

# Beavers are home again in Scotland

IN MAY, THREE FAMILIES OF BEAVERS WERE RELEASED INTO THE WILD IN SCOTLAND AS PART OF A TRIAL REINTRODUCTION. JILL NELSON AND NIDA AL FULAIJ WERE THERE TO WELCOME THEM.



FORESTRY COMMISSION



SWT & PTES

**T**he long-awaited Scottish Beaver Trial (SBT) has finally begun, and beavers are living wild in Scotland for the first time in over 400 years. Three beaver families have been released at carefully selected sites in Knapdale Forest, Mid-Argyll. The beavers, originally from Norway, have been chosen because they are considered to be the closest type to those once found in the UK. All of them have completed a six-month statutory quarantine period and been declared fit and healthy.

The trial project is being run as a partnership by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland and host partner Forestry Commission Scotland. Scottish Natural Heritage is closely involved in the ongoing monitoring of the animals and their habitat. PTES is one of several funders of the project and Jill Nelson and Nida Al Fulaij were privileged to be present at the release: 'There was a real buzz of excitement in Knapdale as the beavers ventured forth into the Scottish countryside' says Jill, 'It's such a peaceful and remote place that I'm sure they will quickly make themselves at home and start improving the landscape.'

Now that the beavers have been

released into the wild, the real work of the trial can begin. First and foremost, the trial is a scientific study of how beavers cope naturally in the Scottish environment and what effect they will have upon it. The beavers are wearing radio transmitters so that their activities can be closely monitored. The information gathered will help the Scottish Government make further decisions on the future of beavers in Knapdale Forest or elsewhere in Scotland.

### Perfect location

Knapdale Forest is an ideal location to carry out the project as it covers a range of important habitats and biodiversity. The trial area is also in the heart of a forest which produces timber and provides recreational facilities for people, making it a suitable place to observe how beavers co-exist with forestry operations and the environment.

The Scottish Government approved a licence for the release of the beaver families in Knapdale Forest in May 2008, following a two-month long public consultation which showed that 73% of local respondents favoured the trial.

The Scottish trial is being watched with interest by various

groups that would also like to see the return of beavers elsewhere in the UK.

### A close watch

Scottish Beaver Trial Project Manager Simon Jones, said: 'The release went extremely well. They were placed into purpose-built artificial lodges at carefully selected points around the trial site. They will now gradually gnaw their way out of the lodge at a pace that is comfortable for them, before exploring their new surroundings.'

'First and foremost, this is a scientific study of how the beavers cope naturally in the Scottish environment and what effect they have upon it. We will be closely tracking the beavers' activities and collecting data over the next five years.'

'We hope to see many people visiting the trial site over time, but the beavers do need time to settle in before meeting the neighbours. Visitors will stand a better chance of seeing beaver signs, and maybe even some beavers, by waiting a few months to make their trip to the trial site. By timing your visit in the early morning or early evening, you will have the best chance of spotting these intriguing animals in the wild.'