

Scots want beavers moved not shot, new research finds

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A majority of Scots agree beavers should be moved to new locations in Scotland instead of being killed, according to new research.

The findings come as Highland-based rewilding charity Trees for Life seeks to raise £40,000 through a crowdfunding appeal to help protect Scotland's wild beavers. This will cover the costs of its current legal challenge over the failure of NatureScot – the Scottish Government's nature agency – to make the killing of beavers a genuine last resort when the species needs managing.

The Protect Beavers In Scotland campaign has been boosted by a new opinion poll showing that 66% of Scots agree beavers should be relocated to new areas of Scotland instead of being killed when they need managing. Only 5% of those asked disagreed.

"With the future of Scotland's endangered beavers hanging in the balance, it's increasingly clear that NatureScot's current illegal approach to beaver conservation is also out of step with public opinion," said Steve Micklewright, Trees for Life's Chief Executive.

"It shows people want to live alongside these biodiversity-boosting, flood-preventing animals – a finding boosted by the fantastic response to our current crowdfunding appeal to protect Scotland's beavers."

The opinion poll was carried out by market research agency Survation for the Scottish Rewilding Alliance, a coalition of organisations including Trees for Life. Over 1,000 people were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that NatureScot should relocate beavers before considering authorising their killing.

Beavers' dams create nature-rich and flood-reducing wetlands. When beavers sometimes also have unwanted local impacts on agricultural land, laws governing protected species require any intervention to have the least possible impact on their conservation.

Lawyer Adam Eagle, Chief Executive Officer of The Lifescape Project, a legally specialist rewilding charity spearheading the litigation alongside Trees for Life, said: "There's a strong legal case that NatureScot is breaking the law by failing to make killing of beavers a last resort, in failing to fully explore all other options, and in failing to ensure its actions do not compromise the survival of the species in Scotland."

The Scottish Government declared beavers a legally protected species in May 2019, but in the following months NatureScot authorised the killing of 87 wild beavers.

Although NatureScot has identified over 100,000 hectares of suitable beaver habitat, the Scottish Government says beavers cannot be relocated to new areas within Scotland – significantly limiting the options for Tayside farmers whose crops are damaged by beavers.

A judicial review ruling in Trees for Life's favour would ensure lethal control is a genuine last resort. Conservation charities and others will be able to identify – with proper community engagement – suitable sites around Scotland to which beavers could be moved and be safe and welcome.

Trees for Life says this would ensure a better future for beavers, which can be key allies in tackling the nature and climate emergencies. By helping prevent damage to farmers' fields and ensuring farmers are less often forced to shoot much-loved and endangered animals, it would also be a farmer-friendly solution.

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For more details on Trees for Life beaver appeal, see treesforlife.org.uk.

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