

Wild Beaver Pair Confirmed in Norfolk for First Time in 500 Years

Confirmed lodge at Pensthorpe marks major milestone as wider debate grows around Britain's beaver return

Last November, Pensthorpe confirmed the first free-living wild beaver recorded in Norfolk for several hundred years.

At the time, the discovery was believed to involve a solitary dispersing animal moving quietly along a remote stretch of the River Wensum.

Following continued monitoring, that assumption has now changed.

New camera footage confirms two individual beavers together, displaying grooming behaviour and occupying a substantial lodge structure entirely within Pensthorpe's restored wetlands.

The discovery confirms the presence of a settled wild pair in Norfolk for the first time in 500 years.

The lodge is located in a secluded and inaccessible area of the reserve. Detailed monitoring has confirmed:

- no alteration to water levels
- no impact on neighbouring land
- no infrastructure concerns
- no visitor safety implications

The animals are behaving entirely naturally within suitable river habitat.

Early ecological observations are already demonstrating positive environmental effects within the active area. Monitoring indicates reduced silt and debris movement through the channel, exposure of sand and gravels along sections of the river bed, and natural canopy opening as trees are selectively worked. These changes increase light penetration and create more varied in-channel habitat, offering valuable insight into how beavers interact with an internationally important river system.

Pensthorpe has not released any beavers and does not know the origin of the pair.

Since the initial announcement last year, further reports of beavers appearing in landscapes across England have emerged, sometimes outside of licensed reintroduction programmes. These discoveries have prompted wider national discussion around unregulated releases and the pace of official reintroduction strategy.

Pensthorpe does not support illegal wildlife introductions. Effective conservation must be lawful, transparent and coordinated.

However, where wild animals are already present, healthy and causing no conflict, the responsible course is careful monitoring and partnership working rather than capture or removal.

Richard Spowage, Reserve Manager at Pensthorpe, said:

“When we confirmed a single wild beaver last autumn it marked a historic return for Norfolk. To now confirm a settled pair with an established lodge changes the scale of that moment entirely.”

“A pair occupying a lodge indicates stability and suitable habitat. It suggests this landscape is not simply being explored, but is capable of sustaining a native species absent for centuries.”

Beavers were hunted to extinction in Britain in the sixteenth century. Their gradual return through licensed reintroductions and natural dispersal is one of the most significant conservation developments in modern Britain.

The presence of an established pair in Norfolk adds a new dimension to that story.

Spowage added:

“The fact that beavers are appearing in multiple suitable landscapes across the country inevitably raises wider questions about how Britain manages the return of native species. Landscapes that are restored and connected will support wildlife. The key challenge now is ensuring national policy keeps pace with ecological reality.”

Pensthorpe has informed government bodies including Natural England and continues to work constructively with ecological partners and neighbouring land managers. Monitoring remains ongoing.

The pair are located in a remote area and are not being promoted as a visitor attraction. Sightings remain extremely unlikely.

For the first time in modern history, Norfolk is not simply witnessing the return of a native species - it is hosting it.

The exact location of the lodge is not being disclosed for welfare reasons.

Further information is available at:

www.pensthorpe.com/beaver-at-pensthorpe

Notes to Editors Pensthorpe is a 700-acre family-friendly nature reserve located 11 miles inland from the North Norfolk coast. Interactive trails, seven bird hides and several charming boardwalks weave through the wilderness of the reserve and present an opportunity to get closer to native and migrating wildlife. To date, more than 1,560 different species have been recorded across the site, reflecting the richness and diversity of its restored habitats.

A hidden gem for garden lovers, Pensthorpe is home to six spectacular gardens, including the Millennium Garden designed by world-renowned plantsman Piet Oudolf. Families enjoy wildlife-

inspired eco play areas, including WildRootz, which are often hailed as some of the best in Norfolk. The reserve's serene environment offers unrivalled birdwatching opportunities and a unique way to connect with the natural world.

With over 110,000 visitors a year and a recent Best Rural Attraction award, Pensthorpe has become a standout destination for all ages.

The reserve is on the A1067, one mile from Fakenham and just over 20 miles from the city of Norwich.

Entry prices fluctuate through the year. Adult tickets start from £10.95 and children from £9.95. Under 3s go free. Annual members receive free entry. Parking is free.

For more information about opening times for the reserve, shop and café, please visit:
www.pensthorpe.com