



Beavers have made themselves at home in Tayside, but are unlikely to spread farther, say experts.

▶ REINTRODUCTION

Tay beavers here to stay

Population estimates for the rogue rodents of Scotland's Tayside reach almost 150.

It's official: as some lone voices have been saying for several years, the number of beavers living wild in the River Tay catchment in central Scotland is considerably more than a handful of animals.

A survey released by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) at the end of 2012 suggests that 146 beavers in 40 groups have established themselves in the rivers and lochs of the catchment, from Kinloch Rannoch and Kenmore in the west to Perth and Forfar in the east. All of them have escaped, or been released, from private collections (see box, right).

Last spring, the Scottish government decided to allow

the beavers to remain in Tayside at least until 2015, when the beaver reintroduction trial in Knapdale concludes. A decision will then be taken on whether to continue beaver reintroductions in Scotland as a whole.

"For the first time, we have a clear picture of how many beavers there are, and how far they have spread," said David

Bale, chair of the Tayside Beaver Study Group. "And because the beavers are in an area with both farming and fishing, this is a good chance to see how they affect land use."

James Scott, from SNH, has dismissed fears that the beavers might move out from the Tay catchment and populate other areas. "There's sufficient suitable habitat for them there," he said.

In 2010, believing there to be no more than 30 or so animals, SNH attempted to recapture the Tayside beavers because they were not part of a planned release. But this was abandoned after only one was trapped.

Nevertheless, experts say that it would still be possible to remove the entire Tayside population if this were deemed necessary in two years' time. **Simon Birch**

▶ BACKGROUND

- The Tayside beavers have been living in the area since at least 2006, and possibly since 2001.
- The population originates from animals that were deliberately and illegally released into the wild or escaped from private collections.
- For example, in 2006 beavers escaped from the Auchingarrich Wildlife Centre in Perthshire.

AGENDA interview

DR DARBY PROCTOR on CHIMPANZEES



In a recent study that rewarded sharing, Dr Darby Proctor discovered that chimps appear to have a sense of fairness.

Is this discovery a first?

Previously, observational studies have shown that chimpanzees share food, but until now no one has proved that, in an experimental task, they distribute the rewards equitably.

Why is this important?

It has long been assumed that humans are the only species with a sense of fairness, but increasingly experiments have shown that other species, such as chimpanzees and capuchin monkeys, are sensitive to the needs of others. Now we can say that chimps preferentially choose equitable reward distribution.

Is it likely this behaviour also occurs in the wild?

I believe that our findings could be one way to interpret some of the behaviour that is described in the literature.

Do other mammals have a sense of fairness?

We're not sure, but we would expect other co-operative species to need something like a sense of fairness to ensure that a partner did not take most of a reward. **Fergal MacErlean**

Dr Darby Proctor is a research fellow at Emory University, where she studies primate behaviour.

Keith Ringland

Andy Rouse/naturepl.com

NEWS IN NUMBERS

24 The number of tonnes of ivory confiscated in Malaysia in December 2012. Last year was the worst year for ivory smuggling since records began in 1988.

850 The number of different fish species living in the Mekong River. Recent discoveries include a catfish that can walk on land and a blind, cave-dwelling member of the carp family.



54% The amount by which vaccination cuts TB levels within badger social groups, according to research carried out by the Food and Environment Research Agency.