



Derbyshire
Wildlife Trust

Beavers in the landscape



© Beaver Trust

Eurasian beavers are a large semi-aquatic rodent that are native to Britain. They were hunted to extinction in Britain 400 years ago for their fur, meat and scent glands. Beavers have now returned to 27 European countries since the 1930s and more recently to Britain in the last 25 years. In England, there are wild breeding populations of beavers in Devon and Kent and further enclosures across the country.



© David Parkyn

Beavers were released into Derbyshire Wildlife Trust's enclosure at Willington Wetlands in 2021 where they have over 40 hectares of wetland habitat. Derbyshire Wildlife Trust are now moving forward to work collaboratively with organisations, agencies and communities to assess the possibility of returning beavers into the wild in the future in Derbyshire.



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Do you know your beaver basics?

- Beavers are herbivores meaning they only eat plants and the leaves, branches and bark of trees.
- They live in freshwater bodies and prefer still or slow moving water with depths of at least 60cm.
- An adult beaver is approximately 80cm to 1 metre in length and their distinctive scaly tail is an additional 30cm long.
- Most years, female beavers give birth to 1 litter in spring, usually including 1 to 4 kits (beaver young).
- Beavers have been a protected species in England since 2022.

The benefits of beavers

Beavers are a keystone species because of their ability to restore ecosystem function to our rivers while also creating a more resilient landscape for us in response to climate change.

Beaver activity can lead to:

Reduced flood risk

Beaver activity helps to store water and 'slow the flow' leading to reduced flooding downstream during high rainfall events.

Improved water quality

Beaver ponds and wetlands behind dams filter out sediment, pollutants and nutrients improving water quality downstream. They also act as carbon stores.

Increased biodiversity

Beaver engineered wetlands are a perfect habitat for a variety of species such as water voles and birds including the willow tit.

Resilience to drought

Beaver activity makes more space for water, and a wetter landscape helps to reduce the impact and severity of drought.



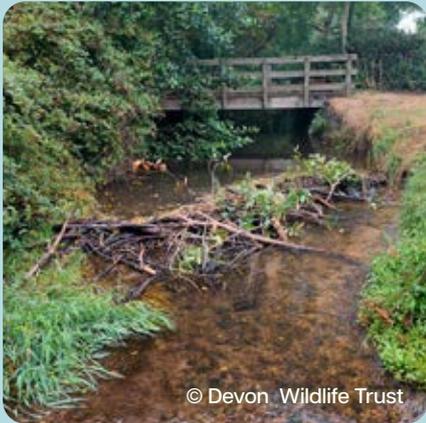
© Alan Puttock, University of Exeter

This is an aerial view of a beaver-created wetland in the River Otter catchment in Devon where beavers are living in the wild. It shows how beaver activity, such as dam building and burrowed canals, can change the landscape to hold more water and provide new habitats for wildlife. Dams start small, and this beaver dam and wetland has taken many years to get to this size. The effects of different beaver activities, and the changes they can create, will vary depending on the location and how they are managed.

Contact: beavers@derbyshirewt.co.uk

<https://www.derbyshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/derbyshire-beavers>

Beaver activity



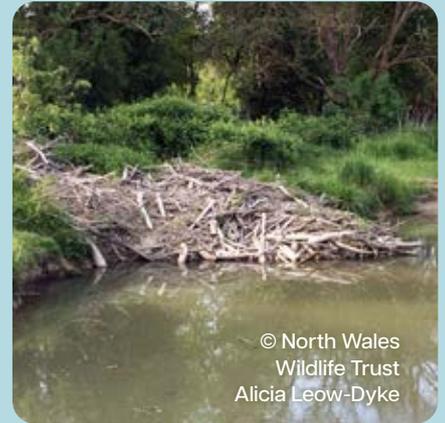
Dam building

Beavers build dams from sticks, large stones and sediment from the watercourse. They do this when they need to raise the water level behind the dam to make it deep enough. Beavers don't always create dams and they can't dam rivers when they are too wide, deep or fast-flowing.



Feeding

Beavers feed on woody and green vegetation, leaving a 45-degree angle on the stem. They generally forage within 20 metres of the watercourse, although they can go further but don't like travelling far from water. They mostly coppice smaller trees but they can fell mature trees.



Lodge building

Beavers live in burrows which they dig into riverbanks, or lodges they make from logs, sticks and mud. What they build and how many will depend on the river and size of their territory. Entrances to chambers and burrows are hidden underwater. If a chamber is exposed beavers are likely to cover the hole with sticks and sediment.

Did you know?

Beavers use their tails for balancing when standing on their hind legs to feed and fell, they use it as a rudder to support swimming, and to warn against danger through tail slapping the water's surface.



Gardens and large ponds

Beavers prefer still or slower flowing water and therefore might occasionally make use of large garden ponds. Beavers may excavate burrows and canals which can weaken banks and cause erosion. They might also look for foraging opportunities in gardens too. Beaver activity in gardens should be monitored and management options such as exclusion fencing or bank protection might be considered where it's difficult to make space for beaver activity.

Living alongside beavers

In spring 2025, the government in England opened the door to receive applications for wild release licences. This is a thorough application process that requires looking at suitable habitat, possible impacts and consulting the community.

Making space for a returning species, especially such a busy one, can bring some new challenges. Beaver activity may sometimes need to be managed, such as near infrastructure, riverside properties and valuable agricultural and forestry land.

To assess how beavers could be released successfully in Derbyshire, it is important to work as a community to discuss the opportunities and concerns and to understand how we could live alongside beavers in the future to benefit both people and nature.

Examples of beaver management

Tree protection

Some beaver feeding, such as on orchard or ornamental trees, is unwanted and can be managed by tree wrapping with galvanised welded wire mesh. A sand and paint mix can alternatively be applied to the base of trees. Exclusion fencing may be more appropriate for orchards.



© Charlotte Taylor

Visit our website for more information and to sign up to our beavers mailing list <https://www.derbyshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/derbyshire-beavers>

For further questions relating to beaver reintroductions please email: beavers@derbyshirewt.co.uk

This leaflet was produced in September 2025. Please note that some of the content may be subject to change.

Thank you to Derbyshire Dales District Council and The Swire Charitable Trust for enabling the production of this leaflet.

Managing beaver dams

Beaver dams can deliver significant reductions to downstream flood risk; however, they can sometimes raise water levels locally. If a dam is less than two weeks old, and is causing significant disruption, it can be removed. Support and advice on this should be sought from a local beaver management group. For any dam that is older, a licence from Natural England would be required and evidence provided that the dam is causing serious damage to property or infrastructure.



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