

**THE TRANSPORT,  
QUARANTINE AND  
CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT OF  
EUROPEAN BEAVER *Castor fiber***



**Report for Scottish Natural Heritage**

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May, 2002

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# THE TRANSPORT, QUARANTINE AND CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT OF EUROPEAN BEAVER *Castor fiber*



## Introduction

The following report is based on the experience gained from the import of five groups of European beaver into the UK from Poland, Norway and Bavaria since mid-1996. These animals (31 in total) were imported initially for zoological display and latterly to be employed as habitat managers within the Kent Wildlife Trust's (KWT) Ham Fen Nature Reserve. Two animals were born in quarantine, five died in quarantine of various causes, three had to be euthanased on veterinary advice and three died shortly after the conclusion of rabies quarantine.

This report includes references to practical comments from a range of different fieldwork sources but for ease of application the legal requirements pertain solely to a Norwegian import.

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### **Acronyms used in text**

IATA	-	International Air Transport Authority.
KWT	-	Kent Wildlife Trust
DEFRA	-	Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
SERAD	-	Scottish Environment and Rural Affairs Department
CITES	-	Convention in Trade of Endangered Species.
EUR	-	Euro
VAT	-	Value Added Tax
DVO	-	Divisional Veterinary Officer

# CHAPTER 1



## CAPTURE OF ANIMALS IN NORWAY

### 1.1 Licensing and Formal Approval

Any application to obtain European Beaver from Norway has to be made to the Directorate for Nature Management in Norway. Division Head Erik Lund granted the KWT licence and a copy of the conditions required and contact details are outlined in Appendix 1. A licence will only be granted for capture between October and April in order to ensure that no dependent young are orphaned. This licence is likely to be granted to a recognised Norwegian catching team who would operate on behalf of a client organisation.

### 1.2 Capture Methods

The capture method employed in Norway consisted of using a boat with an outboard motor to patrol known beaver territories at night. Beaver were then spot-lamped on the bank and either chased or captured with a net on land or captured with a net from the boat while attempting to escape under water. The beaver captured for KWT were all known sex individuals, which were transpondered (micro-chipped), rendering gland-fluid sexing in the boat unnecessary. The microchip number was read and the animal was then either released or transferred from the net into a holding sack in the boat. The catching nets were modified commercial fishnets (25.5 inches in diameter, reference 5ft F/G with 1.85 metre golf net.) which can be purchased in the UK from companies like Collins Nets in Dorchester (tel. 01308 427 352). The main modification for beaver capture was to have an open net bottom, fitted with a draw cord which was closed during capture and then opened to allow easy transfer of the beaver into hessian holding sacks. Although this method of capture was extremely effective it required clear water with few submerged obstructions, reasonable room to manoeuvre a boat and a high trapper night time input. Ten beaver were caught for the KWT using this method over a period of approximately eight days.

In Bavaria, beaver were captured using live catch traps costing EUR 375 plus VAT (see Fig. 1 below) which were situated on well established beaver trails. These were checked twice daily and, although largely water proof, were provided with a little dry grass bedding and baited with apple or carrot. Castoreum from the glands of road casualty animals was also occasionally employed as an attractant but was felt to be a last ditch

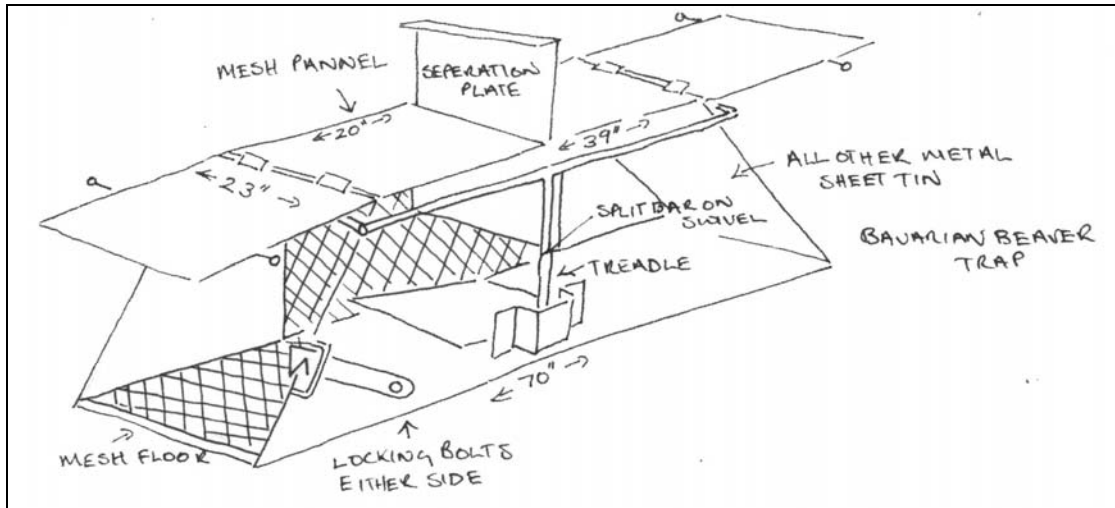


Fig. 1. Bavarian live catch beaver trap.

option. Although this functions as a strong attractant for territorial individuals, it may actually dissuade non-territorial animals from entering. Where the traps were near standing trees or some other natural obstruction, simple 1 ft high guide barriers made from concrete reinforcing mesh were placed at either side of the trap entrance to encourage the animal to enter. Trapped animals were transferred into tin transport crates with sliding door fronts costing EUR 100 plus VAT (see Fig. 2 below) for movement to a central holding facility.

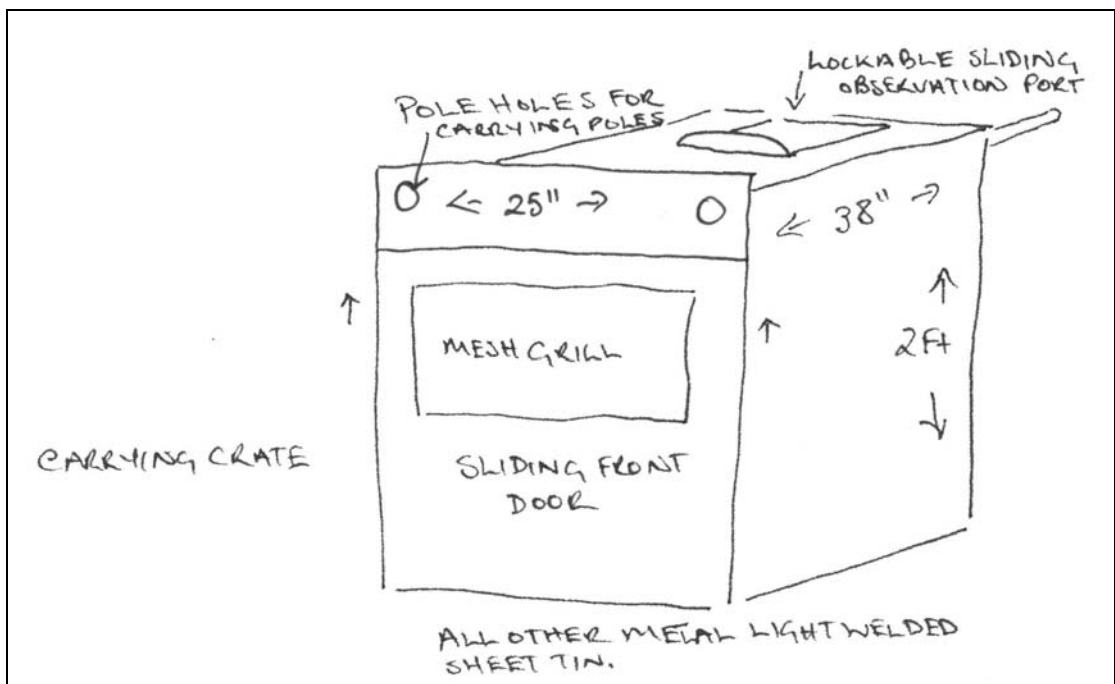


Fig. 2. Bavarian beaver travelling crate.

### **1.3 Care of Animals**

In Bavaria, captured beavers were held in prefabricated dog runs which were 12 x 6 x 6 ft (*l x w x ht*). These were roofed with box tin as beaver can climb and meshed with 2 inch square weld. The pens were under-meshed with concrete reinforcing mesh to prevent digging and water was provided in converted wheelbarrow bases which could be easily emptied on a daily basis, cleaned and used again. The beaver were given straw bedding and wooden boxes as beds.

The captured animals in Norway were transferred into simple tin-sided pens - approximate floor area 12 x 10 ft - in a well-ventilated cattle shed. They were given straw beds, fed on apples, willow or aspen browse and were provided with water, which was changed daily in sectioned-off parts of an old concrete dung channel. This method of holding was quite adequate for a short period of time - 2 weeks - and would be improved by employing the converted wheel barrow bases used in Bavaria.

Feeding newly captured beaver is very much an exercise in trial and error. Browse akin to the species they would feed on in the wild is essential both as a settling in tool and additionally to ensure no gut microfloral upset. After provision of this commodity a variety of other feedstuffs will readily be taken with apples, carrots and parsnips proving to be the most popular. Beaver will also consume bruised oats, brown bread, sugar beet, cabbage, potatoes or turnips, but can be picky feeders, refusing odd items at random.

After capture there are no statutory or specific veterinary requirements, but a sensible physical health check is worthwhile. A single captured animal in Norway had been badly bitten in a territorial fight and was not eating in captivity. Although the trappers were convinced it would recover, it was decided not to import this individual from a welfare standpoint.

Animals from the same family group can easily be housed together, even if they are individually trapped at intervals over a period of weeks. Animals from separate families must not be housed together as they are liable to fight severely.

### **1.4 Seasonality of Capture**

The Directorate of Nature Management will only issue licences to capture beaver between October and April and the actual capture months are restricted still further by weather conditions. The KWT beaver were captured in April but we were informed prior to this that in certain

districts October, November and March were also possible capture months. Licences are not granted between May and September in order to prevent any dependent young being orphaned. Animals captured in March or April will in all likelihood be pregnant and could produce young in captivity, resulting in home-grown family groups. Two females from the KWT contingent produced single young in captivity, which survived and were maintained with their parents without any particular problems. In our experience, quarantine of large family units together - i.e animals caught in the autumn - has been more difficult as the much larger and more active youngsters created a range of overcrowding-related problems. These are considered in greater detail in 4.7 (*Pair and Group Requirements*).

### **1.5 Resource Requirements**

It is difficult to predict an exact resource requirement for obtaining beaver from country of origin as this is, to a large extent, dependent on the numbers involved and what the catching agents are required to do.

In the case of both the animals obtained from Bavaria (wild caught) and Popielno in Poland (captive bred?), donations were made for the maintenance time and feed costs involved, which came to approximately £250 per animal. In Bavaria, one individual keeper could in a morning's work simplistically maintain up to 40 animals, but not at a level of care which would be adequate on a long-term basis.

The capture techniques in Norway ensured that the animals were quickly assembled and that therefore their captive care time in country of origin was short. In fairness, targeted live trapping could also produce the same outcome, with the only reasons for the Bavarian animals being held longer being that -

- (1) There maybe odd "problem" individuals - wary animals within a family group destined for removal which are difficult to trap.
- (2) families may be seasonally batched for transport elsewhere.

In Norway the approximate expenditure was in the region of £7,000 for nine animals but this figure incorporated a payment to the trappers for their time, the construction in Norway of travelling crates and the cost of the Norwegians coming to the UK to view Ham Fen.

In conclusion, before any import occurred an exact specification of what was required in country of capture should be prepared for a costed quote.

## 1.6 Transport from Capture Site to Port of Exit

The transport of beaver is essentially a simple matter. If not being moved for air transport purposes in IATA crates, tin travelling boxes have been used with considerable success. These are much lighter and easier to use than approved IATA crates (see (Fig. 3 below) but may not be of an acceptable design for air transport. They have been used as approved rabies carrying crates for road import into the UK.

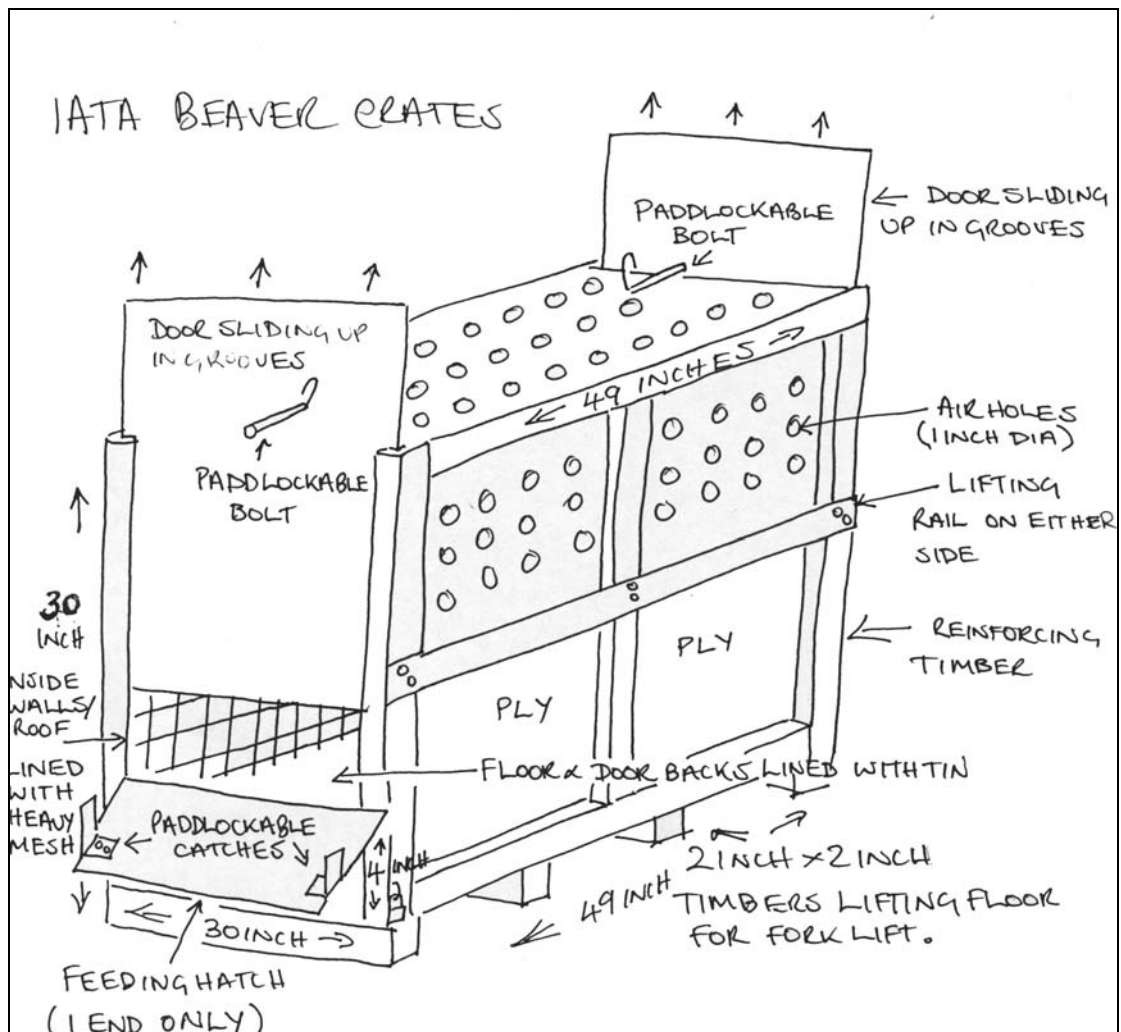


Fig. 3. IATA approved beaver crate.

Although substantial numbers of beaver have been crated and moved from Bavaria over land by road in crates on a trailer for periods in excess of 24 hours without any substantial mortality, I am of the opinion that the most effective method of international transport is by air. In Norway, the beaver were moved from their holding facility to Oslo airport, from there to Heathrow and on to Wildwood within a period of less than 12 hours. They were cool at all times due to either external temperature, situation in an air craft hold, holding in the approved air-conditioned quarantine

facility at Heathrow or movement by road to Wildwood. During the transport period they were provided with clean fresh bedding (good straw is ideal) and an abundance of apples. This latter aspect is extremely important as an adequate source of temporary moisture, which they will readily consume. Water provision in the transport crates is virtually worthless, as they will readily paddle in any receptacle provided, spilling any water into their bedding. Apple provision should be topped up every 12 hours at a minimum of six apples per animal.

## CHAPTER 2



### TRANSPORT FROM CONTINENT TO UK

#### 2.1 Approval at the Port of Exit

There are no requirements for any health checks in Norway prior to export as this process is solely governed by DEFRA's issue of an import licence. This will only be issued after inspection of the finished quarantine facility which, if approved, will receive a RM16 authorisation form, a copy of which is enclosed in Appendix 2. When approved, an RM3 import licence will be issued together with a RM3A boarding pass, RM30 vet's inspection certificate and a RM31 carrying agent's report. These are all enclosed in Appendix 3 and contain their own self-explanatory detail which must be legally adhered to. The beaver must be pre-booked onto a flight with a cargo carrier that will accept live animals. On arrival at the airport or docks, animal cargoes will only be accepted and allowed to board if they are in IATA approved crates (airports only - Appendix 4) with affixed rabies stickers. These must be fully padlocked shut. The boarding pass and import documents will be required at port of exit, as will the copy of the Norwegian capture licence. No CITES certificate is required for European beaver as they are a non-scheduled species.

#### 2.2 Travelling Crate Design

The diagram below (Fig. 4) details an accepted IATA crate design. All the crates we have employed have been home-made by local carpenters in either the UK or Norway and cost approximately £400 each to construct. The tin Bavarian crates, which are not IATA approved, cost approximately £200 each in Germany. It is also worth noting that, should imported animals arrive through an airport, both customs tax and a clearing fee for the animals and their crates may be charged.

#### 2.3 Care of Animals during Transport

For care of animals during transport see 1.6 (*Transport from Capture Site to Port of Exit*). It is illegal to open any rabies quarantine crates in the UK, unless at an approved quarantine centre at port of entry or in the approved quarantine facility where the six-month quarantine period will occur. Once the animals are in the crates in country of origin, more apples may be added but inspection of the animals during transport is likely to be of little worth as transported beaver generally freeze position in a crouching mode and huddle in a pile with their colleagues.

## **2.4 Modes of Transport**

See comments in 1.6 (*Transport from Capture Site to Port of Exit*).

## CHAPTER 3



### UK IMPORT AND TRANSPORT TO APPROVED QUARANTINE FACILITIES

#### **3.1 Permits and Approval for UK Import**

See comments in 2.1 (*Approval at Port of Exit*).

#### **3.2 Transport from Entry Port to Quarantine Facilities**

Only an approved rabies quarantine carrier operating an approved quarantine vehicle can move imported animals. Paragraph 2.1 outlines the requirements for the certificates required. For the specific details of transport see form RM31, Appendix 3. Contact details of specific carrying agents can generally be obtained from the entry ports, which are detailed under condition 12 on the back of the form.

## CHAPTER 4



### QUARANTINE FACILITIES

#### 4.1 Legal Design Requirements

The legal requirements of a rabies quarantine facility are detailed in Appendix 5. A sample copy of an approved facility outline, detailing information required by DEFRA, is attached to form RM16 (Appendix 2).

#### 4.2 Design Recommendations

Any quarantine facility designed to retain beaver of either species must have a sheer sheet tin lining on all surfaces to a height of 4 ft, with no exposed wood accessible to the beaver. A concrete floor is essential, together with some form of simple fan ventilation system above the pens to ensure air movement. If - as at Wildwood - the animals are to be quarantined in adjoining stables, then air vents in the ends of the building should be fitted to ensure a good through flow. All the entrance points to the retaining facilities should have double doors with the external doors designed in a half-stable fashion to allow the top door to be opened during warm weather.

Start off beds for the beaver can be easily constructed by placing two straw bales at angles in a corner to form a box and bursting some loose straw into this enclosure. Beaver generally use this readily as a bed and will add to the material in it by chopping up woody browse to form a soft springy bed.

Each holding pen should have its own separate bath, which can be readily emptied. The bath design below (Fig. 4) is based on that used in Bavaria and has been employed extremely effectively at Wildwood. Baths with soiled water in them can be lifted easily into a wheelbarrow of the same dimensions, allowing simple transport for disposal.

#### 4.3 DEFRA/SERAD Approval Required

The quarantine holder should initially seek approval from DEFRA/SERAD veterinary staff at local DVO level. They will then advise on the design of a facility and approve plans. Final permission from DEFRA will then be granted from their office at: DEFRA, Area 206, 1 A Page Street, London, SW1, Import of Dogs section (tel. 0207 904 6000).

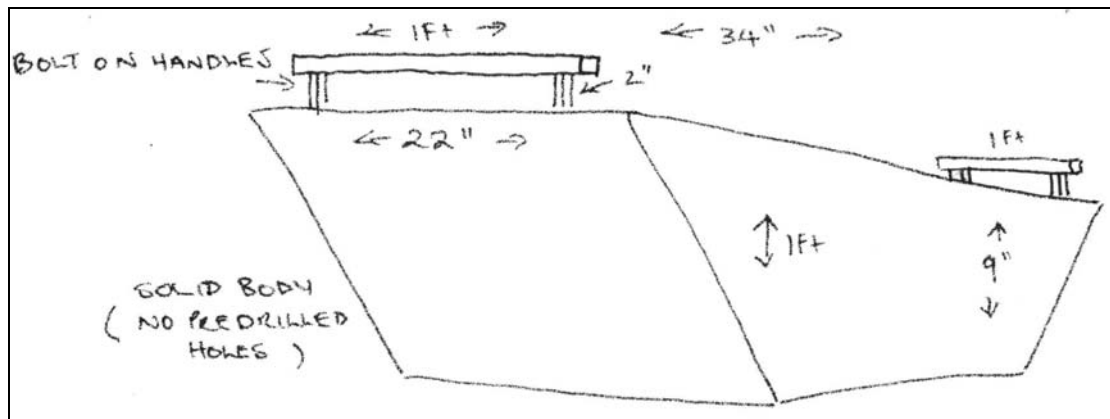


Fig. 4. Wheelbarrow base-style beaver bath.

#### 4.4 Planning Permission Required

Planning permission may be required if the quarantine facilities are an entirely new building. Adaptation of an existing facility might not require permission, especially if it is an ex-agricultural building, the appearance of which is unchanged from the outside. Local advice would have to be sought from planners on this matter.

#### 4.5 Veterinary Supervision during Quarantine

A local veterinary supervisor must inspect the quarantine facility by law on a once weekly basis. The responsibilities of the veterinary supervisor are detailed in Appendix 6.

#### 4.6 Additional Veterinary Considerations

The legal requirements of the veterinary supervisor are outlined in Appendix 6 but these only account for the rabies requirements of the quarantine legislation.

Enclosed in Appendix 7 is a copy of the veterinary screening protocol and final report by Wildwood's veterinary supervisors for the KWT beaver, which was devised after consultation with Tony Sainsbury at the Institute of Zoology, Vic Simpson and The International Zoo Vet Group. An important feature of this process has been regular screening of faeces, blood sampling, at least one thorough physical check of sedated animals, regular weighing to detect significant changes in body mass and thorough postmorteming of any dead animals. In addition to the foregoing problems, which have occurred with quarantined beaver, include:

- Tooth malocclusion and over growing of teeth in response either to past historical damage or a lack of woody browse to gnaw. This can lead to an inability to feed, starvation and death. It is not always easy

to spot as a condition without a thorough physical examination but should be checked as a possibly hazardous factor in any early veterinary examination.

- Enteritic bowel infection due to over crowding of large youngsters - 6 months plus - in quarantine facilities using a single water facility.
- Pseudo TB, a fatal condition for a group of six Bavarian animals, half of which succumbed while the remainder were destroyed. Veterinary advice suggests that testing for this condition prior to import may not be effective and that vaccination is not a foolproof option.
- Terminal Ascarid infestations. Two animals from the KWT import developed heavy parasite burdens in a reasonably short space of time when transferred from the internal holding - quarantine pens - to larger 16 x 10 ft pens outdoors. Although one of these animals may have been an aged individual at the end of its natural lifespan, the other was not. Treatment was instigated with Panacur dog and cat wormer, which subsequent screenings proved to have been effective.
- Blow fly strike of any animals wounded in territorial fights. This can easily prove fatal.
- The aged animal also had ringworm, which physically resembled bare scar type tissue on its pelt.
- A single animal died in 1996 from a respiratory disorder due to poor ventilation at Blackpool Zoo.

#### **4.7 Pair and Group Requirements**

Experience at Wildwood of quarantining groups in excess of seven animals in a single pen has been negative to date although, at the time of writing with a larger - 20 x 10 ft - pen, four individuals are being held together without any problems to date. While it is clear that the best method of reintroduction is to move family groups together, the six-month legal quarantine for UK entry imposes significant practical problems for this strategy. Holding numbers of animals together might be mitigated by allowing a larger living space, but it would not resolve the following issues:

- Ready disease transmission amongst a larger group due to higher stress levels and overcrowding.
- More pressure on the use of swimming water again raising the possibility of disease transmission
- Difficulty of accurately identifying the suffering individual on the basis of warning signs, e.g. diarrhoea.

In the event of any of the above conditions arising, the only appropriate response is to split up the group to reduce over crowding. This might entail expanding further the quarantine holding facility, if it is not already designed to take pairs rather than groups, and would also negate the intent of group import. This could also complicate the final release if, for example, sibling sex ratios are uneven. As our experience stands to date, I would recommend the import of pairs against groups and would suggest strongly that more animals than are strictly required be brought in to counteract any potential losses.

#### **4.8 Food and Water**

Beaver require the simple provision of a swimming water facility which is changed daily in the morning. This is best provided in the modified wheelbarrow bases, which they will drink from readily. Additional moisture will be obtained from feedstuff such as apples. Other feed preferences are outlined in 1.3 (*Care of Animals in Norway*), but the importance of browse cannot be overemphasised. This applies not only from a nutritional viewpoint but also from physiological tooth wear and behavioural nest/lodge making exercises. It is vital the browse supplied is from species beaver would naturally feed from of choice, as browse from other species that they are unused to can lead rapidly to digestive upsets.

#### **4.9 Hygiene and Waste**

The legal hygiene and waste disposal requirements are detailed in Appendix 5. In addition to these, the following practical considerations should be met:

- Any wet sawdust around the baths should be removed daily
- Wet bedding should be removed
- Any surplus food left from the day before should be removed
- Swimming - all - water should be changed once daily
- All wastewater should be disposed of in a dry ditch, sump or septic tank

Dry beaver-made nests should be left, but animals should not be allowed to build large lodges in quarantine as these can easily become damp and stale.

#### **4.10 Staff Husbandry Requirements**

The six-month quarantine period will easily be a full-time seven days a week job. This will involve care and maintenance of the beaver, upkeep of the facility, browse collection, waste disposal, veterinary care as

required, etc. If this quarantine occurs in an unskilled facility, then a degree of experienced oversight of procedure will be vital.

Improvements in the overall veterinary and husbandry protocols that an SNH import can apply, based on our experience at Wildwood, should negate many of the naïve "teething" pitfalls of this exercise. However, experience of why an individual might be behaving abnormally or the nature of observed symptoms can easily be misunderstood. European beaver are not difficult animals to work with or quarantine and their care requirements should not be over-blown, but total supervision by naïve staff could place the whole venture on an extremely tenuous footing.

#### **4.11 Time Scale of Construction**

The time scale required to construct and approve a quarantine facility is impossible to evaluate accurately as it is dependent on whether an existing facility is to be adapted or a new one created or enlarged, etc. If the latter course of action were the case, then design approval might take a month perhaps, construction a month, final permission another month and import permits the same. This total of four months takes no account of planning required, contract commissioning, etc.

#### **4.12 Other Issues**

Other relevant issues pertaining to the temporary captive husbandry of beaver for release include:

- Manual restraint of adult beaver is both difficult and stressful. If a detailed examination is required of an adult, sedation may be required. Two people can handle sub-adults with one individual grabbing the tail and the other pinning the animal down to the ground by holding it behind its shoulder blades. Young animals can be caught and moved from boxes by catching them with one hand where their tails join their body and then picking them up by holding them firmly with the other hand under their front legs. Beaver should not be held above their front legs or shoulders, as they will respond by biting severely.
- Normally, adult animals are not aggressive. But certain individuals are and they can bite severely if given the opportunity. These odd individuals may attack without provocation if contained in a small area. Normal tasks such as the routine movement of animals into crates or for vaccination can be easily accomplished by using small hand-held pig boards to jam them into corners or guide them into crates.
- Habituation of young animals born in captivity may be a problem, but experience to date suggests that individuality may be a strong factor in

this process. Of the two young born at Wildwood, one is a shy retiring animal which is virtually nocturnal while the other is a very tame individual which, without any prompting, is utterly unafraid of people. Our Polish youngsters born in captivity are very wary and conform to a normal nocturnal beaver lifestyle.

- Aggression between individual animals in a family is uncommon and we have not observed a single instance of such behaviour. Aggression between animals from different families is common and territorial fighting, should they inadvertently mix in an enclosure, can be fatal.

## CHAPTER 5



### TRANSPORT FROM QUARANTINE FACILITIES

#### 5.1 Legal Release from Quarantine

At the end of the quarantine period the veterinary supervisor will contact DEFRA who will then allow the release of the animals from quarantine. A normal self-certifying domestic animal movement document must then accompany the animals on any journey they make.

#### 5.2 Transport to Release Site

The mode of transport from the quarantine facility to the release site is dependent on the distance between the two. In theory, internal air transport within the UK can move animals anywhere quickly, with the remainder of the journey being completed by road in secure boxes on a trailer or suitable air-conditioned vehicle. There is no quarantine legislation relevant to such a move but, again, normal animal transport regulations for domestic animals available from SEERAD would apply. Ideally, most aquatic mammals are best moved on cool days, in the evening or early morning to reduce heat stress and the transport criteria outlined above - lots of apples and deep straw beds - would apply. If possible, from a settling perspective, it is a good idea to transfer established dry beds in the crates with the animals as they move and also to put this dry bedding in their artificial lodges.

#### 5.3 Temporary Enclosure Techniques and Artificial Lodge Design

Artificial lodges are a well-proven method of orienting released beaver to a release site. The bulk of the animals will employ these for a while prior to moving to their own selected locations. These lodges are typically made from wooden boxes 1 x 1 x 1.5 m (*l x w x ht*) which are situated at the side of a release area and covered with branches, tussocks and mud to form a mound. The entrance/exit to these structures should be set next to the water's edge and initially blocked to the beaver with a fence of 2 inch willow stakes driven down into the ground. The beaver will gnaw through these rapidly to get to the water and should then orientate themselves around the lodge. A back entrance to the lodge is essential to allow the animals to be transferred from their travelling crates and established bedding from the crates together with apples should be placed in the

lodge. Trials in Norway and in the UK have demonstrated that beaver can easily be retained in small ponds and lagoons by encircling these on a temporary basis with electrified sheep netting for a week or so. Experience at Wildwood suggests that artificial lodges might be more simply constructed from four straw bales covered with bitumenised roofing card. The entrances of these again are blocked with willow stakes and the bales themselves are fixed in place with stakes driven through them at either end. The beaver will rapidly settle into and add to these structures. This method of construction will be employed in June, 2002, at Ham Fen.

#### **5.4 Fencing Methods and Materials**

The fencing method used to retain beaver in pools or ponds is standard sheep turnip netting which is easy to roll out and stake. This fencing is solely erected on the land surrounding the pool as fencing beaver into a water area is a major job requiring heavy bars or grilling set into concrete. This sheep fencing has a tractor battery and electric unit fixed to it and is available from agricultural suppliers. Trials at Wildwood have also demonstrated that three strand electric wire fences set to a maximum height of 45 cm are effective at retaining beaver.

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