



Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust

The Old Ragged School, Brook Street, Nottingham, NG1 1EA
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Media Release

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Page 1 of 4

Returning beavers have been anything but Idle since their return to Nottinghamshire. Wildlife Trust excited by earlier than expected arrival of beaver kits.

Just over a year ago, staff, volunteers and supporters of Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust were eagerly awaiting the arrival of eight beavers from Scotland at the Idle Valley Nature Reserve near Retford. The anticipated arrival was part of an ambitious project to return them to the county for the first time in centuries.

12 months on, those connected with the project are reflecting on the animals' positive impact on the reserve, the largest site in the charity's care, and celebrating the news that the group has expanded more quickly than expected – with two previously single adult beavers having successfully paired and raised kits.

The group, which lives in a carefully designed enclosure, settled in well and their positive impact within the 58-hectare enclosure was evident within days – from signs of coppicing by feeding on willows to evidence of gnawing on large tree trunks to trim their teeth, creating new habitat for invertebrates.

Whilst the prospect of returning beavers to the Nottinghamshire landscape, where they previously thrived until hunted to extinction many centuries ago, provided motivation for the project, the real driver was the beavers' capacity to enhance habitats not just for themselves, but also for other species. Their return represents the Trust's commitment to utilising natural processes to enhance the wildlife habitats at the huge reserve, which sits alongside the River Idle, to make it wilder and more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

With over 375 hectares of diverse habitat to manage across the vast site, the Wildlife Trust has long been searching for the right balance between direct intervention by man and machines and natural processes. The Trust's Nature Recovery Team firmly believed that beavers would make a significant impact through their feeding and by felling trees to build their underwater lodges – thereby helping control willow and other tree species currently forming dense scrub at the expense of reedbed and marshland habitats.



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Speaking on behalf of Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, Head of Nature Recovery (North) Janice Bradley said: “Idle Valley Nature Reserve is by far the largest site in our care and the scale of the challenge has sometimes stretched our resources. Shaping habitats across such a large area through staff and volunteers with hand tools and machinery is a never-ending task, so we have increasingly employed natural processes such as grazing to keep habitats open and diverse. The return of beavers, alongside investment to enable us to control water levels and expand our conservation grazing programme, was the obvious next step and we’re delighted with the impact they have had so far. The discovery by our monitoring team that we have new kits earlier than expected is a great way to round off the year.”

The Wildlife Trust hoped that the single adults, which had never previously met, might pair last spring and potentially rear kits in 2023. The fact that they had kits this summer means they got together very quickly indeed. The team behind the project is delight to have two family groups helping to transform habitats at the Idle Valley Nature Reserve.

In some parts of the enclosure the beavers have ‘ring-barked’ some trees, which the Trust hopes will develop into standing deadwood, one of the rarest habitats on the reserve and which is essential for declining species such as lesser spotted woodpecker, willow tit and tree-dwelling bats. In recent weeks, the beavers have created a new glade in an old aspen plantation, which will enable the development of a far richer ground flora, and have also coppiced willows in channels in the reedbed, opening up those channels for wildfowl and bittern.

The return of the beavers required significant investment, including fencing the new enclosure, research to ensure the beavers would thrive and to assess their future impact plus licencing and logistics of the quarantine and transportation from Scotland. This investment would not have been possible without partners and supporters.

Janice added: “Bringing back beavers to Nottinghamshire is the most ambitious species-focussed project we’ve ever embarked on and we couldn’t have achieved it without the support of Severn Trent, Nottingham Trent University, partners such as Natural England, the EA and the Beaver Trust, and of course generous individual donors.”

The reintroduction of the beavers formed part of a much larger project designed to improve a range of habitats across more than 220 hectares of the reserve, funded by Severn Trent. Severn Trent and the Trust were recently nominated for the Utility Week Collaboration Award for this wetland transformation project.

Speaking on behalf of Severn Trent Graham Osborn, Biodiversity and Ecology Team Lead said: “This has been one of the most exciting, and nail biting projects that we have had the pleasure to support, simply because we are dealing with nature and a species that is relatively unfamiliar in our region, and with that comes risk on potential success. But, to have



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such an incredible first year, with the beavers becoming established, and then the new additions to the group, this is an outstanding result for everyone involved.”

The beavers were originally living on the River Tay in Scotland and after a period of quarantine at specialised facilities at Five Sisters Zoo, the Beaver Trust carefully transported them to their new home in Nottinghamshire. The Wildlife Trust has introduced beavers to the site as part of a long-term vision to make the site wilder by enhancing, protecting and connecting habitats and as part of wider, multi-partner efforts to ensure 30% of land across the UK can support nature’s recovery by 2030.

A comprehensive monitoring programme, run in partnership with Nottingham Trent University, will assess the longer-term impact of the beavers as they enhance habitats to the benefit of other species, such as wildfowl, amphibians and dragonflies. The research will also identify opportunities to improve habitats further for vulnerable species such as otter, water vole, and bittern.

Whilst the charity is delighted that the beavers are now helping it deliver its long-term aspirations to enhance the reserve’s habitats for other species, especially the wild fowl and wading birds that are central to the reserve’s designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, the project has not been without its challenges, such as the targeted theft of fencing materials when the enclosure was being built.

The Wildlife Trust believes that the Idle Valley Nature Reserve can be a vital part of the UK Nature Recovery Network by acting as a catalyst for the restoration of nature across the wider Idle floodplain where it has been investing in and supporting other landowners for over 30 years.

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PHOTO/VIDEO



Two of the new beaver kits caught on trail cam



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Further trail cam footage of adult beavers and the release of the male beaver thought to be the parent of the new kits can be found via this link for one time use only: <https://we.tl/t-ILzVjX0V4Q>

For further information or to request interviews please contact Erin McDaid on 07734 573862 emcdaid@nottswt.co.uk or Rachel Rutherford on 07519 633236 rrutherford@nottswt.co.uk

Notes for Editors

1) The Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, a registered charity, manages dozens of nature reserves throughout the county. It advises local authorities, community groups and landowners on nature conservation issues, and makes a major input into decision-making on planning matters and other issues.

2) The Trust is part of a nation-wide network of local Trusts which work to protect wildlife in town and country - The Wildlife Trusts. The Wildlife Trusts now boast over 900,000 members. For more information, please see our website: www.nottinghamshirewildlife.org