

Beavers in Scotland



Everything you need to know

Beavers have returned to Scotland after being hunted to extinction around 400 years ago. Now, with their population growing and expanding into new areas, it's important that we all learn more about them, their behaviour and the benefits, opportunities and impacts this may have.

What are beavers?

Beavers are native Scottish animals that live in and around freshwater such as rivers, streams and lochs.

They are the second largest rodent in the world and are semi-aquatic with waterproof outer fur, webbed back feet and a large, flat tail which acts like a rudder when swimming. Beavers lived alongside people for thousands of years in Scotland until they were hunted to extinction for their meat, fur and oils for perfumes and medicines.

They began to be reintroduced to Scotland in 2009 and became a Protected Species in 2019.

Beaver benefits

Beavers have many benefits for climate and nature.

They are a 'keystone species' because their presence and activities have many benefits for other wildlife, plants and habitats.

They are also known as 'ecosystem engineers' because their activities shape and create wetland areas that benefit many other animals and plants.

They can also reduce flooding, improve water quality, and bring socio-economic benefits such as tourism business opportunities.

Beaver behaviours and impacts

While beaver behaviours bring many ecological benefits, in some situations they can impact land management, infrastructure or other species of conservation importance. As a result, their impacts sometimes need to be managed.

With beavers now back in Scotland it is important that we learn about them, how to live alongside them, and also how and when to manage any negative impacts.

Common impacts include

Tree felling – Beavers fell trees for building material as well as bark for food. Sensitive or important trees may require protection to prevent them from being felled, such as fencing around areas of trees or wrapping individual trees with wire mesh.

Damming – Beavers build dams to create deep water ponds to protect themselves. They feel safest in water. Damming can cause localised flooding problems for land managers and people and in some situations affect the habitats and passage of migratory fish.

Burrowing – They also build 'lodges' to live in with underwater entrances and exits, or burrows which you can't always see from above. Burrowing can undermine and weaken structures, including river banks, infrastructure and paths, posing a risk to the safety of the public and farm machinery. Burrowing into floodbanks and bunds can increase the risk of erosion and collapse, leading to flooding of agricultural land and damage to crops.



Managing Impacts

Learning to accommodate beavers in our landscape again will bring many benefits. There are a range of techniques to help manage their impacts where needed, but beavers (their dams and resting places) are protected and it is important that you choose the right approach to avoid further problems.



Advice

Free advice is available from NatureScot to support beaver management and mitigation. In some cases, funding may be available to support mitigation works or projects that trial new approaches that support living with beavers.

Go to [Nature.scot/beavers](https://www.nature.scot/beavers)