

Appeal to bring beavers home to the Highlands

Wednesday 22 March, 2017

Conservation charity Trees for Life is seeking support in raising £15,000 for a project aimed at bringing beavers back to the northwest Highlands.

The charity's Bring Back the Beavers appeal will fund site assessments, work with local communities, and beaver habitat restoration work such as tree planting and natural regeneration.

This will enable Trees for Life to prepare for a formal application for a licence to re-establish beavers in the Highlands.

"Beavers were a key native species of the Caledonian Forest before being hunted to extinction some 400 years ago. We now have an unprecedented opportunity to bring them back," said Alan Watson Featherstone, Founder of Trees for Life.

"We are asking the public to help us pave the way for beavers to come home to the Highlands – improving the region for other wildlife, and providing a tourist attraction to boost the local economy."

Last November, the Scottish Government announced that European beavers were officially accepted as a native species in Scotland.

Trees for Life has been preparing for the return of beavers for more than 25 years. This has involved creating suitable habitat by planting aspens and willows along loch shores and riverbanks. In 2015, the charity commissioned an expert survey of some of the key sites where it works, which confirmed that these locations could support beavers.

Beavers are superb ecosystem engineers. They create and manage wetland habitats – benefitting insects, fish, bats and birds. Their small dams help regulate water flow. Their felling of trees provides dead wood that benefits many organisms, and stimulates regeneration by causing new shoots to grow from tree stumps.

Beavers cannot colonise the northwest Highlands on their own, as the Great Glen is a natural barrier to beavers from the existing populations in Argyll and Tayside. So the only way to be sure they will return to the region will be to give them a helping hand.

In Europe, 24 countries have reintroduced beavers, with significant benefits. The official Scottish beaver trial in Argyll also showed substantial positive results, both for the local ecology and from increased tourism.

The Scottish Government has recognised that some residents may be concerned about the possible impact of beavers on their interests, and that this requires careful management.

Any surplus funds raised by the Bring Back the Beavers appeal will be used by Trees for Life to fund other activities to help restore the wild forest habitat.

For more details and to support the appeal, visit www.treesforlife.org.uk.

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