

Legal killing of 1-in-5 Scottish beavers spotlights need for fresh approach across Britain

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The killing of 87 beavers in Scotland – one fifth of the country’s population – proves there is an urgent need for humans to live more sympathetically alongside beavers across Britain, the Beaver Trust says.

The Trust said lethal control of the animals for agricultural reasons should be only ever a last resort, and that options such as relocating beavers to areas where they could benefit the landscape and be welcomed by local people should be considered.

The scale of the officially sanctioned lethal control of beavers in Scotland in 2019 was revealed in a report released by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) on 28 May.

James Wallace, Director of Beaver Trust said: “Reintroducing beavers to Scotland has brought tremendous benefits to local ecosystems. Occasionally their presence also creates negative impacts for agriculture, but culling one fifth of the population in a single season is no answer.

“Further deaths must be reduced, and Beaver Trust is calling on landowners, farmers, the Government and conservation groups to work together urgently on simple, positive steps to prevent avoidable culling of this important animal in future.”

Chris Jones, Director of Beaver Trust, who has beavers on his farm in Cornwall, said: “While beavers’ presence in agricultural areas on floodplains can result in problems for farmers, these challenges can be successfully managed. Germany’s Bavaria is just one of many international examples of how beavers and farmers can co-exist quite successfully alongside each other.”

The Trust says that the benefits of beavers significantly outweigh any disadvantages. The animals are expert ecosystem engineers that provide a vital and natural opportunity to sustainably adapt British landscapes to cope better with increased flooding and droughts, while improving the quality of our rivers and benefiting all sorts of other wildlife.

“Beavers are hugely valuable creatures and we must recognise them as such. There is a welcome demand and enthusiasm for their presence in other parts of the UK – so surely moving them is the best option, and lethal control should be a last resort,” said Chris Jones.

“Public support for beavers across Britain is rising exponentially as projects such as the five- year River Otter Beaver Trial in Devon prove their importance to our ecosystems.

“People want to see beavers back across our landscape and we need to learn fast how to co-exist with them. SNH’s report provides an important opportunity to collectively safeguard beavers and welcome their return.”

Beaver Trust is working collaboratively with non-governmental organisations, farming, fishing and forestry groups and the Government to create a simple, national strategy for restoring beavers and our rivers. See <https://beavertrust.org>.

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