



Autumn colours on Lingmell

Water voles (*Arvicola amphibius*) in Ennerdale

Water voles are one of the most endangered native mammals in England. They are a vital part of river ecosystems and are often called 'ecosystem engineers'. As well as being a key prey species for a number of native predators, their burrowing can help promote soil microbial activity, drainage and soil quality. Their grazing can increase bankside biodiversity by reducing the domination of any singular plant species. They also have a positive impact on floral diversity by cropping grasses and dispersing seeds and pollen.

In August this year, Forestry England led a water vole reintroduction where 75 animals were released in the middle valley fields by Dodsgill Beck and at Gillerthwaite Mire. The water voles were contained in release pens for the first few days to adjust to their surroundings. On the fourth day, the pens were opened and the water voles were free, yet able to return to a safe place to evade predators while they built their own burrows. At the end of the week the pens were removed. They will be monitored next spring and further releases are proposed in 2026 & 27. The non-native American mink prey on water voles and are the main cause of declining numbers, along with habitat loss. Prior to the release, monitoring indicated that Ennerdale valley was free of mink populations, with only occasional visitors. A successful mink trapping network was established in the valley and along the River Ehen and tributaries, with combined efforts by West Cumbria Rivers Trust. The network continues to expand into new catchments. The water vole release in Ennerdale helps to rebuild populations of this wonderful mammal in the county and nationally. A big thank you to our Wild Ennerdale volunteer team for their help with this project.



Volunteers helping with water vole release at Gillerthwaite Mire. Photo Credit: David Willey



Ennerdale water vole
Photo credit: Jonny Winter

Riverlands work

The recent works on the River Liza this summer by the National Trust Riverlands team are now complete for this year. The main aim of the project was to better connect the main river channel with the adjacent delta (field) area to the south (downstream left). This would once have been a wetter, more diverse and ecologically rich landscape prior to the river being straightened (canalised) and the photo on the right, taken in Sept, shows how quickly nature can respond. We will be monitoring this area with future bird surveys and aerial photos. As the 'Char Dub' name suggests, it is also an important part of the river & lake zone for migrating & spawning fish, in particular the Arctic Char.



Char Dub delta
Photo Credit: Simon Webb

River Restoration on the Ehen

Further west, river restoration works along sections of the upper River Ehen have been completed over the Summer. Removing some of the artificial channel constraints and creating new in-channel features helps reconnect the river with its floodplain, creating a more naturally functioning and resilient watercourse for freshwater and terrestrial species including both freshwater mussels and Atlantic salmon. This is also helping to slow the flow of water further downstream during times of flood.



Floodplain reconnection, River Ehen
Photo Credit: Luke Bryant

Forestry Update

Felling and extraction work at Broadmoor has been completed. Timber dispatch will be ongoing for a few more months. Tree felling and extraction is continuing at Latterbarrow (north of the Ennerdale YHA) and will continue into Spring 2026. In Summer 2026 there will be another phase of work to remove the brash mats used by the harvesting machinery on both sites. This will free up access to more areas of soil for natural regeneration and native tree planting. The branches removed will be chipped and sent to make product for equestrian and horticulture markets.



Felled larch area on Latterbarrow

Beaver Update

What has happened so far?

On 1 May 2025 Forestry England submitted an 'expression of interest' (EOI) for a wild beaver release into Ennerdale with support from the other Wild Ennerdale partners. Full details can be found at:

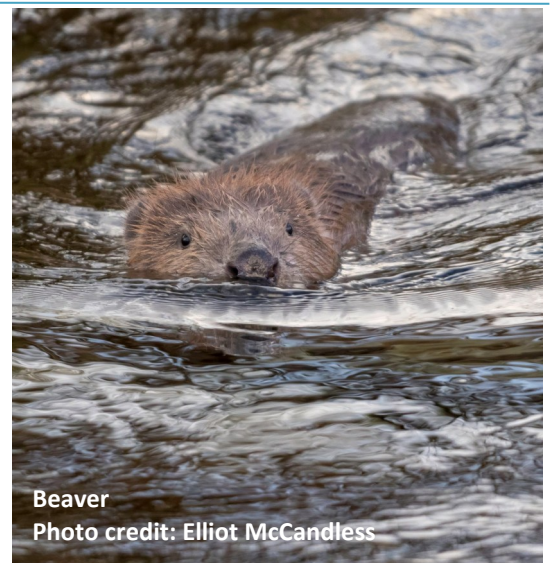
www.forestryengland.uk/ennerdale/beavers

In response to the EOI, we were asked to submit additional information on three areas:

- Releasing enough beavers for a genetically diverse population.
- Including members from across the catchment in our steering group.
- Our long-term plans for beaver management.

What will happen next?

We plan to submit our additional information before the end of 2025. If we are invited to prepare a full application, we will engage with those likely to be affected by the proposals from this point.



Beaver
Photo credit: Elliot McCandless

Wild Ennerdale is a partnership of people and organisations led by Forestry England, National Trust, United Utilities and Natural England. For more information please visit wildennerdale.co.uk