much as anybody, but I am very against bringing back beavers. There's a good reason why we use the phrase "busy as a beaver" and "beavering away" because beavers can cause a lot of damage in a very short time. I really worry that beavers will build dams that will flood my fields, killing my precious crops. Even if I spot the beavers' dams before my fields flood, I will have to spend lots of money clearing them away. There are other problems too: rodents such as beavers can carry diseases and I am afraid that they will spread those diseases to my sheep and cows. I really believe that the beavers could force me to close down my farm. Finally, I really do love the wildlife of our country – but shouldn't we help the animals that are already here, before bringing back new ones? Shouldn't we spend the money helping endangered creatures like the Scottish wildcat first? I love animals, but the beavers will do more harm than good.'

Stakeholder 2: Isaac the forester (against bringing beavers back)

'Hello, my name is Isaac Richardson and I'm a forester working in Knapdale Forest. It is my job to make sure that the trees in the forest stay healthy and strong. While I would be excited to see beavers running (and swimming) around Scotland again, I'm afraid the damage they would do would be too great. A normal beaver can cut down around 200 trees a year! Just imagine the damage a whole family could do to my beautiful forest! People have told me that the beavers will stay in the part of the forest where the test is happening. But I know beavers – they are amazing at chewing through things, so I am certain they will escape and cause trouble.'

Stakeholder 3: Shilpa the conservationist (for bringing beavers back)

'Hi, I'm Shilpa Singh. I work as a conservationist in the Knapdale Valley. My job is to make decisions that protect the wildlife of the forest, so you can trust me when I say that I would never do anything to harm it. I support the reintroduction of beavers to Scotland because scientific evidence shows that they will help all the other plants and animals. Beavers will create new wetland areas that will help species such as otters, water voles, fish and dragonflies to flourish. Beavers help humans as well, as they remove some harmful chemicals called phosphates from the water. Finally, it was us who hunted the beavers in the first place, so it's our duty to bring them back if we can.'

Stakeholder 4: Connor the Tourist Board Officer (for bringing beavers back)

'Hello there, my name is Connor Douglas and I work for the Scottish Tourist Board. I make sure that people continue to come and visit Scotland, as this brings happiness to the visitors and brings money into Scotland. Where I work, we believe that £127 million would be brought to Scotland by visitors coming to see the beavers. We could spend this money on better schools and medicine for Scottish people and on protecting Scottish wildlife. The return of the beavers would also create more jobs. We'll need more hotels to look after all the visitors, and people will get jobs taking visitors on wildlife safaris. I think that if the beavers come back, everyone will be a winner!'

Making your pamphlets

Now that you've learned about the stakeholders, you need to create your pamphlets. Choose two stakeholders you just heard from and make pamphlets for them – one who is for bringing the beavers back, and one who is against it.

There are four pages in each pamphlet. You need to make sure that you use both pictures and words to convince the reader to agree with the stakeholder.

Page 1: This needs to be a picture that will catch the reader's eye. You also need to spell out your message in about four or five words, a bit like a newspaper headline.

Page 2: Here you can use the lines to explain in your own words why bringing back beavers is a good or a bad idea. This is where you need to persuade the reader to agree with the stakeholder.

Page 3: Here you can list some facts using bullet points, based on the information you have heard.

Page 4: You can put anything you like here, as long as it helps convince people that bringing back beavers is a good or a bad idea.

Glossary

Beaver: A large, mostly nocturnal, rodent (like a guinea pig or hamster). Beavers are semiaquatic, meaning that they spend a significant amount of their time in water. They are known for building dams, using their teeth to fell and carry timber. There are two species of beaver, the American beaver and the Eurasian beaver.

Globally extinct: No longer existing, died out.

Locally extinct: Extinct in a particular geographical area.

Extinction: The process of being or becoming extinct.

Pamphlet: A small booklet or leaflet containing information about a single subject.

Persuade: To cause someone to believe or do something through your own actions or words.

Rewilding: Rewilding has several meanings. It can mean bringing locally extinct species into the wild, or bringing creatures into the wild that have been bred in zoos or wildlife centres.

Stakeholder: A person with an interest or concern in something.

Viewpoint: A person's opinion or point of view.

