# Beavers transform Argaty estate as rewilding tensions grow in Scotland



As dusk descends over the serene landscape of the Argaty estate, Tom Bowser, a passionate advocate for rewilding, shares his insights beside a sprawling pond shaped by the industrious beavers now found on his family’s land. The tranquillity of the moment is punctuated by the gentle chirping of birds and the anticipation of watching these remarkable creatures at work. With a single movement, a beaver breaks the water's surface, revealing the quiet determination that Bowser admires—a determination mirroring the ongoing journey of beaver reintroduction across Scotland.

Bowser’s narrative, framed in his latest work *Waters of Life*, unfolds as a personal account of the efforts to bring Tayside’s beavers to Argaty, marking a significant chapter in a conservation story that has evolved dramatically over recent years. Initially decimated in the 1600s due to hunting and habitat loss, beavers began their comeback after a few escaped captivity in 2001, leading to decades of controversy, debates, and efforts from conservationists advocating for their return. By 2019, some protections were finally established, but the threat of culling remained, leaving numerous beavers vulnerable to lethal control measures.

In early 2020, a conversation with James Nairne, a trustee of the Scottish Wild Beaver Group, set the course for change on the Bowser family plot. Nairne’s proposal to relocate beavers to Argaty was met with a mixed response from the community, where local farmers feared economic repercussions caused by the rodents' ecological engineering. Despite the backlash, Bowser moved forward with the plan, countering resistance with robust support from environmental groups, schools, and even celebrities.

By November 2021, Argaty became the first private estate in Scotland to formally reintroduce beavers. “This is not simply about beavers,” Bowser states, emphasising the implications for agriculture and local ecosystems. “Farming relies on a healthy environment,” he adds, illustrating the intrinsic link between agriculture and biodiversity.

The ecosystem impact has been notable: the beavers have transformed a previously drained peat bog into a thriving wetland, storing water and reducing flood risks for the surrounding farmland. Ongoing research from Stirling University corroborates Bowser’s observations, highlighting improvements in water quality and biodiversity. The beavers’ presence enriches the environment, creating a landscape of resilience and abundance that bolsters a myriad of species.

Yet, as conservationists attempt to broaden beaver populations across Scotland, tensions linger. Just weeks prior to Bowser’s reflections at Argaty, NatureScot postponed a planned reintroduction in Glen Affric, citing local concerns despite robust community backing. This delay ignited frustration and anger among conservationists, with Bowser labelling it a “cowardly stalling” that underscores governmental hesitance amidst pressure from agricultural lobby groups.

Meanwhile, a groundswell of support for beaver translocations has emerged, evidenced by recent reports from the Beaver Trust, which detailed a record 77 beaver translocations in 2023, significantly reducing lethal controls. This represents a shift in the tide, affirming conservation goals aligned with Scotland's Beaver Strategy and marking a positive trajectory for beaver populations throughout the country.

The broader narrative of beaver reintroduction, however, is layered with complexities and contradictions. In December 2023, the first wild-born kits were spotted in the Cairngorms after the reintroduction of beavers to the park—an event echoing the success seen at Argaty. Yet, opposition from landowners persists, as highlighted in the hesitations surrounding Glen Affric and the contentious role of political influence over ecological restoration efforts.

Bowser’s book isn’t merely a chronicle; it serves as a call to action for future generations. He hopes to inspire a shift in perspective, advocating for a symbiotic relationship between farmers and wildlife, underscoring the necessity of understanding and accepting beavers as allies in environmental stewardship. As he observes their industrious behaviour—constructing dams and enriching the landscape—it becomes evident that beavers are not merely creatures to be tolerated; they are vital architects of a resilient ecosystem, working tirelessly to restore balance that benefits both wildlife and human communities.

In this age marked by ecological crises and political inertia, the story of beavers at Argaty embodies hope. Every ripple that breaks the water’s surface serves as a reminder that, to heal our landscapes and forge a sustainable future, we must make room for the right kind of wild—where humans and nature exist harmoniously.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: 1
2. Paragraph 2: 1
3. Paragraph 3: 1
4. Paragraph 4: 1
5. Paragraph 5: 1
6. Paragraph 6: 1
7. Paragraph 7: 1
8. Paragraph 8: 2, 3, 4
9. Paragraph 9: 6, 7
10. Paragraph 10: 1, 2, 5
11. Paragraph 11: 1, 5
12. Paragraph 12: 1

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/business-environment/environment/5240814/tom-bowser-argaty-red-kites-beavers-rewilding/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://beavertrust.org/2023-beaver-management-report/> - In 2023, the Beaver Trust, in collaboration with Five Sisters Zoo and under the direction of NatureScot, achieved a record translocation of 77 beavers. Forty beavers were released into the wild in Scotland, including sites such as Loch Lomond NNR, various locations in the Spey Catchment as part of the Cairngorms Beaver Project, and Knapdale. The reduction in the number of beavers subject to lethal control, from 63 in 2022 to just 8 in 2023, is also greatly welcome. This progress aligns with Scotland's Beaver Strategy, aiming to expand the beaver population across the country for the benefit of biodiversity.
3. <https://forestryandland.gov.scot/news-releases/new-family-of-beavers-arrive-in-loch-ard-forest> - On November 21, 2024, Forestry and Land Scotland, in partnership with the Beaver Trust, released a family of five beavers into Loch Ard Forest. This release took the total number of beavers translocated to land managed by Forestry and Land Scotland to 24 in 13 months. The beavers were released into restored wetland habitat, where a network of ponds and new native woodland had been created alongside the Duchray Water within the riparian corridor. This initiative supports the Scottish Government's Beaver Strategy, aiming to expand the beaver population across Scotland for the benefit of biodiversity.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce31zvex4yqo> - Conservationists have reported the birth of the first wild-born beavers in the Cairngorms National Park in over 400 years. The two kits were born following the release of four beaver families at selected sites in the park late last year. The first kit was born on land owned by Wildland Cairngorms Ltd, and the second at Rothiemurchus, near Aviemore. This marks a significant milestone in the reintroduction of beavers to Scotland, with populations already established in Tayside, on the Forth, in Knapdale, and Loch Lomond.
5. <https://news.sky.com/story/beavers-return-to-cairngorms-national-park-in-scotland-after-400-years-13034743> - Beavers have returned to the UK's largest national park, the Cairngorms, for the first time in 400 years. Two beavers were released on the Rothiemurchus Estate within the park, and another pair were set free on land owned by Wildland Cairngorms Ltd. The release was conducted under a licence from public agency NatureScot, with plans to relocate up to 15 beaver families to sites in the upper River Spey area over the next five years. Conservationists hope the beavers will boost biodiversity and enhance the region's ecosystems.
6. <https://theferret.scot/beavers-forestry-agency-landowners/> - A plan for the first reintroduction of beavers in northern Scotland has been postponed by the Scottish Government’s forestry agency following opposition from landowners, aided by the local SNP politician, Kate Forbes. A dossier of emails released under freedom of information law reveals disagreements within Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) over its support for the proposal to bring beavers back to Glen Affric in the Highlands. Campaigners were disappointed by the delay, though they still hoped that beavers would be reintroduced in 2024.
7. <https://www.nature.scot/doc/beaver-management-report-january-2023-april-2024> - NatureScot's Beaver Management Report for January 2023 to April 2024 highlights significant progress in beaver conservation in Scotland. The report details various translocations and reinforcements, including releases in the Cairngorms National Park, Loch Lomond, and other areas. It also discusses the reduction in lethal control of beavers and the ongoing efforts to expand their population across Scotland. The report emphasizes the importance of collaboration among stakeholders to achieve the goals set out in Scotland's Beaver Strategy.