

The return of the beaver to River Otter

Not only is East Devon home to the first colony of wild beavers for 400 years, but they have just had babies (called kits). This is exciting news for Devon Wildlife Trust and luckily captured on film by local film maker Tom Buckley presented here on the [BBC.com/earth web site](http://BBC.com/earth).



England's only breeding population of wild beavers are being allowed to remain in the wild on the River Otter after the announcement on 28 January by Natural England granting DWT a five-year monitoring licence. This significant moment in the history of modern conservation has come after months of hard work trying to secure a long-term future for the animals.

The Eurasian beaver disappeared from the English landscape over 400yrs ago and until recently was absent from much of Western Europe. Controlled trials and reintroductions in parts of Europe, including Scotland, has seen a steady rise in the population and greater contact with land managers and local communities. During the intervening 400 years however our landscape practices, development and population levels have changed significantly and one of the purposes of the trial will be to assess the impact the Beaver will have and how it adapts in this environment.

The beavers, which live on the River Otter in East Devon, were discovered to be breeding in February 2014. Defra announced its intention to capture and remove the animals in July citing the risk to human health from a tape-worm that European beavers are known to carry, but which is not currently present in the UK. Defra's decision sparked an overwhelming response from local people, with the vast majority showing their support for the beavers to remain.



It was only after all the adults had passed full health checks earlier this year, that the colony was permitted to remain.

Devon Wildlife Trust has spent the last six months working with Defra, Natural England, local farmers and the wider community to secure a solution that would see the disease risk addressed and the beavers remain.



Defra's tests revealed the beavers were all clear and the DNA tests also proved the animals are the once-native Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber*). As a result, they were re-released back on to the River Otter in March, just in time for the pregnant females to progress to term. The re-release signalled the beginning of the 5 year

monitoring trial led by DWT and involving partners Clinton Devon Estates, Derek Gow Consultancy and University of Exeter.

East Devon AONB Partnership is represented on Steering Group for the trial through AONB Manager Chris Woodruff, who said:

“This is an exciting yet challenging project that could have implications beyond the river Otter for this once native creature. The trial is just that, a test, but within a living and working landscape. The licence contains various conditions and we look forward to working with the Devon Wildlife Trust and its key partners to ensure it is delivered successfully over the next 5 years”.

Further details on beavers can be found [here](#). For a DWT video update on the project see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYeRou5iCsM&feature=youtu.be>