

Annual Beaver Trapping – 2018

Background

The River Otter Beaver Trial (ROBT) is undertaking a scientifically monitored trial re-introduction of Eurasian beavers (*Castor fiber*) on the River Otter in Devon, for a five-year period (1st April 2015 – 31st March 2020). The trial is being conducted under a licence issued by Natural England to the Devon Wildlife Trust. As part of this trial, annual trapping of beavers in particular the offspring each year for sexing and tagging with permanent identification chips is undertaken.

Aims

- To determine the general health and body condition of Eurasian beavers in this lowland English river catchment
- To tag any trapped beavers with permanent identification chips and ear tags
- To gather information on sex, age class and weights

Method

Beavers were trapped using Bavarian beaver traps as for all previous trapping events. The River Otter was surveyed on foot from Otterton to Tipton St John to identify potential trapping sites with fresh field signs, to enable offspring from the Otterton family to be targeted. Traps were also placed at Yettington and along the River Tale at two sites Danes Mills and Rydon House, where beavers are known to be present and not previous targeted for trapping. All traps were pre-baited for a min of 1-2 weeks and beaver activity monitored before traps were set. Two trapping periods were undertaken.

Findings

The annual trapping occurred over two sessions in mid-February (15-19th) and late march (27th-31st). Six Bavarian style cage traps were used, as for all previous beaver trapping events. Trapping sites were identified according to concentrations of fresh field sign activity, site access and exposure to members of the public, and land owner permission. Four trapping sites were selected, targeting four different pairs/family units. Each trapping session was preceded with a period of pre-baiting to encourage any beavers to approach and enter the traps before they were set.

Traps were monitored and re-baited daily, with daily checks for any trapped animals occurring by 8:30am. Any previously tagged individuals were released after a visual check to insure there were no obvious signs of injury or disease. Given time of year adult females were presumed to be potentially pregnant and additional handling of already tagged individuals were determined as unnecessary at this point in the trial.

Any newly trapped individuals were checked for obvious injury, disease or poor body condition, sexed, weighed, and tags applied, including coloured ear tags and individual PIT tags. Two adult females were re-trapped, both with obvious signs of pregnancy. Seven previously untagged individuals were trapped. All bar one adult male, were offspring born within the trial over the last two years (determined by body size for time of year). These beavers were giving varying combinations of coloured ear tags and micro-chipped. Unfortunately, one of these individuals could not be PIT tagged, but ear tags should enable its

recognition and microchipping on next trapping season. All individuals were in good body condition and didn't display any signs of illness or disease, and appeared to be surviving well in this environment.

The majority of ear tags were retained on re-trapped individuals but it should be noted there was some ear tag loss and that this will increase over time.

Conclusion

All individuals trapped as part of the 2018 general trapping program were in good body conditions with no obvious external signs of disease or compromised welfare. They were all within normal expected weight ranges for their age class. One adult female was presumed pregnant due to enlarged nipples and time of year. Seven previously untrapped individuals were tagged.

Dr Roisin Campbell-Palmer
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Summary of trapping

Trap Date	Location	Sex	Age Class	Weight (Kg)	Left ear tag	Right ear tag	PIT tag	Comments
16/02/18	Yettington	M	Adult	16.5	Red	Red	956000004815565	New trap
16/02/18	River Otter	M	Yearling	9	Orange	White	956000006260139	New trap
16/02/18	Rydon	F	Adult	22	Green	Turquoise		Re-trap, pregnant
16/02/18	Danes Mill	M	Yearling	11	Orange	Orange	981000006500069	New trap 'SAM'
17/02/18	Danes Mill	F	Yearling	11	Pink	Light blue	no chip	New trap 'DANI'
18/02/18	River Otter	M	Yearling		Orange	White		Re-trap
18/02/18	Yettington	F	Adult		White	White		Re-trap, pregnant
28/03/18	Danes Mill	F	Adult			Grey	981000006655874	Re-trap
29/03/18	Danes Mill	M	Yearling		Orange	Orange		Re-trap
30/03/18	River Otter	F	Yearling	9	White	Red	956000006257407	New trap
30/03/18	River Otter	F	Sub-adult	12	Red	Light blue	956000006193102	New trap
31/03/18	Rydon	F	Adult		Green	Turquoise		Re-trap
31/03/18	Yettington	F	Adult			White		Re-trap
31/03/18	River Otter	F	Yearling	10.5	Red		956000006198496	New-trap