



Trapping and health screening of wild beavers on the river Otter

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In 2014, it came to Defra's attention that a small population of beavers was living freely on the River Otter, Devon. This was of concern for two reasons: (i) their unlicensed presence contravened the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, (ii) there was a risk that adults carried a zoonotic parasite *Echinococcus multilocularis* (*Em*) which can pose a threat to human health – the UK is presently *Em*-free. The Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA) were tasked with assessing the population status and with trapping and testing all adults for *Em*.



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Sites of beaver activity were identified from a combination of information from local stakeholders and field sign surveys along the riverbank. At sites identified as having recent activity (e.g. footprints and fresh gnawings - photos), remote cameras were used to confirm beaver presence, identify individuals and determine family groups, as well as to guide the placement of traps.

Bavarian traps, specifically designed for the capture of Eurasian beaver, were sited so that they were aligned on natural beaver egress points from the river. Traps were locked open, baited (apples) and monitored with remote cameras (photo). A total of eleven traps were located within four separate trapping areas along the river.



Once the remote cameras recorded beaver activity within (photo) or around the traps, the traps were then set (photo); between three and eleven traps were set on any one night. Trapping focused on those mature adults that represented a potential risk of carrying *Em*.

Records from remote cameras indicated a total of nine individual beavers (animals were separated by simultaneous sightings, body size and individual tail-markings - photos) in two different social groups (six individuals and three individuals respectively). All four known adults and one juvenile were captured over 12 nights of trapping during February and early-March 2015. Un-trapped yearlings (three in total) were recorded on camera up to the cessation of monitoring on the 7th March.



Unique tail scarring pattern



Juvenile tail without scarring

Following capture, adults were screened by experts from the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) and concluded to be clear of *Em*. On confirmation that the animals were free of other diseases of significance (screening organised by Devon Wildlife Trust) the beavers were released back into the River Otter by DWT as part of a five year Natural England licensed trial reintroduction.



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