

Field signs: Beaver

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Description: A photographic guide to beaver field signs

Beaver activity and field signs

Beavers are most active at dawn and dusk, and rest in the day. Not all field signs are common. Note the location of any signs, take a photo without causing disturbance, and check with Fisheries, Biodiversity and Geomorphology teams.

Feeding stations and food caches

Beavers mainly feed on soft vegetation in spring and summer, leaving angular cuts. In autumn and winter, they feed more on the bark of trees and shrubs and create important food caches. Caches are food reserves of partially submerged collections of woody material and can indicate an active burrow or lodge. Piles of sticks, with the bark stripped, and uneaten soft vegetation can form where they feed regularly. These feeding stations are often found along the water's edge.



Trees and ring-barking

Beavers will feed on bark leaving distinctive teeth marks. Ring barking is common on mature trees where bark is removed entirely from around the trunk. They may fell a range of sizes – willow is favoured. They use trees and branches as forage and for lodge and dam construction. Native trees will often regrow.



Dams

Beaver dams are mainly constructed from woody material, vegetation and substrate. Dams can typically be maintained by beavers, in most situations, where watercourses are <6m wide. Beaver dams vary in size, function and permanence and can be built to alter water levels to protect lodges, burrows and canals, and to access foraging sites.



Forage trails and beaver canals

Beavers often create forage trails leading from water into riparian vegetation which can become worn with regular use. They can dig these out to create canals allowing them to move around while staying in water.



Burrows and lodges

Beavers construct chambered burrows and lodges in which to breed and rest. Lodges are more visible above ground but are not always present where beavers live in chambered burrows. Short burrows can be used as day rests. Lodge and burrow entrances are typically submerged and not often visible except at low water levels or if the roof collapses. A territory can have multiple lodges and burrows. Some lodges can look similar to accumulated flood debris.

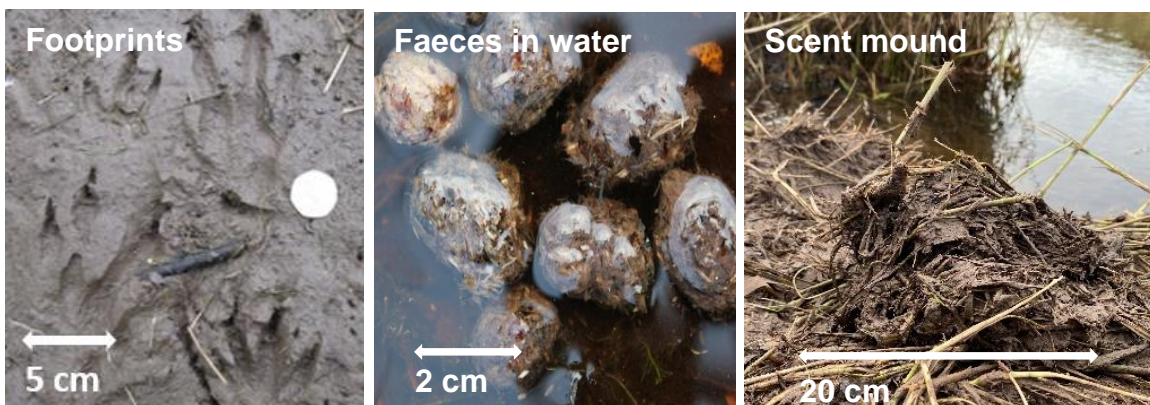


Other field signs

Footprints are distinctive with toe bone and claws often visible. Webbing can sometimes be evident on the hind print.

Beavers tend to defecate in water, often in slower water near the lodge or dam. Faeces break down easily and therefore are not a common field sign.

Scent mounds are piles of material such as mud constructed by beavers which they mark using scent from castor sacs near the base of their tail. The mounds have a distinctive smell, are next to the shore and mark territorial boundaries. They are found more frequently during the dispersal season in the spring.



All photo credits: Róisín Campbell-Palmer