

11/11/21 Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

Taming the Flood – a Beavers' Tale, presented by Darren Tansley.

At the November meeting of the Blyth Valley and Southwold Suffolk Wildlife group, Darren Tansley gave us an intriguing account of a beaver project in Essex. Beavers were plentiful throughout Europe following the last Ice Age, but they were hunted voraciously over the centuries for their fur and meat, and by the sixteenth century they were extinct in Britain.

Climate change and flooding has led to an interest in the concept of natural flood management, and of re-introducing beavers to assess their impact on river systems. There are about twenty five such projects currently in the UK, and Darren talked about the one at Spains Hall in Essex. It is a joint effort with various Agencies to monitor the many effects of beaver activity. The landowner provided a wooded, enclosed site with a tiny stream, and in March, 2019, a beaver pair were introduced. They quickly set to work, establishing a system of dams, deep pools and side canals, creating a watery landscape. Dams begin as mud, to which small, then larger sticks, then logs are added. They leak, allowing water to disperse widely, absorbing flood waters in winter, and maintaining flow in summer. The beavers' huge lodge has an underwater entrance, making it safe from predators, and where two kits were born in 2020.

Water monitoring and testing is ongoing. Chemical pollution is captured as the water filters down. Run-off is slowed, and this is of particular importance to the village of Finchingfield below, which floods regularly. Initial monitoring shows that the beaver landscaping has modified the speed of flood water, making a significant difference to the village. In addition, the beaver activity has encouraged a much wider diversity of wildlife, and the elusive water shrew has been filmed eating the freshwater shrimps there.

Darren's talk generated lots of questions for discussion, and we all found it a thought-provoking topic.

Our next meeting is at 7.30pm, Thursday, Jan 13th. Our local Coastal Reserves warden, Jamie Smith, will be giving us the latest Local Reserve Roundup. It's at the Southwold Arts Centre, IP18 6JP, entrance is £3 to include refreshment. Under 25's free.

Penny Mansfield

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