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Unravelling Perceptions of Eurasian Beaver Reintroduction in Great Britain

The Eurasian beaver went regionally extinct in Great Britain 500 years ago, and now they're being reintroduced. In Scotland, they have been listed as a resident species once again since May 2019. In England, a decision on the future of beavers is due in 2020 following the end of the 'River Otter Beaver Trial' in the South West, and a number of beavers are present unofficially in Wales with proposals being made for an official reintroduction project. For most of Great Britain therefore, living with beavers is a new concept for human communities to comprehend.

In a nationwide online survey (n=2759) we sought to understand the perceptions that exist about the possibility prior to the presence of beavers. In our results, (now published in the journal AREA) we identified key stakeholders and explored views of the potential impacts that beaver presence would have. Amongst the respondent pool we found a diversity of opinion, and key groups less likely to have a more positive view of the impacts of beavers included respondents whose occupation was in 'Farming & Agriculture', 'Fisheries & Aquaculture' or were 'Retired', but even within these groups there was a variety of attitudes observed.

We then identified the need to consider the attitudes towards management techniques and views of responsibilities for management in order to make proactive decisions to minimise potential conflicts. This includes considering attitudes towards the legal protection of beavers; we found that respondents who supported beaver reintroduction tended to associate with the view that there should be strong legal protection whilst those that did not support reintroduction tended to associate with the view that there should be no legal protection. With these polarised perspectives, there is a risk that management strategies may escalate conflicts if the social dimension has not been factored into the decision-making process.



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In this presentation, we use the questionnaire results as well as experiences from the 'River Otter Beaver Trial' in order to make the case that such attitudes towards management will need to be considered early in beaver reintroduction projects, beyond simply the perceptions of the beavers themselves, in order to inform management decisions which are less likely to cause or escalate conflicts with beavers or between people about beavers. We will then conclude by introducing further areas of social and socioeconomic research being undertaken in Great Britain within the scope of a PhD project working alongside the 'River Otter Beaver Trial', 'Cornwall Beaver Project' and a proposed project in Plymouth.