

Alliance calls on Scottish Government to help beavers survive

Friday 24 July, 2020

A coalition of 24 environmental charities, countryside access organisations, businesses and community groups is asking the public to sign a petition to show the Scottish Government that it should safeguard the future of the country's fragile wild beaver population, instead of allowing the animals to be shot.

The Scottish Rewilding Alliance has launched a petition on the Scottish Parliament website calling on the Government to allow unwanted beavers – which currently can be legally shot by farmers – to be moved to new areas where landowners would welcome them and where there is plenty of suitable habitat. It is hoped the petition will trigger a debate in the Scottish Parliament.

Scottish Nature Heritage (SNH) has already identified over 100,000 hectares of 'core beaver woodland' in Scotland where beavers can thrive. In areas of the Highlands, for example, SNH has identified many beaver-friendly locations, often surrounded by land with low sensitivity to beaver impacts.

"A recent YouGov poll showed that a large majority of people want more beavers in Britain – yet the Scottish Government allowed the shooting of around one-in-five of Scotland's wild beavers last year," said Steve Micklewright, Convener of the Scottish Rewilding Alliance and Chief Executive of conservation charity Trees for Life.

"Beavers can help in a post-Covid green recovery by creating nature-rich wetlands that help tackle the climate and nature crises. It's unacceptable that these habitat-creating, biodiversity-boosting, flood-preventing animals are at risk because the Government allows their killing. A simple and positive solution is to relocate beavers from where they're not wanted to where they are."

Although the Government made beavers a protected species last year, it says they can only spread naturally from their existing ranges in Knapdale in Argyll and on the River Tay.

This political decision leaves Tayside farmers whose crops are sometimes damaged by beavers with little option but to apply to SNH for a licence to kill the animals. Last year, 87 beavers – some 20 percent of the total Scottish population – were shot.

The Government's current policy also denies enthusiastic conservation bodies and landowners of the opportunity of introducing beavers to their land.

Beavers build small dams, creating nature-rich wetlands that support all sorts of wildlife and soak up carbon dioxide. Their dams help reduce flooding by regulating water flow, retain water which helps during droughts, and improve water quality by trapping sediment. Beavers can also become a tourist attraction that can benefit local communities and economies.

"Every beaver shot is a wasted life that could have done so much to help rewild Scotland. So we are asking everyone who cares about beavers to sign the petition to show the Government that there is popular support for a better approach to dealing with the localised and manageable problems these animals sometimes cause," said James Nairne, Trustee of Scottish Wild Beaver Group.

The Alliance's petition can be supported at treesforlife.org.uk/savebeavers.

The Scottish Rewilding Alliance is a collaboration of organisations wanting to enable rewilding at a scale new to Scotland. See www.rewild.scot.

Ends

Notes to editors

* The Scottish Rewilding Alliance petition: www.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/beaver.

* In a YouGov poll in January 2020, 62 percent of people – and 76 percent of those who want to bring back missing species – wanted beavers to be reintroduced on a large scale. See

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