

Was there a beaver *Castor* sp. at large in the river Salwarpe, Worcestershire in December 2024?

Gary Farmer and Nicki Farmer

There are two species of beaver in the world, the Eurasian Beaver *Castor fiber* and the American Beaver *Castor canadensis*, and the Eurasian Beaver has been the subject of reintroduction programmes in the UK in recent years. Most of these have been under licence from Natural England, and usually into enclosures (including Wyre Forest). These introductions are closely monitored to check on the health of the beavers as well as monitoring their activities. But there have also been illegal releases (presumably *C. fiber*) in the UK.

Worcestershire Wildlife Sightings project received a report regarding a sighting of possible beaver activity adjacent to the river Salwarpe near Droitwich on 6th December (Diana Westmoreland pers. comm.). There was no further information shared on the topic and it slipped to the back of my mind. Then, during a walk along the river Salwarpe and the Droitwich Canal on 30th December, Nicki Farmer noticed a small tree stump bearing marks of what appeared to be mammal gnawing (01 & 03); the work of a beaver?



01. Beaver at work? Gary Farmer 01.01.24.

On 1st January 2025 we returned to the same area of the river to look more closely at the signs. We followed the river from grid reference SO 91082 63533 on the east side of Droitwich walking along the bank where possible, joining the Droitwich Canal and continuing until grid reference SO 89679 63667 towards the west of the town. The signs were concentrated in a short stretch where the river and canal converge, between grid reference SO 90691 63346 and SO 90399 63454, a distance of approximately 400 metres, and not in exactly text-book habitat (02).



02. The area of suspected beaver activity near Droitwich 01.01.2025. Gary Farmer.

We photographed each gnawed tree and assigned a grid reference to each location (03 – 10) to log this occurrence. There have been a few occurrences of beaver noted around Worcestershire and its borders in recent years, but this appears to be the first in such a public location. It will be interesting to know if any signs have been found outside of this area, and if the animal returns in the future.



03. Close up of gnaw marks on image 01. SO 90650 63350. Nicki Farmer.



04. Willow stem felled into the river. SO 90645 63351. Nicki Farmer.



05. Obvious gnawing on the felled willow stem in image 04. Madi Farmer.



06. Multi-stemmed willow felled. SO 90673 63347. Nicki Farmer.



07. Multi-stemmed tree gnawed at base. SO 90531 63381. Nicki Farmer.



08. Close up of gnawing on image 07. Nicki Farmer.



09. Gnawing on larger tree. Note bark chippings still present on the ground next to the tree. 30.12.2024. SO 90441 63429. Madi Farmer.



10. The same tree as image 09, two days later 01.01.2025. Note the chippings have been scattered, suggesting they were very fresh in image 09. Nicki Farmer.

Images

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Further Information

Worcestershire Wildlife Sightings. Available at: <https://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings>. Accessed 04.01.24.

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UK Government summary of responses and next steps regarding the government's public consultation on the approach to the reintroduction and management of beavers in England. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/beaver-reintroduction-and-management-in-england/outcome/summary-of-responses-and-next-steps> [Accessed 02.01.25].

Forestry England: Beavers in Wyre Forest. Available at: <https://www.forestryengland.uk/wyre-forest/beavers-wyre-forest> [Accessed 02.01.25].